

## 3.2 Not Another Rom-Com

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, we're going to turn to our Bibles now. Josh, as you know, has been leading us through some studies in Paul's first letter to Corinthians. And last week we looked at the first half of 1 Corinthians 7. We're going to be back in that chapter, long chapter, this evening.

And reading the second half of the chapter, really beginning at verse 25. Paul's been dealing with all sorts of things in chapter 5, 6, and 7, all kinds of mess in the Corinthian church. Church has been a messy place right from the very beginning. That's a challenge, isn't it? It's also a comfort. There's nothing new under the sun. Nothing in our generation hasn't been experienced before.

And the Bible deals with everything we need to deal with. And some of these situations, really, in chapter 5 and 6 are, in some ways, quite shocking. And yet, it's about down to earth reality. In chapter 7, Paul is dealing with the whole issue surrounding marriage.

And those who are married, those who are not married, those who should be married, and those who won't be married. And he's putting all these things within the context of seeing the greater picture, the bigger picture of our calling, our eternal calling in Christ Jesus.

[ 1 : 1 0 ] And so, having talked about those who are married, and widowed, and so on, in verse 25, he now turns to those he calls the betrothed.

Or it may be that he's talking about the virgins. He's talking about those who are not yet, or haven't been married. Now, concerning these betrothed, these virgins, I have no command directly from the Lord, but I give my judgment as one who, by the Lord's mercy, is trustworthy.

I think that in view of the present distress, it is good for a person to remain as he is. Are you bound? In betrothal, I think it means, though Josh will tell us.

Are you bound to a wife? Well, do not seek to be free. Are you free from being married to a wife? Well, don't seek a wife. But if you do marry, you've not sinned.

And if a betrothed woman marries, she's not sinned. Yet, those who marry will have worldly troubles. And I would spare you that. This is what I mean, brothers.

[ 2 : 2 3 ] The appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none. 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. 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. I want you to be free from anxieties.

The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord. How to please the Lord. And the married man is anxious about worldly things. How to please his wife. 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, anxious about worldly things. How to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit. Not to lay any restraint on you.

But to promote good order. And secure your undivided devotion to the Lord. If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly towards his betrothed.

[ 3 : 2 7 ] If his passions are strong and it has to be. Well, let him do as he wishes. Let him then marry. It's no sin. 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. Well, he will do well. So then he who marries his betrothed does well.

And he who refrains from marriage. Will do even better. A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies.

She's free to be married to whom she wishes. Only in the Lord. And yet in my judgment. She's happier if she remains as she is.

And I think that I too. Have the spirit of the Lord. Amen. May God bless to us. This is where it will help us understand it.

[ 4 : 24 ] And apply it. In our lives of service. Well, do turn again in your Bibles. To 1 Corinthians chapter 7.

There's a sense in which. If you've seen one rom-com. You've seen them all. Someone lacking in some kind of direction. Or fulfillment.

Or humanity. Is seen careering through life. Somewhat aimlessly. And it all comes to a head. When they finally meet. The one. And through some sort of.

Bumpy journey. They finally get together. And live happily ever after. I'm sure. Most of us have seen copious amounts. Of these. Kinds of films. That all follow this same pattern.

And the underlying message in them. Is this. What anyone lacks in life. Is someone to share life with. In all its fullness. Love.

[ 5 : 26 ] And romance. Are the answer to all of our problems. It's a powerful narrative. Isn't it? That's a prevailing one. That romantic love. Is at the heart of our purpose.

And key to our fulfillment. And so it'll be near universal. Won't it? That when someone articulates. Their plans. Their hopes. Their dreams for life. That getting married. Is somewhere near the top of them.

And so as this is such a prevailing narrative. We need to be realistic. That this will make its way. Into the church. Though perhaps with some added. Pious language. You see the world is catechizing us.

Teaching us instinctively. To think as they think. All the time. We mustn't be naive about that. So of course. We'll be able to articulate.

That marriage isn't ultimate. But our longings and desires. Can be so easily shaped. By that kind of rom-com. World view. And so for those who. Haven't or aren't yet married.

[ 6 : 25 ] It can feel like. Life is on hold. Until marriage happens. Or that life is contracted. If it doesn't happen. When we used to play Monopoly.

In my family. I don't know if this is the actual rules. But it was certainly the rules in our house. You couldn't start playing. Until you rolled a six. And so there would always be someone. Half an hour into the game. Still trying to get a six.

Whilst everyone else is off. Buying properties and building houses. And that's what the world.

Would have us believe. That singleness is. Singleness. Well I'm sure it's no surprise.

But reality. And rom-coms. Are very far apart. Singleness isn't a holding pen. Or a display cabinet. Before the main event. And marriage isn't the answer.

To all of our problems. That's been Paul's concern. In chapter seven. Greener grass. Won't step up our godliness. A change of circumstance.

[ 7 : 21 ] Won't be the silver bullet. To flourishing in life. There's no such thing as a fast track. To true spirituality. The Corinthians were always looking for.

What would elevate them. What would make them more spiritual. And with great but false piety. The trumpet. That sex isn't for the godly in marriage. Prayer is.

And this kind of pious thinking. Leads them to all manner of asceticism. Denial of good things. As a form of overt spirituality. And it seems they've taken to thinking.

That singleness. Then. Is the golden ticket. Not weighed down all this. Sex and things. And so Paul's. Slightly surprising here.

He. Is very positive about singleness. But for completely different reasons. To the Corinthians. Look at verse 25. Paul says.

[ 8 : 19 ] Now concerning the betrothed. The engaged. That's one of the concerns. They've brought to Paul. The now concerning. And other translations. Or you can see the footnote there. Use. Virgins.

And I think that's. Perhaps more helpful. The issue here. May have arisen. Because of. Specific questions. About whether our marriage. Or marriages in the church. Should go ahead. But the reality.

Is that Paul's teaching. Isn't limited to just. That one niche. Circumstance. Is it? Indeed. The question. That hangs over. This evening's passage. Is what does Paul say. About those who aren't

married.

The Corinthians. Want to know. How can we be most spiritual? Can I? Should I? Will I? Get married? What will that do. To my spirituality? Reality? And the reality is.

Those. Those questions. Are. Significant ones. Few decisions. Can. Completely. Change. The shape. And scope. Of someone's life. In the way that marriage can.

[9:20] And so it's not always. A straightforward question. To answer. The bible. Upholds. And champions. And promotes. And celebrates. And honors marriage. Marriage. It's a wonderful thing. It's the thing.

That sees families. And societies. Flourish. But the bible. Also holds singleness. In very high regard. The Corinthians. Are always interested.

In that. Which is better. But Paul. Doesn't let them. Have that. Neither marriage. Nor singleness. Is the unfortunate. Embarrassing. Little sibling. Of the other.

Both. Are to be cherished. And wielded. For the better. Flourish. Of the people. Of God. And so neither. Is to be ruled out. Of our thinking. Or our estimation.

I'm sure there has been. No little hurt. To some people. From even. In the church. People treating marriage. As the superior calling. It is worth us. Reflecting on that.

[10:16] Isn't it? Is it an. Uncomfor. Is it uncomfortable. For a single person. To be in our church. To be in our group. Group. To be in our friends.

Circle. Or is it just. The married. Who fit in. Perfectly. Well. And life. As a single person. Is that little. That little bit. More awkward. Or where those. Who don't have children.

Are made to feel. Lesser too. You. And with it being. Such a big decision. I'm sure. Many people. Would love. To come to a past. Like this. And have a clear answer. Paul. What should I do?

As if Paul. Can act like a magic. Eat ball for us. Should I get married? Ask again later. Paul's answer.

Can feel a little bit. Like that. Can't it? Because he doesn't. Give us a yes. Or a no. A black. Or a white. But that's instructive for us. Because there is no godlier option.

[11:10] Choosing one over the other. Doesn't make you more pious. And so whilst Paul doesn't give us. The magic eight ball answer. He does make a good case. For singleness. It may well be. A good.

And right. And godly. And indeed. Cross shaped option. For some. Even if it isn't the path. For many. Paul highlights.

Two big realities. That ought to form part of our thinking. About marriage. And singleness. Before then drawing. Out two conclusions. So notice. Singleness. Isn't a case of.

Catching the unwanted plague. That most other people. Manage to escape. Remember Paul's words. In verse seven. Each. Has his own gift. From God. One of one kind.

And one of another. To conceive. That singleness. Is in some. Is in some way. A sort of deficiency. Is to overlook. That our father. Knows what is best. For us.

[12:06] In the same way. To think. In the same. And the same is true. If we think about that. With marriage. Well let's look at. The big realities. That ought to figure. In any thinking. About marriage. The first one. Paul says.

This world is fearing. This world. Is fearing away. This world. As we know it. Is fearing. It's. We know as Christians.

That this life. Is not the end. Of the story. Any disappointment. Any delight. That belongs to this world. Will not last. The world's to come.

Shapes everything. Well. Verse 26. Paul. Does say here. That there's wisdom. In. Remaining.

There's. It's good for people. To remain. As they are. If you're bound. To a wife. Then. Remain. If you're committed. To marry one. That's fine. Go for it. If not.

[13:00] He says. Don't seek one. And that's. Possibly down to. The present circumstances. That are being faced. By the church. He says that. Because of the present distress.

It's hard for us. To know exactly. What the present distress. Would be. There's speculation. About famines. And all sorts of stuff. Like this. What's clear. Is that there was. Some difficulty.

And so. What Paul's saying. Is that perhaps. In particular times. Of strife. There is wisdom. In not seeking. To change. Those circumstances. But the truth is. We don't need to know.

The specifics. About the distress. Because this world. Is always groaning. Isn't it? This world. Will always be filled. With things that can. And do distress.

And we know. Theologically. Why this is the case. This world. Is fading away. Because there's a world. To come. This epoch.

[ 13 : 56 ] This age. Is often referred to. As the last days. And that began. At the cross. Jesus was inaugurating. The coming of his kingdom. And we knew. That because of all. That Christ accomplished.

In his death. And resurrection. We knew. That a time is set. A time is coming. When this world. Will be done away with. And the new heavens. And new earth. Will be here. There's a day.

In the future. When we will see. The consummation. Of Christ's kingdom. Here on earth. But until then. We live in the age.

In between. Don't we? And with that. There are all manner. Of distresses. Of hardships. And difficulties. And so. Paul goes on. To explain. What he's talking about.

And why he shapes. His guidance. Thus. He says. Verse 29. The appointed time. Has grown very short. And again. The last line.

[ 14 : 51 ] Of verse 31. The present form. Of this world. Is passing away. And that shapes. Our priorities. Doesn't it?

Eternity. Brings perspective. To any decision. In life. Because neither marriage. Nor singleness. Is going to be. The end of the story. Nor is our job.

Or where we live. Or what we live in. All of these things. Will pass away. Even. Marriage. The Lord Jesus.

Says that. Doesn't he? In reply to the Sadducees. Marriage. Is a this world thing. So Paul is telling us here. Not to go all in.

On any of these things. Don't invest. All we have. On a relationship. Being the key to our future. Or a job. Or an education. Or a house. Or a relocation.

[ 15 : 48 ] He's saying. Don't let your love rest. Too firmly. Or absolutely. On anything that belongs. To this world. Don't let your hope. Be so bind up.

With this world. Because it's failing away. That goes both ways. Doesn't it? Don't cling too tightly. To the things that have brought you delight.

Or devastation. Because our future isn't here. In this world. One commentator. On this issue. Writes.

One of the most pernicious phrases. In the English language. Is. And they all lived happily ever after. Much like the rom-com idea. It suggests that.

Usually something like marriage. Is the key to a happy ending. And it can be so easy. For us to focus. On all that this world tells us. Is the answer to fulfillment.

[ 16 : 45 ] And where we don't have it. Whether it be the career. That's unfulfilling. The home that isn't what you imagined. The marriage that never was. Or the child.

That isn't to be. These aren't. The ultimate solutions. Disappointment. Heartbreak even on these. Doesn't rob us.

Of that which will last forever. Of that which is preeminent. Paul tells us. We haven't missed out. On our happy ending. And that happy ending.

Doesn't depend on any of those things. What's far more important. Is those two days. That we saw hanging over chapter six. The day of Christ's cross. And the day of Christ's coming.

They set a certain. And future. For all who belong to the Lord Jesus. Now of course. This doesn't mean that. All of this life is pointless. And so nothing matters.

[ 17 : 44 ] Because this world will pass away. In fact quite the opposite. Knowing this. Helps us to make the most of this life. Think about all the decisions.

That can cause us all kinds of stress. And strain. And where we'd love to have. More explicit guidance. Who or if to marry. Which house to buy.

How long to stay in my job. Whether to go to university or not. Well for all of these. It helps us. To see them in light. Of what is eternally true. These decisions.

Don't need to cripple us. Not one of them. On their own. Will alter our eternal future. And so there's freedom for us. Very few decisions.

If any. That aren't clearly right or wrong. And that are made with godliness in mind. Very few. Will take us off course. Look at verses 29 to 31.

[ 18 : 43 ] If we read these wrongly. We can get ourselves all mixed up. Paul says. Let those who have wives. Live as if they have none. Those who mourn. As if they're not mourning.

Those who rejoice. As if they're not rejoicing. Those who buy. As if they have no goods. Those who deal with the world. As if they have no dealing with it. Paul isn't saying to the married.

The married. Ignore your spouse. Even if that's what you'd want him to say. He isn't saying. Ignore or pretend away reality. Of course not. That would contradict so much.

Of what he's already said. Now what he's saying is. The truth that this world. Is passing away.

Giving away. Giving away to a glorious new one.

That truth. Alters. Our perspective. On all of those things. Our mourning. Looks different. In light of eternity. Doesn't it? Yes.

[ 19 : 39 ] There can be tears. But coupled with real hope. So too. Our rejoicing. Our material goods. Become so much easier.

To hold lightly. Don't they? And how we see marriage. Is transformed too. When seen in light of eternity. When we don't have to look.

To marriage. As the key to happiness. And fulfillment. Because we know that comes. From our glorious future. That means that we can then. Enjoy marriage.

For what it is. If we marry. Or. We can enjoy singleness. For what it is. Because there's a happy ending. Either way. Jesus return.

And all that means. For us. As his people. Actually frees us. To enjoy the gifts. That God has given to us. Here and now. And we can enjoy them. For what they are. Not needing them.

[ 20 : 33 ] To be more than that. Because the more. Comes from a glorious future. That's big reality. Number one. This world is fading away.

The second one. That Paul talks about. Is that life is fraught. The world is fading away. And life is fraught. Life in this world is hard.

And the truth. Is that marriage. Multiplies concerns. Look at verse 32. Paul says he wants. To offer freedom. He wants.

To offer freedom. From anxieties. But we must ask. What anxieties? It can't be the anxieties. That he talks about. In verses 32 and 33. Anxious about pleasing your spouse.

Because as we've already seen. If someone is married. Then they're to take that very seriously. It's not to be wished. Or pretended away. It's right. And glorifying to Jesus.

[ 21 : 32 ] To honor your marriage. It's right. And glorifying to Jesus. To spend your one night in together a week. Seeking to delight one another. Sexually. Paul can't mean freeing us from that anxiety.

Any more than he can mean freeing us from the right anxiety. Of wanting to please the Lord Jesus. If we aren't married. So the anxiety that Paul speaks of. In verse 32.

About freeing us from. Isn't about right concerns for spouse. Or savior. But instead. I think it's back to the same Corinthian disease. He wants to free them from anxiety.

Over making the spiritual or unspiritual choice. Over worrying if. They've somehow managed to step outside of God's plan for their life. If that were even possible.

He wants to relieve anxiety over that. The choice to marry or remain single. Isn't at all a case of obeying God's will or not. Unless of course we ignore the plain things that he does say about marriage.

[ 22 : 35 ] Like marrying an unbeliever. Actually the choice to marry or not. Isn't fundamentally a spiritual decision at all. It isn't right or wrong. More spiritual or less spiritual.

If you notice Paul's concern here is far more down to earth and every day. His concern is over practical realities. The key word here is in verse 34.

Divided. Marriage brings myriads of concerns. That a single person doesn't have. It divides our attention. It divides our concern.

Across many things. That we wouldn't have had before. When we marry. Our concerns grow in manifold ways. We don't just have to get ourselves.

Through another week. We've got responsibility for someone else. Perhaps down the line.

Responsibility for little ones too. I've heard people say at various times.

[ 23 : 35 ] That they've started to drive differently. Or they've given up hobbies. And extreme sports. Because they've gotten married. Or they've had children. And now if something happens to them. It doesn't just affect them.

And that's right, isn't it? We live in a sin-stained world. And it affects us all the time. Life brings with it hardship, opposition, pain and loss.

But when we marry. We bring into our homes all of this for someone else too. And more than that. It places more demands on our time. Christians have almost limitless worthwhile things.

That we can fill our weeks with. Don't we? There are very few immovable pillars in our calendars. Joining together for corporate worship. Especially on a Sunday. Is perhaps the most immovable part of our weeks.

For most. For a large part of life. Work in some way will be another pillar. And sleep. But aside from those. There are endless godly things that we can do.

[ 24 : 40 ] Investing in people. Serving our church family. Joining a choir or a sports club. To reach out to friends. And on and on. But marriage adds in more immovable things.

And that may impact other worthwhile endeavors we're involved in. Marriage doesn't mean that we shouldn't be interested in all those other good things.

But the reality is we can't do everything. And the reality is that marriage adds in concerns that maybe we haven't even thought of. The difficult in-laws who place far too much of a demand on you.

And intrude into family life. As an aside it's worth thinking about that both for prospective brides and grooms. In marriage you don't just marry your spouse.

But you also gain a new family. But also it's worth thinking about as parents. For those who have children who are married or are marrying. Will you be an in-law who adds to burdens and concerns?

[ 25 : 44 ] So there's that unexpected. Unforeseen. But there could also be unexpected illness for your spouse. Or your child and you have to become a full-time carer alongside everything else.

Or the worry for your beloved when they're battling through life. Knock after knock. And clinging on to the Lord Jesus for dear life. And you spend your time worrying how much more can they take. Do you see Paul's point? It isn't a case of more spiritual or less spiritual. It's a case of more fixed concerns. Right concerns.

Good concerns. But more of them. And life is fraught. Maybe the present distress was some sort of famine or hardship like that.

And Paul can give his advice. Because when we do face real hardships. It can be easier to do that without the burden and responsibility of others. We've seen that with many of our Iranian members.

[ 26 : 47 ] Had to flee and leave family behind in Iran. And the turmoil and strain multiplies. Because they're concerned about what's happening with their loved ones far away.

A single person doesn't have that. That's what Paul means by saying that those who are married have divided interests. I wonder how many mums feel that tension.

Perhaps they used to have helpful times reading good Christian books. They had time to read during the week the passages that were preached on on Sunday. Or that were going to be preached on. And that was a long time ago.

And you just can't anymore. A good thing has been replaced by a new and necessary good thing. Paul is realistic.

Marriage will bring with it all kinds of surprising concerns. And we can't do everything. Now, Paul isn't saying, here's the truth about marriage.

[ 27 : 48 ] It's awful. Don't do it. No. But he's saying, be realistic. It isn't the silver bullet. And it brings with it as many new concerns as it brings wonderful benefits.

Paul isn't saying that one is better than the other. They're both good. But they're different. And it can be the case that some people, for various reasons, aren't best suited to marriage.

The complications and concerns will be too big a burden. And that's okay. It's no less recalling. No purr gift. And in truth, we must not neglect the benefit that there is in any church from those who have been gifted to a single life.

I think in my own experience, two of the people who've invested in me most and been the biggest help to both my wife and I, modeling for us the Christian life, helping us, mentoring us, training us. One of them is single and couldn't have had such an impact if he wasn't. And another was indelibly mentored by two older single men.

[ 28 : 57 ] And there are numerous examples in our midst of single people who gave of themselves selflessly, abundantly, for the service of others, for our church. And they've been able to do so, to bless and encourage so many, because their interests weren't divided.

They had extra time. And that's yet another example of the pattern of the cross being brought to bear on everyday life. Well, those are the two big realities that Paul draws our attention to.

The world is fading away, so our happy ending isn't found in this world. And life is fraught. And those who are married have increased concerns. But then Paul has two conclusions.

He says, you're free. You're free. There's no prescribed pattern for you. Marriage and singleness are both pleasing to God.

Both are arenas for godliness. And both are arenas for glorifying God. Paul says in verse 25 that he doesn't have a command from the Lord.

[ 30 : 07 ] But he gives his judgment. Now, it might be easy for us to write off what Paul says here if we don't like it. Well, it's not really a command. It's not authoritative. It's only Paul's judgment.

But he is still an apostle. And one through whom God, one who through God himself is made trustworthy.

And he is, verse 40, as he says, one who has the spirit of God. So Paul is worth listening to. And he doesn't have a command because his conclusion, his answer about whether to marry or not is, you're free.

Both are good. Both are right. But think clearly on them. Think about these realities. Paul gives his first brief answer in verse 26.

But then he gives a longer one in verses 36 to 38. So verse 26, should I remain single? Well, that's good. Is it ungodly to marry?

[ 31 : 19 ] Well, he says, verse 36, it's no sin. In fact, if you are entangled with someone, if passions are strong, if desire is strong and getting stronger for one another, then he says it's far better to get married.

Paul says, go for it. In fact, do it sooner rather than later. Don't wait until you've stumbled. Don't date for years and have a long engagement. Better a wedding you can afford now without stumbling into sin than a dream wedding marred by episodes of unrestrained passion.

That's Paul's message. But either way, the word and idea that comes up throughout these verses is freedom. You're free. Paul says he doesn't wish to place restraint on you.

Apply good sense to these things. And so he says, verse 38, he who marries does well. He who refrains from marriage does well.

The Corinthians want to know what is the more spiritual option. Corinth seems to be saying singleness is the truly spiritual way, but for falsely pious reasons.

[ 32 : 29 ] It isn't the godlier way. There isn't a godlier way. There is only godliness in whatever our circumstances are. Paul does say that singleness is good, but with very different reasons from the Corinthians.

It's not a form of asceticism. Look how holy I am. I've denied myself. But Paul also gives godly reasons to marry.

Good family life glorifies God. And in his design, when we take the whole of the Bible's message, the many will marry. But just as good family life glorifies God, well-used singleness also glorifies the Lord.

Perhaps for some of us, that's the harder thing to hear. Or something that we don't want to have to think about. And maybe you'd rather be in the many who marry rather than the some who don't.

That's fine. It isn't wrong to desire it. Paul says you're free. You do well either way. But if God in his infinite wisdom gives the good gift of singleness to you, it isn't to punish you.

[ 33 : 45 ] It isn't a cruelty. He may well be keeping you from struggles you can't foresee. And he is giving you opportunities to give and serve for his kingdom in ways that the married can't.

Look at verses 39 and 40. They seem to form a form of conclusion to all that Paul has said. Marriage is for life.

Cherish it. Fight for it. Make sure that sex is at the heart of it. But to the unmarried and the widow, he says you're free to marry. And notice the freedom. He says free to marry whomever you wish.

No fine Mr. Perfect. No the one. Of course, until you are married and then they are the one. But Paul's message is you're free to stay single, you're free to marry, and even when choosing who you marry, there's great freedom.

He does give one caveat. Free to marry in the Lord. And the Bible is clear. To marry in the Lord means that it must be someone who is free to marry, that is not married already.

[ 34 : 57 ] Must be someone of the opposite sex. It mustn't be a close relation. And finally, and very importantly, it must be another Christian. Do you hear that?

It is a disaster to head off on marry, to bring unto yourself all the concerns that marriage brings with someone who shares a different destiny and a different priority.

Don't do it. That girl in your seminar group might have a nice smile, or that colleague might be great fun, but don't go there.

That's what Paul says. Great freedom. Apart from when it's going to be a disaster. Well, Paul has one final thing to say.

This world is fading. Life is fraught. You are free. And he says, lastly, your life is for the Lord. Your life is for the Lord.

[ 36 : 00 ] What counts above all else in light of eternity is what and who we are for. Whatever we choose to do with it, do so for the Lord. And so Paul says, verse 35, he doesn't want to place restraint.

He knows we have freedom. And so with whatever we choose, Paul says to use our freedom to do what best sees us serve the Lord. The NIV is perhaps a little clearer for us here.

It translates the second part of verse 35 like this. Good order and devotion to the Lord aren't two things in that verse, but one.

Paul is saying that the priority over marriage or singleness is undistracted, unhindered devotion to the Lord. But be realistic.

For many, marriage will help us in that. But for some, singleness will better serve our unhindered devotion to the Lord. And that's what we're for.

[ 37 : 14 ] Marriage won't fulfill all that we want it to. It won't give us the answers to everything if that's what we're looking for it to do. And actually, singleness has real benefits.

Both are good and godly when they're for the Lord. So Paul is saying that the key to true spirituality and relationships has nothing to do with our status and everything to do with our service.

So shape your singleness, whether marriage is a possibility or not, around better service of the Lord Jesus. Invest in people, serve them, love them.

Give of yourself to that which will last forever. And shape your marriage around your family, better serving the Lord Jesus together.

Build family life around the church, not the other way around. Resist the lure of being an insular family. Too taken with its own concerns to serve and love and invest in your brothers and sisters.

[ 38 : 19 ] Because whilst marriage will pass away, whilst the rom-com happy ending is a harmful fiction, there is a marriage that can change everything for us.

The key to happily ever after is actually a marriage. But it's not to Prince Charming or the bell of the ball. The marriage that is key to everyone's future is a marriage between Christ and his bride, the church, the denouement of history.

That's the one that will last forever. That's the one that will be the answer to all of our longings. So long for that wedding day and let that shape your life with whatever the Lord gifts you.

On that day, it will matter not that we were married or single or that we worked for Google or Greggs or that we lived in a tent or a tower. Paul says, I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint on you, but that you may live in a right way in undistracted, unhindered devotion to the Lord.

True spirituality in relationships is not seen in our status, but in our service. There's no silver bullet. Let's pray.

[ 39 : 51 ] Lord, help us to trust you, to know that you aren't a cruel father that inflicts us with obstacles to our flourishing, but that everything we have, you've given into our hands.

To help us grow to maturity, to help us flourish in service of the Lord Jesus. And so with whatever good or ill that befalls us, we ask that you would grow our longing for your glorious and coming kingdom.

And we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.