

BIBLE TEACHING AND WORSHIP GUIDE



FOR THE HOME-BASED CHURCH

Produced Weekly

Marriage – Good? Singleness – Good?
1 Corinthians 7:1-17, 25-35

Copy this sheet for the Gathering Time, Bible Study, and Worship Experience leaders for the next meeting of the church.

Leaders' Responsibilities:

Important: Each person who will be leading one of the three parts of a session during a series of sessions needs to have access to the "Introduction" article found at the beginning of each series (Bible Teaching #....). The weekly session "Background" located in the Teacher Preparation is much more specific to that day's study.

1. **The Gathering Time Leader** will gather all of the people together and help them prepare their minds and hearts for a wonderful worship experience before God. His/her responsibility is to introduce the congregation to the theme (content) and the Scripture that will be central to their worship experience for the day.

2. **The Bible Study Leader** will then help the people understand what the Scriptures have to say and teach us about the content of the study for the day. He/she will guide the people to make a general application of the study (ie: How does this Bible study apply to people today?)

3. **The Worship Time Leader** has the responsibility to use the theme and Scriptures to guide the congregation to make personal commitments to God's will for each one in regard to the study for the day. He/she will use others to lead in the music, taking the offering, ministry moment comments, and other activities and parts of the **Worship Time** that can aid in participatory worship.

Prior to this Coming Session:

Gathering Time Leader:

Bible Study Leader:

When enlisting the Bible Study Leader for this meeting, care must be taken that the person is comfortable leading a study which deals largely with issues of sexuality.

Place the outline for the study on a white board or write it on a large piece of paper (newsprint will do).

Worship Time Leader:

Music Sources:

He is Lord, *The Worship Hymnal* #277; CCLI # 5178348

There is a Redeemer, *The Worship Hymnal* #279; CCLI # 11483

Knowing You (All I Once Held Dear) *The Worship Hymnal* #487; CCLI # 1045238

1

Copy this section for the Gathering Time leader.

Gathering Time: (Suggested time: 15 minutes)

Marriage – Good? Singleness – Good?

Focal Text

1 Corinthians 7: 1-17, 25-35

Background Text

1 Corinthians 7:1-40

Main Idea

Whether married or single, Christians are to live in ways that please the Lord.

Question to Explore

How can both married and single life be lived in ways that please the Lord?

Teaching Aim

To guide the church to summarize the teachings of this passage on marriage and singleness and identify ways to apply them.

Gathering together:

Sing

He is Lord, *The Worship Hymnal* #277; CCLI # 5178348

There is a Redeemer, *The Worship Hymnal* #279; CCLI # 11483

First thoughts:

Almost two thousand years after Paul addressed these words to the Corinthian Christians, we find that today's cultural circumstances and sexual values are very similar to what the Corinthians faced. Today's Christians must also face issues of sexual purity out of marriage and sexual fidelity within marriage. Paul writes from the perspective that our commitment to serving the Lord must overshadow even the important areas of our life involving sexuality. Young adults who postpone marriage are serving the Lord in interesting and difficult places around the world. They hike to remote areas to share the gospel; they live in circumstances not compatible with family life; they use artistic and musical abilities to reach people groups closed to the gospel.

But their doing so demands a celibate life style which is not a popular alternative in today's world.

Married couples have never had a better time to model what Christian commitment means. Paul will write to the Ephesians at a later date that the husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church and gave his life for it. This high view of the sacrificial love involved in a marriage relationship is not widely taught and modeled. Today's lesson can help us understand how our human relationships bless or hinder our Christian ministry.

Closing the Gathering Time:

Take time at this point to mention items of prayer concern for the church, announcements of ministry or activities, and anything else that needs to be shared with or by the congregation. Pray for these needs. Remember to praise God in prayer.

Break time! Take five minutes between sessions. Encourage children to use the washroom so that they won't need to leave during the Bible Study time.

Distribute youth/adult Bible study outlines or paper for note-taking, if available.

Also hand out the activity sheets for preschool and younger children to use during Bible Study and/or worship.

2

Copy this section for the Bible Study leader.

Note to the Bible Study Leader: Suggested teaching time for the Bible study should be about 35 minutes. Use the “Teacher Preparation” for your personal study during the week before the session. Use the “Bible Study Plan” for the actual session.

Teacher Preparation

Marriage – Good? Singleness – Good?

When enlisting the Bible Study Leader for this meeting, care must be taken that the person is comfortable leading a study which deals largely with issues of sexuality.

Focal Text

1 Corinthians 7: 1-17, 25-35

Background Text

1 Corinthians 7:1-40

Main Idea

Whether married or single, Christians are to live in ways that please the Lord.

Question to Explore

How can both married and single life be lived in ways that please the Lord?

Teaching Aim

To guide the church to summarize the teachings of this passage on marriage and singleness and identify ways to apply them.

Introduction to your personal study:

Think carefully about who will be in your study this week. What needs exist that can be addressed by this study? Perhaps your ultimate aim will be to increase sensitivity to the issues of singleness experienced by some in your group. Many Christian groups are very family oriented. Conversation, prayer requests, and a general atmosphere of family life may cause the single person to feel marginalized. Paul values singleness because it allows for a great commitment to Christian service. We can recognize that reality, but we need also to recognize that loneliness may be a reality in the lives of many singles.

Background:

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Marriage – Good? Singleness – Good? – 13-34-06-en

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Please ask for and read the information contained in the “**Introduction**” article found at the beginning of this series (Bible Teaching #....) of Bible Study and Worship sessions. Whoever downloaded this session for you should have that material for you, as well.

Chapter 7 of 1 Corinthians continues Paul’s practical advice to the Christians at Corinth who lived in an immoral society. Paul refers in verse 26 to “the present crisis”. Perhaps Paul was thinking of the persecution that was going to come upon the believers. He may also have been thinking that Jesus might return at any time. In verse 29 he indicates “the time is short” and in verse 31 he says “the world in its present form is passing away”. Thus, the entire chapter is concerned with the way in which Christians can best live their Christian principles in a world which does not value those principles and at a time when that world as they knew it might be ending soon.

These realities are present today. Celibacy is a virtue of so little value in today’s world that even very young teens are expected to have sexual relationships. Since 2007 health officials have recommended that adolescent girls be vaccinated against human papilloma virus HPV because the virus can lead to cervical cancer in later life. More recently, health officials have suggested that boys 11-13 also be vaccinated as an additional protection for women. The vaccine is more effective if given before sexual relations occur -thus, the very young ages of the recipients.

Sex education programs which focus on abstinence from sex before marriage are popularly seen as unrealistic. The focus in sex education programs is generally on taking precautions to avoid pregnancy or sexually transmitted disease.

Paul was not unrealistic about the importance of the human sexual drive. Although he himself valued the single life and the opportunities for ministry which that affords, he states in verse 9 *“But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.”*

He also addressed the marital relationship in verse 5 *“Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time.”*

Paul, in fact, takes an extremely practical view of the realities of human sexual relationships while encouraging believers to place these relationships in a proper perspective to their Christian life.

In Corinth, sexuality was used as a part of the worship of Aphrodite. Temple virgins were provided as a part of the “worship” experience. It was no easy task for new believers to separate themselves from this all pervasive environment of sexual freedom. “The Greeks always looked down on the body. There was a proverbial saying, ‘The body is a tomb.’ Epictetus said, ‘I am a poor soul shackled to a corpse.’ The important thing was the soul, the spirit of a man: the body was a thing that did not matter. Now that issued in one of two attitudes. Either it issues in the most rigorous asceticism in which everything was done to subject and humiliate the desires and instincts of the

body. Or – and in Corinth it was this second outlook which was prevalent – it was taken to mean that since the body was of no importance you could do what you liked with it; you could let it sate and glut its appetites. It was of no importance at all.” (William Barclay, **The Letters to the Corinthians, The Daily Study Bible**. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956, p. 62).

The influence of these ideas is seen in the way the Corinthian Christians were living their lives. Some felt that the body should be subjugated and sexual desires denied. Some even pledged to marry, but to refrain from sexual intercourse and devote themselves to spiritual growth.

Other Christians were having a hard time removing themselves from the influence of the attitude that sexual activity was an act of the body and of little importance to the soul and spirit. Others, undoubtedly were not concerned at all with the philosophical ideals behind their sensual life style; they were merely involved in pleasure-seeking.

This is the background of Paul’s writing and is basic to our understanding of the text.

We can outline the chapter in the following way:

1. Counsel about celibacy and marriage (7:1-9)
2. Counsel about the permanence of marriage (7: 10-11)
3. Counsel to those married to unbelievers (7:12-16)
4. Encouragement to live as God Called us (7:17-24)
5. Counsel about whether to marry (7:25-40)

(See Harbour, Brian. **Bible Book Study Commentary 1 Corinthians**. October-December, 1991, Volume 13, Number 3. Nashville, Tennessee: The Sunday School Board.)

Focusing on the Meaning:

This passage deals with a specific question Paul was asked by the Corinthian believers. The question was “Which is ideal for the believer – to be single or to be married?” Paul’s opinion is that it would be better to be single (vs. 1,7,8). However, if a person is already married, he/she should not divorce his/her spouse (v 10). Marriage provides an honourable way for humans to experience sexual fulfillment (vs. 2-6).

Counsel about celibacy and marriage

1 Corinthians 7:1-2 Paul indicates that the single life-style is viable for Christians. Without family obligations, Christians were free to go anywhere at any time to share the word of Christ.

However, not every person can live alone. Not every person can control the sexual drive. Others need the companionship and emotional intimacy which marriage provides. The desire for children is a motivating force for many. These people would be able to serve God most effectively in a marriage and family situation.

Underlying Paul's attitude of favour to the single life was his focus on sharing the gospel with as many people as possible in the short time allotted. Whether the Christian's life was shortened by the return of Christ or by his/her death through persecution or even the realities of life with disease and dangers, Paul focused on using time for furthering the gospel. When being married was a hindrance to that, Paul saw it as a less desirable state of being.

7:3-5 The husband and the wife had responsibilities to each other. We may not realize the radical nature of Paul's insistence on the mutuality of responsibility. He lived in an age where the woman was the property of the man. Whether she was content was of little importance.

Paul indicates that meeting the sexual needs within marriage fulfilled God's purpose (the two will become one flesh) and it foils Satan's plan. Satan's plan would include the pain and disruption to spouse, children, extended family, church family, and all other areas of influence which are harmed when marital infidelity occurs.

One may note in today's society that nearly every avenue of communication – music, movies, TV, the internet etc. - acts as if sexual activity was the absolute right of all under almost any circumstances. But when a person of influence is accused of inappropriate sexual activity with a minor or a person with a dependent relationship (psychologist/client, doctor/patient, pastor/parishioner) we are appropriately indignant. We send very conflicting message to youth, new immigrants, and all those who are trying to develop a workable ethic.

7:6-9 "Weaving like a thread through this entire passage is Paul's conviction that our commitment to God should take precedence over everything else" (Harbour, p. 43). Paul really believes that the most effective way to serve God in the circumstances of his day was to remain single. But he understands that some should marry.

Counsel about the permanence of marriage

7:10-11 Paul indicates that those who are married should not become single by divorce. This is not a suggestion as was his counsel about singleness. It is a command. He told wives not to go away from their husbands (v. 10) and instructed husbands not to put away their wives (v. 11). Women and men had different rights in the ancient world. Husbands could legally divorce their wives, but wives could not

legally divorce their husbands. Therefore, if a wife leaves her husband she would not be legally divorced and thus should remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband.

However, beyond the legal ramifications of the issue is the understanding that marriage is a permanent institution. God's intention for marriage is a permanent relationship. The old marriage vows still have meaning, "I, (Sarah/James), take you (Sarah/James), to be my (wife/husband), to have and behold from this day on, for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish; until death do us part."

Counsel to those married to unbelievers

7:12-16 The words of William Barclay are meaningful here.

"Paul has two great things to say which are of permanent value.

(1) He has the lovely thought that the unbelieving partner is consecrated by the believer. The two have become one flesh and the wonder is that in such a case it is not the taint of heathenism but the grace of Christianity which wins the victory. There is an infection about Christianity which involves all those who come into contact with it.

(2) He has the equally lovely thought that this very association may be the means of saving the soul of the unbelieving partner. For Paul evangelization began at home. The unbeliever was to be looked on, not as something unclean to be avoided with repulsion, but as another son or daughter to be won for God. Paul knew that it is blessedly true that often human love has led to love of God." (p. 71)

We might, however, need to acknowledge that establishing a relationship with a non-believer because one hopes to win that person to the Lord is asking for difficulties. In 2 Corinthians 6:14 Paul emphasized "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers". In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul is addressing the issue of those already married who become believers. For a believer to deliberately choose to begin a relationship with an unbeliever is an issue altogether different than what is addressed here.

Encouragement to live as God Called us

7:17-24 This passage is not a part of the lesson focus. However, for background study, it is well to emphasize that Paul urged the Corinthian Christians to accept the circumstances of their lives and to turn their attention to the work Christ gave them to do. Issues such as circumcision even one's role as a slave were secondary to the call of God to service. *Keeping God's commands is what counts* we are told in verse 19.

Counsel about whether to marry

7:25-40 Barclay states that it would be easier to understand the chapter if this section had been placed first for it shows that Paul's whole outlook was dominated by the fact

that he expected the Second Coming of Christ immediately and at any moment. So soon was Christ to come that everything must be laid aside in one tremendous effort to concentrate on preparation for that coming. The most important human activity and the dearest human relationship must be laid aside if they threatened to interrupt or to slacken that concentration (Barclay, pp. 77-78).

In the final verses of the chapter (39-40) Paul indicates that a widow may marry again as long as that marriage is made in the Lord. This, of course, is a standard for any Christian marriage at any age or in any circumstance.

Your Goal as the Leader of this Bible Study:

The “Teaching Aim” clearly outlines your goal for this session:

To guide the church to summarize the teachings of this passage on marriage and singleness and identify ways to apply them. Be sure to emphasize the high standards that Jesus set for his followers in reference to sexual practice and marriage or singleness.

For Personal Reflection:

What have I learned from this study?

What personal experience does this lesson bring to mind?

What is one action I will take this week to apply this Scripture passage to my life?

Bible Study Plan (Suggested time: 35 minutes)

Marriage – Good? Singleness – Good?

Regroup the church after the Gathering Time and break by singing a chorus that young children can relate to—or another praise chorus if your congregation does not have children. Children who go to their own Bible teaching session should stay with the group until after this song. Have the preschoolers and children accompany the hymn with rhythm sticks, maracas, bells, etc.

Begin by helping the group locate the Focal Text in their Bibles. Also, share with them the Main Idea to be learned from the Scriptures, and the Questions to be Explored by the group.

When enlisting the Bible Study Leader for this meeting, care must be taken that the person is comfortable leading a study which deals largely with issues of sexuality.

Focal Text

1 Corinthians 7: 1-17, 25-35

Background Text

1 Corinthians 7:1-40

Main Idea

Whether married or single, Christians are to live in ways that please the Lord.

Question to Explore

How can both married and single life be lived in ways that please the Lord?

Teaching Aim

To guide the church to summarize the teachings of this passage on marriage and singleness and identify ways to apply them.

Connect with Life: Your home group is likely have members whose earlier life decisions have complicated their ability to live as Paul directs. Be sensitive to those issues while emphasizing the importance of celibacy for singles and a life long commitment for those in a marriage relationship.

Guide the Study:

Place the following outline for the study on a white board or write it on a large piece of paper (newsprint will do).

1. Counsel about celibacy and marriage (7:1-9)
2. Counsel about the permanence of marriage (7: 10-11)
3. Counsel to those married to unbelievers (7:12-16)
4. Encouragement to live as God Called us (7:17-24)
5. Counsel about whether to marry (7:25-40)

Ask: What movies, TV shows or books have you recently seen or read which emphasize the value of sexual purity? (Don't spend time here; people may not be able to respond quickly).

Continue by saying: It may be easier to list movies, TV shows or books which accept and even glamorize sexual immorality. We live in a world which seems to thrive on examples of sexuality which push the limits of public sensibilities.

Ask: What is the reaction of the public when a person of influence steps outside accepted norms of behaviour? How do people react when a person betrays a trust relationship – coach/player; teacher/student; counselor/client/ pastor/church member?

Continue by saying: We are not very consistent in our attitudes toward sexual immorality.

Describe (based on the background material) the attitudes toward sexuality which were present in Corinth.

Have someone read 1 Corinthians 7: 1-2.

Say: Paul indicates that the single life-style is viable for Christians. Without family obligations, Christians are free to go anywhere at any time to share the word of Christ.

A man who grew up as a missionary kid now has a very meaningful ministry with young boys and teens who have been abandoned or whose home life is not healthy. The ministry is twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Learning life skills such as carpentry, cooking, cleaning are part of living at the youth ranch. Many late night counseling sessions are involved. Having a normal married relationship and family life would be very difficult in his situation.

Inquire: What obstacles to living the celibate life exist for singles? (These might include the desire for companionship and intimacy. Intimacy would include sexual intimacy, but

also the sharing of ideas and similar interests. Many people have a strong desire for children of their own.)

Have someone read 1 Corinthians 7: 3-5.

State: Paul's emphasis on the mutuality of giving is remarkable given the culture of the day which viewed the woman as the property of the man.

Inform the class of the attitude of some Corinthians that the natural sexual desires were evil and were to be subject to strict control. This was in contrast to the prevalent view that the body was of no importance and had no relationship to spiritual issues.

Add: Those who felt that sexual desires were wrong might deny their spouse sexual intimacy. Paul says that this would only be acceptable by mutual consent and for a short period of time.

Have someone read 1 Corinthian 7: 6-9.

Explain: Paul does not command that married Christian couples refrain from sexual activity; he only states that it might be possible for some couples.

Ask: What does Paul wish that more people could do? (Not marry. Paul wants people to be as free as possible to share the gospel with others)

Have someone read 1 Corinthians 7: 10-11.

Have the class identify what Paul does command: (A couple must stay together).

Help the group understand that a woman separated from her husband could not legally divorce him in that society. Therefore, she would need to remain unmarried. However, an unmarried woman had no protection or financial security in the culture of the day.

Inquire: What motivation would Paul have in insisting that marriages are permanent? (This honors God whose intention was that marriage is a permanent relationship).

Have someone read 1 Corinthians 7: 12-16.

Ask: What does Paul feel should happen when an unbeliever is married to a believer? (The believer should live in such a way as to influence the unbeliever).

Comment: Paul is not addressing issues such as abuse. He is most likely speaking to a marriage already existing when one or the other partner becomes a Christian. Entering into a marriage with the idea that one can lead the other to accept Christ is a common misconception which often leads to grief.

Have someone read 1 Corinthians 7: 25-35.

Emphasize: Paul's belief that Christ's return was imminent influences this passage. Rather than focus on human relationships, all Christians should be focused on sharing their faith with others. Worrying about getting marry or staying single should not be the main concern of the believer. I am 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 (verse 35). Paul is emphasizing "undivided devotion to the Lord."

Encourage Application:

Summarize by asking the group what truths regarding marriage and regarding singleness are applicable to us today.

1. Unmarried people may have unique opportunities for ministry.
2. Marriage has mutual responsibilities and obligations.
3. Marriage is permanent.
4. A Christian may have a positive influence on an unbelieving spouse.
5. Christ is coming again; this is an overriding consideration in making life decisions.

If you have two or more youth, this is the time to give them the **Youth!!! Take Ten** page and allow them to move away from the adults and apply the lesson by and for themselves.

Take a five minute break to separate the Bible Study and Worship Time. Children may need to use the washroom again before worship.

Youth!!! Take Ten

Bible Study Application for Youth

You may wish to move away from the adults for the final five to ten minutes of the Bible study and help each other as youth to apply the lesson to your own needs.

Marriage – Good? Singleness – Good? **1 Corinthians 7:1-17, 25-35**

A youth will lead the following activity and comments. No adults need to be present. If possible, teens should take turns in leading the application time.

This passage deals with a specific question Paul was asked by the Corinthian believers. The question was “Which is ideal for the believer – to be single or to be married?”

Ask yourself this question in light of your goals for the near future. Do these include

- study
- travel
- missionary service
- saving money?

Ask yourself these questions in terms of your sexuality.

Are you prepared to remain sexually pure until marriage?

How do you feel about the popular practice of living together before marriage?

How do you feel about having children?

Depending on the nature of your group, you may choose to copy these questions for silent reflection rather than for discussion.

3

Copy this section for the Worship Time leader.

Worship Time (Suggested time: 30 minutes)

Marriage – Good? Singleness – Good?

1 Corinthians 7:1-17, 25-35

Beginning the Service:

Sing **Knowing You (All I Once Held Dear)** *The Worship Hymnal* #487; CCLI # 1045238

Have someone read 1 Corinthians 13 or read it together as a congregation with the leader reading one verse and the congregation reading another verse.

Offering:

Praying for the World:

The Northern Kham Tibetans are one of the unreached people groups of the Tibetan Plateau. Linguistically and culturally unique, they live in areas that are far removed from the Chinese who claim them. There has been no recorded history of Christian witness among them. Only in recent years have foreign Christians been able to travel to these remote areas. Although the work has been slow and hard in Northern Kham, there is a deep sense that God is preparing the soil, the hearts of the people, for His presence. Great hope and anticipation lie in the hearts of those committed to reaching the Northern Kham as they look to see all that God will do.

Sharing Guide:

This sharing guide is written to assist the person who directs the worship time to reemphasize the teaching for the day and help guide the congregation to respond to God's call and will for their lives in regard to the scripture studied. The leader may choose to follow the guide closely. Or, he or she may wish to only use it to give direction and a concept for preparing an original message. The leader is free to choose other ways to communicate and share the concepts presented here.

Be Ye Kind Ephesians 4:32

A verse often memorized by children is Ephesians 4:32. The King James Version is beautiful in its expression.

And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

The New International Version states ***Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.***

The Message reads as follows: ***Be gentle with one another, sensitive. Forgive one another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgave you.***

Kindness, compassion, tenderness, gentleness, sensitivity, forgiveness. These various expressions of attitude and action guide our human relationships as Christians – whether we are married or single.

We will be able to express these attitudes and actions, especially forgiveness, because we have experienced forgiveness from God Himself through our relationship to Christ. **The Message** interprets the need to forgive quickly and thoroughly. Forgiveness which is slow to come and is half-hearted in nature harms any relationship.

The entire chapter is concerned with the way in which Christians can best live their Christian principles in a world which does not value those principles and at a time when that world as they knew it might be ending soon.

“Weaving like a thread through this entire passage (which we have studied today) is Paul’s conviction that our commitment to God should take precedence over everything else (Harbour, p. 43).

Our human relationships are guided by and empowered by our relationship to God. And those relationships so guided can be a powerful witness to a lost world. We may wish to radically change the value system of the world in which we live. We may attempt to do that by education, political involvement, and social change. We may experience success in some measure. However, each one of us has the ability to make change in the world by the integrity and beauty of the relationships we establish.

Employer to employee, teacher to student, friend to friend, neighbour to neighbour, spouse to spouse, parent to child – each of relationships may give opportunity to express kindness, compassion, tenderness, gentleness, sensitivity and forgiveness. And when those are expressed, our Christian witness is made believable.

Paul's writings in 1 Corinthians express his belief that Christ's return was imminent and everything the Christian did was with the goal of sharing the good news with as many people as possible as quickly as possible.

Many years have passed. Christ has not returned. But He may return at any moment or our life may end. We must endeavour to make our lives count for God's Kingdom.

Call to Commitment:

Spend a few minutes silently memorizing Ephesians 4:32.

And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Repeat the passage to one another and then conclude by saying it together. Pray that this passage will guide relationships this week.

Concluding the Service:

Sing a song of joy in Christ and/or close with a prayer of praise to our Lord for the opportunity to follow his teachings and serve others in His Name.