

Relationship Status
Single or in a relationship

Bumper:

Welcome to Southside Church.

As we begin today, I want to **thank all of you who supported our Foster Parent's Night out event.**

Southside Church collaborated with **Clover Hill Church** to care for foster kids while we **sending the parents out on a date.**

Twenty-Six signed up and served, we helped fund the night of fun for the kids and gifts of chocolate and a gift card to the parents.

Thank you for loving people and being willing to serve our community!

This makes a difference, and I **had great conversations with leaders from our Chesterfield Department of Social Services!**

They shared how much they need our prayers and support!

Thank you for being a church that serves!

Today we are in the second week of a new series titled Relationship Status.

Last week we began - by acknowledging the cultural pressure to define our relationship status!

Especially in the area of Romance and sexuality!

This pressure is so intense – that it has produced confusion!

If you missed last weekend, I encourage you to go to **www.southsidechurchva.org**, and get caught up by watching **Week one: Status Confusion!**

Today I want us to go a bit deeper.

This past week we celebrating Valentine's Day!

Did you know this is **one of the most pressure filled days of the entire year?**

Think about it, on this day:

Couples are under immense pressure to make everything perfect: do I get flowers, a card, do I do both with a gift, do I make dinner reservations?

What if it isn't enough, **what if I do too much?** Can I even afford this? Will my expectations be met?

Singles are feeling the pressure too, do I sign on to a dating site, do I swipe right, do I go out with friends or do I just stay home.

Should I try and **justify why I'm not in a relationship** on social media?

Do I **fill my night with some activity** or stay in and **binge watch Netflix?**

How can I **get my mind off what everyone else is pressuring me** to think about?

And then there is our children, think about our poor children.

Many of them were wondering - **will that box my mom or dad made for me be filled up with notes and gifts from the people I want to be noticed by?**

There is **so much pressure** during the month of February to define our relational status, are **we single or in a relationship!**

This pressure can **skew our perspective on the purpose for relationships.**

Relationships **are supposed to help us be more open and caring**; however, this pressure to define our status actually **manipulates us into being more selfish.**

It causes us to think about how relationships define us, and **what we can get out of them** rather than **what our relationships are supposed to produce!**

Through this series, **we want to encourage you**, not to **cave to the cultural pressure to define our relational status.**

We want to **invest some time understanding the purpose of our relationships**, while **exploring what can produces healthy relationships - the way God intended.**

Thankfully, **God our designer gives a lot of guidance about the purpose of relationships throughout scripture!**

Scripture is another word for the Bible.

When we spend time, **looking at God's clear instructions for relationships** it can really help us.

So today, I want to **look at a passage in the Bible written by the Apostle Paul** to the church he helped plant in the ancient city of Corinth.

The portion of Paul's letter we will look at today gives a great overview of purpose of our relationships while helping us see what really matters in healthy relationships.

At first glance, **it looks like Paul is teaching about marriage.**

But as we look closer there is so much God given truth about why and how we should define our relationship status!

Open your Bibles with me or pull up your Bible app on your phone and let's look at **1 Corinthians 7:1-2 (NIV)**...

1 Corinthians 7:1-2 (NIV) *¹Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry. ² But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband.*

Then he goes on to say in **verses 5-8**...

1 Corinthians 7:5-8 (NIV) *⁵Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. ⁶I say this as a concession, not as a command. ⁷I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that. ⁸Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am.*

Paul begins this passage referring to the “**matters you wrote about.**”

Think about this **Paul is responding to the church in Corinth’s Need for answers!**

Evidently, **writing for help with relationship struggles isn’t a new thing.**

The church in Corinth **was wrestling with the pressure to define their relationship status.**

So much so they had **written Paul and ask him some questions!**

Maybe questions like:

- **Was it better to be married or to be single?**
- **What should a married couple do if one spouse is a Christian and the other isn’t?**
- **What if you are in a marriage but feeling unfulfilled?**
- **What if my spouse leaves me?**

We don't know **what specific questions were asked** but what we do know is----

Paul is addressing the – “**matters [they] wrote him about.**” in this section of his letter.

In Paul's response, we can **see the church was struggling.**

And **who did they go to for answers**, they went to the person **who taught them about God in the first place.**

Let me pause here for a second....

Who do you go to for relationship advice?

Do you put it out on Facebook and Twitter? Discuss it on Reddit?

Do you go to your best friend or turn to the next emotionally available person whose willing to listen?

Where do you seek out answers to matters on relationships?

This is really important because:

Our Advisors Aim us

Who we go to for advice helps set our life's trajectory.

Let me encourage you. **When the answer matters, who you ask matters!**

You should ask for help from:

- Someone **who Values your relationship with God more than they value your feelings**
- Someone **Who has lived through what you are asking about so their experience can speak with integrity**
- Someone **Who has enough wisdom help you find answers instead of just telling you what to do**
- Someone who **will point you back to Jesus**

Paul was a good person for them to ask.

- He was an **apostle chosen by God to share the Good News about Jesus** and valued truth over their feelings
- He was also a **single man who would have struggled greatly with this particular area himself**
- He **shares his advice and experience**, but leaves room for **the Corinthians to make their own informed choices according to the Spirit of God**
- He had a **life-altering encounter** with Jesus
- Jesus **was directing his steps** and they could see **God's spirit at work in Paul's life.**

Paul **describes himself in Acts 23:6** as a **Pharisee who is the son of a Pharisee.**

In those days, a **Pharisee was a well-respected, highly influential pillar** in their society.

It would have been **highly unusual for person of his stature to not be married** by this point in life.

It was so unusual, that some Bible scholars and historians **wonder if Apostle Paul was married**, but his wife left him when he was transformed by Jesus.

If Paul was still **single before becoming a Christian**, he likely received all kinds of pressure from his family.

He would have **receive pressure from his synagogue**, from the **other Pharisees he worked with**, all trying to **get him to settle his relationship status**.

For a normal Pharisee, **it might have looked like a good plan** for him to be married.

But Paul was not a normal Pharisee.

Paul had **experienced a transformative encounter** with the risen **Jesus that changed his life trajectory**.

He surrendered to the calling, **to travel as a missionary**, planting new churches.

Everywhere Paul went, **he marched straight into opposition and danger**.

He was beaten, stoned, arrested, detained, shipwrecked, and **ran out of town so many times** I'm sure it was hard to keep track.

His calling directed His steps and determined His relational status!

Your relationships should flow out of your life's calling!

We get a glimpse in **Verse 6 of 1 Corinthians 7** when Paul implies.

I am **going to respond to your questions**, but don't take this as a **one size fits all answer from God**.

I am going to **answer you out of my own experience** and give advice, not rules.

And he **immediately goes on to address** some of the **relationship struggles** that we all face.

Struggles like, **what do we do with passion?**

The Apostle Paul says **we have to find a healthy way to direct it.**

If you burn with passion to the extent of struggling with sexual purity then find a God approved outlet for your passion!

Marriage is the outlet given as a gift from God through which we can direct it!

Chanel your passion into a marriage designed by God where you and your spouse can mutually benefit from your passion.

However, if you have self-control and are able to maintain sexual purity outside of marriage, great.

You can remain single.

Paul almost sounds like he is just answering off the cuff, and tossing out ideas, but there are some profound truths packed into these words found in this passage!

The first truth is that Paul affirms the value of both marriage and singleness.

In fact, it is clear that Paul clearly favors singleness.

Yet he claims both relational statuses of single and marriage as a gift from God.

Paul's says **if you are single and are able to maintain self-control**, while devoting your attention to your relationship with God----

Then this is a gift to be celebrated and enjoyed!

Paul is celebrating his singleness in this passage.

In verse 1 he says:It is good for a man not to marry.

In verse 7 he says he wished all men were single like him.

In verse 8 he encourages single adults and widows to not get married or remarried.

A little further down in this passage he says, "**it is good for virgins to remain single.**"

And in Verse 28 he warns that those who do marry will face many troubles in life!

This is NOT a good place for married men or women to say amen!

It is clear that Paul **highly values** the status of being single.

Maybe you are single today but wish you weren't, and have felt like you don't really fit in.

Maybe all your friends are getting married or are in long term relationships and you feel left out.

Paul is letting you know there is high value in being single; it really is a gift from God.

It doesn't mean something is wrong with you or that you are broken.

You don't need to give in to the pressure that Valentine's Day brings **to define or attain a different relationship status.**

You can enjoy the gift of being single!

Maybe you have chosen to be single for whatever reason and you want people to stop asking you when you are going to start dating or get married.

Paul is affirming you. Singleness is a gift from God.

Imagine the pressure that would lift from our single population if we could see singleness as a gift from God!

Before we get stuck here, I want to remind all of us that Paul also shines a light on the value of marriage in this part of the letter as well.

He says if you are in a marriage that honors God, it is a gift to be celebrated and enjoyed!

In verses 4 and 5 he says that marriage provides opportunities to grow in responsibility, selflessness, and spiritual discipline.

In verse 9 Paul says it is a good way to experience passion. (I'm talking sex here)

In verse 16 he says it can be an **evangelistic opportunity** to help your spouse grow in their relationship with God.

So if you are single, it is a gift from God. If you are married, it is a gift from God.

Yeah relationships! Praise God!

Celebrate your relationship status and let it make a statement about your God

The second critically important thing Paul clarifies is, that our single or married status isn't the primary objective!

Our most important relationship status is whether or not we are in a relationship with God.

All of the advice Paul gives in this passage is directly connected to how our relationship status influences our TESTIMONY!

Our relationships should shout to the world that God exists and that His design produces life!

What does Paul say in **verse 5** that is more important than a sexual connection with your spouse?

Connecting with God in prayer.

This is why I remind Caryl on a regular basis that I'm all prayed up!

(Pause)

What does Paul say is more important than remaining single? Finding ways to express your passion in a way that honors God's with a call to purity.

What does Paul say about how we act toward one another in a marriage? That Marriage is God's plan for life and we should treat it with reverence.

In fact, Paul uses **34 verses** to take the long way around the relationship status smorgasbord and comes to his main point **in verse 35.**

**“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.”**

In other words, **no matter what our relationship status is, it is a gift from God for His Glory!**

Our relationships are not purely **physical or emotional**.

Relationships are spiritual.

Every relationship should naturally flow out of our relationship with God and give props to the God who created us!

If our relationship with God is primary, then every other relationship should bring Glory to His name!

That brings me to the third important thing Paul expresses in this letter.

Relationships are a **necessary part of our journey!**

It is in the context of our relationships that God's character is revealed to the world.

Paul actually goes out of his way a few different times in this passage **to make it clear that he is just sharing his opinion.**

He is clear **that it is an opinion directed by the Holy Spirit**, but his opinion nonetheless.

Paul is **displaying the principle he is teaching.**

He is in a relationship with the people of Corinth. While he has strong influence with them, he is not dictating.

He could have demanded they act in a certain way in all areas.

Instead, he **offers them good advice** in some areas and gives them the **freedom to make their own decisions.**

He displays the gracious character of God.

Yet, Paul is also careful to point out, that some of his teaching isn't just opinion, it is instruction directly from God.

In verses 10 and 11 Paul is clear, that if we are going to be in a relationship, be careful to act in ways that displays the faithfulness of our God.

If we allow God's character to be expressed through our relationships, then it doesn't matter if our status is single or married, every relationship has value!

Here is where it starts to become fun.

When we realize our romantic relationship status isn't the most important thing in our life!

And we adopt the truth that God's character is on display through our relationships!

Then it can eliminate the pressure to define your status as single or in a relationship!

If Valentine's Day is **all about either being in the perfect relationship or explaining why I am single, it can turn up the pressure.**

But if Valentine's Day is **a day where we get to celebrate our relationships as a means of living into God's character** – his love, his faithfulness, his patience, his selflessness.

Then it can **be a way to elevate every relationship we have, whether romantic or not.**

Maybe this is good news for you.

Valentine's Day doesn't have to be the enemy! Let's take the pressure off!

Conclusion –

In 1647 a group known as the Westminster Assembly created a **concise confession of the faith** that could be used to **clarify the core doctrines of Christianity.**

They wanted it **to be so simple** that even a **child could understand it.**

This new **catechism, or way of teaching about our faith,** started with a **question.**

What is the **chief end or aim of man?** The answer they provided was, ***“to glorify God and enjoy Him forever!”***

They made it simple, and they got it right.

Revelation 4:11 (NIV) ¹¹ "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

Imagine the **fun we could experience in our relationships if our focus wasn't on defining a relational status** as single or in a relationship.

What if we shifted our focus to ***GLORIFY GOD AND ENJOYING HIM FOREVER*** with every relationship we have!

This was the heart of Paul's challenge to the church!

Living this way removes the pressure we face in our culture to define our relational status.

It doesn't matter if you single or in a relationship!

What matters is are you bringing Glory to God through your relationships!

Let's reframe Valentine's Day from this point forward and make the month of February a month that shapes our relationship with God!

So we can through our relationships EXPAND HIS GLORY AND ENJOY HIM FOREVER!

Let's Pray

Response time:

- Today you **recognize you need better advisors**
- **Value your status** single or in a relationship
- You need to **reign in your passion, become sexually pure**
- Get back to the **main objective and deepen your relationship with God**