

Going Deeper: Love As God Designed It

A Study Guide & Resources for Spiritual Growth Based on for 1 Corinthians 7:1-7

Sermon Summary: “Loving Like A Christian”

This message tackles one of Scripture's more challenging passages about marriage and intimacy. The Corinthian church had written to Paul with a proposed rule: "It is well for a man not to touch a woman"—even in marriage. This extreme reaction likely stemmed from their sexually broken culture and personal wounds.

Paul's response surprises them. Rather than applauding their asceticism, he affirms that meaningful, caring touch is part of God's good design for marriage. He offers pastoral wisdom: love in marriage should be **focused** (devoted to one person) and **mutual** (characterized by care rather than control). The core principle: Whatever relational circumstance you're in—married or single—see it as a gift and an opportunity to love like Christ.

Finding Jesus in This Passage

- **Jesus Models Focused Love:** Just as Paul calls married couples to focus their love on one another, Jesus demonstrates ultimate focused love. He didn't scatter His affection or divide His mission; He set His face toward Jerusalem and loved His bride, the Church, "to the end".
- **Jesus Redefines Authority as Service:** When Paul says spouses have "authority" over each other's bodies, he is describing mutual care rather than control. Jesus modeled this perfectly by coming not to be served but to serve, emptying Himself to become a servant. This is the power to care, heal, and make things better.
- **Jesus Provides the Love We Lack:** When we feel we don't have enough love, God does—because "God is love". Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit so we could love with His power.

Interesting Background Facts

- **The Corinthian Context:** Corinth was notorious for sexual immorality and housed the Temple of Aphrodite. Many Corinthian Christians carried deep wounds and confusion about sexuality from this background.
- **The Shakers:** Founded by Ann Lee in 1747, this group viewed sexuality as a source of suffering following personal grief. While their craftsmanship remains, their theology of mandatory celibacy could not sustain the community.

- **"Exousia" – A Different Kind of Authority:** The Greek word for authority used in verse 4 (*exousia*) never means "license to dominate". Instead, it refers to the "responsibility to steward and care for".
- **Marriage Vows:** The traditional phrase "to have and to hold" traces back to the 1549 Book of Common Prayer. While originally legal language from property law, the Church transformed it into a picture of devoted covenant commitment.

Additional Resources for Going Deeper

Books:

"The Meaning of Marriage" by Timothy Keller

"Sacred Marriage" by Gary Thomas

"Boundaries in Marriage" by Henry Cloud & John Townsend

"The Art of Sexual Intimacy" by Clifford & Joyce Penner (mature content, for married couples).

For Further Study:

- Re-Engage Marriage Ministry - Starts February 19th Register at [Reconnect, Reignite, Resurrect Your Marriage - re|engage](#)
- 1 Corinthians Commentary by Gordon Fee: For those wanting deeper scholarly insight into the cultural and theological background of this passage.

Online Resources:

- The Bible Project's "Corinthians Series": Free animated videos providing context for understanding Paul's letters (bibleproject.com)

Activation Questions for Spiritual Growth

For Everyone:

1. **Gratitude Check:** What are three specific things you're grateful for in your current season of life, and how can you express that to God this week?
2. **The "Have and Hold" Principle:** Who has God called you to "have and hold" in Christian love (family, friends, church), and how can you love them more fully?

For Married Couples:

1. **Focused Love:** When did you last have a meaningful conversation with your spouse about their dreams or spiritual journey? Schedule time this week to "know" each other more deeply.

2. **The "Symphony" Principle:** Paul says couples should be "in symphony" when making decisions. Where do you need to get on the same page with your spouse?
3. **Prayer Partnership:** When was the last time you prayed together about something significant in your marriage?

For Singles:

1. **Gift Perspective:** How can you view your current season as an opportunity to serve God and others rather than just a "waiting room"?
2. **Preparation:** What character qualities is God developing in you now that will make you a better spouse or a more sacrificial lover like Jesus?

Addressing Difficult Questions

"What if my spouse and I have very different desires?"

- **Different isn't wrong:** God made you uniquely; differing needs are normal.
- **Communication is key:** Practice vulnerable honesty about your needs.
- **Seek understanding:** Ask questions to understand why something matters to your spouse.
- **Remember the goal:** The goal is becoming more loving and serving your spouse rather than just "getting what I want".

"What if I'm single and don't want to be?"

- **Life isn't on hold:** Invest in friendships, ministry, and personal growth now.
- **Longing isn't sin:** It is okay to desire marriage; bring that longing honestly to God.
- **Guard against idolatry:** Remember that only Jesus completes us, not a spouse.
- **Trust God's timing:** Keep trusting that His timing is good, even when it differs from your own.

A Closing Prayer

Gracious Father, thank You for the gift of love and for designing us for relationship. Jesus, thank You for showing us sacrificial love; fill us with Your Spirit so we can love others as You love us. For those who are married, give them grace to cherish and serve one another. For those who are single, help them see this season as a gift and show them unique ways to serve You. Make us all grateful and growing. In Jesus's name, Amen.