

Stay Where You Are, On Purpose

Sunday, July 13, 2025

Start with Application Testimony

- **Last lesson's exhortation:** For the married, ask God to show you how He is using your marriage to mature you. For the unmarried, do the same with your close relationships – especially those where you are challenged the most.

INTRO

- **We are going verse-by-verse, in a topical study through I & II Corinthians**
 - **Current Topic:** Becoming Mature – The personal discipline of becoming like Jesus
 - In exploring this topic, we've seen that spiritual maturity is not about gaining status or knowledge, but about living a life fully surrendered to Christ. It means rejecting sin, choosing love over personal freedom, and laying down our rights for the sake of the gospel. Maturity shows up in how we handle our relationships, our bodies, and our commitments – honoring God in every part of life. Whether in worship, marriage, or everyday choices, the call is the same: to live with purpose, discipline, and devotion that is rooted in Christ and focused on becoming like Him in everything.
 - In this final lesson on the topic of Becoming Mature, we'll see how maturity means staying grounded in who you are, focused on what matters, and faithful in your present season of life.

- **Note:** *This passage addresses a culture where arranged marriages and multi-step engagements were the norm. Some of Paul's specific advice may seem confusing to us today, but our goal is to identify the timeless principles he teaches. While our culture differs from the Corinthians', these principles still apply, though we may express them differently in our context.*

READ

1 Corinthians 7:17–40 CSB

¹⁷ Let each one live his life in the situation the Lord assigned when God called him. This is what I command in all the churches. ¹⁸ Was anyone already circumcised when he was called? He should not undo his circumcision. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? He should not get circumcised. ¹⁹ Circumcision does not matter and uncircumcision does not matter. Keeping God's commands is what matters. ²⁰ Let each of you remain in the situation in which he was called. ²¹ Were you called while a slave? Don't let it concern you. But if you can become free, by all means take the opportunity. ²² For he who is called by the Lord as a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called as a free man is Christ's slave. ²³ You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of people. ²⁴ Brothers and sisters, each person is to remain with God in the situation in which he was called. ²⁵ Now about virgins: I have no command from the Lord, but I do give an opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is faithful. ²⁶ Because of the present distress, I think that it is good for a man to remain as he is. ²⁷ Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife. ²⁸ However, if you do get married, you have not sinned, and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. But such people will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare

you.²⁹ This is what I mean, brothers and sisters: The time is limited, so from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none,³⁰ those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they didn't own anything,³¹ and those who use the world as though they did not make full use of it. For this world in its current form is passing away.³² I want you to be without concerns. The unmarried man is concerned about the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord.³³ But the married man is concerned about the things of the world—how he may please his wife—³⁴ and his interests are divided. The unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the things of the Lord, so that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But the married woman is concerned about the things of the world—how she may please her husband.³⁵ I am saying this for your own benefit, not to put a restraint on you, but to promote what is proper and so that you may be devoted to the Lord without distraction.³⁶ If any man thinks he is acting improperly toward the virgin he is engaged to, if she is getting beyond the usual age for marriage, and he feels he should marry—he can do what he wants. He is not sinning; they can get married.³⁷ But he who stands firm in his heart (who is under no compulsion, but has control over his own will) and has decided in his heart to keep her as his fiancée, will do well.³⁸ So, then, he who marries his fiancée does well, but he who does not marry will do better.³⁹ A wife is bound as long as her husband is living. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to anyone she wants—only in the Lord.⁴⁰ But she is happier if she remains as she is, in my opinion. And I think that I also have the Spirit of God.

EXAMINE

#1 | A change in you, doesn't require a change in your circumstance

1. Neither your job, your marriage, your status, nor your environment need to change for you to be obedient to God.

a. 1 Corinthians 7:17–19 *"Let each one live his life in the situation the Lord assigned when God called him... Circumcision does not matter and uncircumcision does not matter. Keeping God's commands is what matters."*

i. You can be mature and fruitful in any circumstance. (Phil 4:12–13)

b. 1 Corinthians 7:22 *"...he who is called by the Lord as a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called as a free man is Christ's slave."*

i. Christ is our true master – not other people and not our circumstances. Nothing can enslave us when we belong to Him.

2. Maturity requires "Self-Differentiation." You are not your job, your role, your status, or what others think/feel about you.

a. Self-differentiation is the ability to stay grounded in your identity and values – even when relationships, circumstances, or cultural expectations are pulling in competing directions.

i. This is what Paul is encouraging – and we see this exemplified in the life of Jesus and in many others like Joseph, Moses, David, and Daniel.

#2 | You should choose your attachments and obligations carefully

1. There is a limit to your attention and your energy.

a. 1 Corinthians 7:32–34 *"I want you to be without concerns. The unmarried man is concerned about the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord. But the married man is concerned about the things of the world—how he may please his wife—and his interests are divided..."*

- i. It's good to take on responsibility for others, but we need to evaluate the cost of commitments before making them.

2. To be mature, we must choose our attachments and obligations based on Godly priorities, not internal desires or external pressure.

a. 1 Corinthians 7:35 *"I am saying this for your own benefit, not to put a restraint on you, but to promote what is proper and so that you may be devoted to the Lord without distraction."*

- i. The mature person embraces responsibility and obligation – but chooses those things by considering their impact and the limitations they bring.

- 1. *Often we can find ourselves restrained from following where God leads, because we have entangled ourselves in situations without thinking ahead.*

3. We don't get to freely abandon responsibilities once we have taken them up.

a. 1 Corinthians 7:27 *"Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released..."*

- i. Some responsibilities can't be abandoned – even if we think we were wrong to take them on.
- ii. We must remain faithful, because God is faithful. He will strengthen us to be faithful and bless us when we do.

#3 | Focus your area of concern

1. If you concern yourself with too many things, you can't be effective and fruitful in your calling.

- a. Luke 9:62 ...*Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."*
 - i. Fruitfulness comes from focus. You can't be fruitful in anything, when you get distracted by everything.
 - ii. Circumstances will always tempt us to second-guess and overthink, but if we focus on Jesus, He will direct our attention to the things that need it.

2. The process of maturity trains us to focus on those areas where God has given us responsibility and influence.

- a. We often waste energy in areas where God has not given us responsibility and influence, and then don't have the time or energy for the areas where He has.
 - i. So we must not let the urgency of the moment and the pressures of our circumstances command our attention.
- b. To be effective and fruitful, we must gain a sense of self that is rooted in Christ – not external circumstances or the approval of others.

- i. Hebrews 12:1–2 *“Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, 2 keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith...”*

REFLECT

Let’s take a moment to pray

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide our attention and lead our conversation, helping us see and understand what He wants us to apply in our lives.

APPLY

Process the passage together with these questions:

- Have you ever taken on a responsibility without thinking it through? How did that affect you?
- How do you decide which responsibilities to take on, and which not to?
- What does it look like for you to be faithful in any season of life?

Where we want to “land the plane”

- You don’t need a different life to be faithful – you need clarity about who you are in Christ, wisdom in what you commit to, and focus for what truly matters. Maturity means staying rooted, even when life pulls at you, and being fruitful right where God has placed you. Don’t let pressure or distraction lead your decisions – let your calling in Christ shape how you live every day.

Exhortation for the Week

- Determine to be faithful in this season of your life. Seek the Lord and Godly counsel to find out what that would look like.

FOOTNOTES

1. **(v18) Undo a circumcision?? Was that even possible?** In the Greco-Roman world, a procedure called epispasm allowed circumcised men—primarily Jews—to partially restore the appearance of the foreskin in order to conform to Hellenistic norms of bodily aesthetics. This was not a full surgical reversal as understood today, but rather a method to conceal circumcision, especially in public spaces like gymnasiums and baths, where exposed glans were considered shameful. This practice arose due to social pressure and cultural shame, particularly among Jews who sought social acceptance or status in Hellenized urban centers. *Josephus, Antiquities 12.241 – references Jews undergoing epispasm during the reign of Antiochus IV to escape persecution and cultural stigma. | Bruce Winter, in After Paul Left Corinth (Eerdmans, 2001), details how urban Jewish communities in places like Corinth faced intense cultural pressure that led to practices like epispasm to avoid marginalization in civic and athletic life. | 1 Maccabees 1:15 – condemns those who "made themselves uncircumcised" to align with Gentile customs.*
2. **(v25) “Have no command from the Lord” – is Paul just giving his own opinion? Do we have to follow it?** Jesus had never specifically addressed the propriety of marriage per se (cf. Matt. 19:10–12, 29) but Paul gave his judgment on the issue which they could take as trustworthy counsel. (He of course was writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and hence his “judgment” was as authoritative as Christ’s words; cf. 1 Cor. 7:40.) *David K.*

Lowery, "1 Corinthians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 519.

a. In other words, Paul is not saying he doesn't have direction from God on this matter – he is just saying he doesn't have a specific teaching of Jesus to quote.

3. **(v29–31) "Those who have wives should live as though they had none" – Is Paul encouraging people to abandon their marriages?** The phrase the time is short referred to the Lord's return (cf. Rom. 13:11), but it was also a summary philosophy of life for Paul who lived not for the temporary but for the eternal (cf. 2 Cor. 4:18). This detachment from temporal matters should characterize all Christians but it was more complex for the married (cf. Mark 13:12) for whom, nonetheless, devotion to their Lord should occupy first place in life (Luke 14:26). Paul certainly was not recommending abandoning marital duties (cf. 1 Cor. 7:3–5). Instead he was calling for a commitment to eternal matters and a corresponding detachment from the institutions, values, and substance of this world which was passing away (v. 31). Such a commitment was more easily made and enacted by a single person. *David K. Lowery, "1 Corinthians," in The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 519–520.