

## NOTE FROM PASTOR JONATHAN

**Thank you** to everyone for this amazing ministry year! This is the last set of questions/notes until September. I'll be preparing for the ministry season in September with some new initiatives. In the meantime, check out my **video announcements** for the summer: [https://youtu.be/i\\_SvpNAMrs8](https://youtu.be/i_SvpNAMrs8). I'll be making more videos to share some encouragement and ideas for groups. Please send me videos and photos of what y'all are doing. I'll include them in my videos so everyone can be encouraged by what's going on. I've also included a snippet of Pastor Jono and Pastor Richard's Life Group at the end of my video. I think everything is perfectly self-explanatory without additional context.

**Movie Night Fundraiser.** We're raising money on **July 3** for our Japan, France, and Germany mission teams heading out in July. It's a \$5 ticket for a bag of popcorn, a seat to watch Ratatouille, and a chance to meet our teams. Sign up by July 1: <https://willingdon.churchcenter.com/registrations/events/2997418>.

### 1 Corinthians 7:25-40

<sup>25</sup> Now concerning the betrothed, I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. <sup>26</sup> I think that in view of the present distress it is good for a person to remain as he is. <sup>27</sup> Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. <sup>28</sup> But if you do marry, you have not sinned, and if a betrothed woman marries, she has not sinned. Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that. <sup>29</sup> This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, <sup>30</sup> 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, <sup>31</sup> 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.

<sup>32</sup> I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. <sup>33</sup> But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, <sup>34</sup> 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 is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. <sup>35</sup> I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.

<sup>36</sup> If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed, if his passions are strong, and it has to be, let him do as he wishes: let them marry—it is no sin. <sup>37</sup> 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, he will do well. <sup>38</sup> So then he who marries his betrothed does well, and he who refrains from marriage will do even better.

<sup>39</sup> A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. <sup>40</sup> Yet in my judgment she is happier if she remains as she is. And I think that I too have the Spirit of God.

## Let's Warm Up: Questions to break the ice.

### 1. Did you have more or less freedom in your life 5 or 10 years ago? What changed?

On one hand, my wife and I had less freedom 5 years ago during the COVID lockdowns. We couldn't see people, go out to eat at restaurants, or do other activities. On the other hand, we had a lot of freedom. We both worked from home, so our hours were flexible. We could have a relaxing morning without a busy commute and have lunch together. Worship services were only an hour long and online. Visitations and fellowships were on Zoom. We also didn't have our son yet. We had a lot of extra time on our hands.

In this week's passage, Paul encourages the Corinthians to see singleness and marriage in relation to the freedom to follow and serve God.

### 2. What are some examples of equally good options that you struggle with in your day-to-day? (E.g., menu options, clothing choices, ways to relax)

Have you ever been to a restaurant and found yourself going "Oh, I'll order that!"? And as you look at the next item, you go, "Oh, I'll get that!"? And by the tenth time you've done it, you realize you want to order everything on the menu?

Or maybe in the mornings, you're trying to figure out what to wear. Should you pair this shirt with that skirt? These earrings or those? And you realize they're all good. You are just the perfect stylist with the most versatile wardrobe! Or maybe you're like me with no style sense, so you can't really tell what works or not.

Perhaps you have a day off coming up and don't know what to do. Should you sleep in? Go for a hike? Call up a friend for brunch? Read a book? Catch up on your favorite show? Deep clean your living room? Pull out your weights and do some exercise? Do a day-trip to Squamish? Whistler? Cape Sutil? You want to do all of it! And just thinking about which option gives you stress.

In this week's passage, Paul tells the church that marriage and singleness are both valid options as long as they pursue Jesus.

## Let's Get Started: Questions to start thinking about the main themes.

### 3. What are some ways people see their time on earth (e.g., hedonism, utilitarianism, nihilism, Gospel)?

Most people know their lives on earth are limited. Death is inevitable. So, how should we live?

**Hedonism.** "[H]edonism states that all and only pleasure is intrinsically valuable and all and only pain is intrinsically not valuable." (<https://iep.utm.edu/hedonism>). Life is all about pursuing what makes you feel good and avoiding what makes you feel bad. Of course, good and bad vary from person to person. Some people think cheese with maggots is a delicacy (<https://youtu.be/Y8F-0Ogp4fU>) and bellyflopping off a high-dive platform is fun (<https://youtu.be/3qnN892umFs>), while others ... don't.

YOLO (You Only Live Once) became a popular expression in 2012. Live it up, go wild, take risks. Do whatever makes you happy because you only live once. Go party, buy whatever luxury clothes/cars/experiences, have relationships with whomever you want. If it's a sacrifice or unpleasant, don't do it!

**Utilitarianism.** “[U]tilitarianism is generally held to be the view that the morally right action is the action that produces the most good. ... Everyone's happiness counts the same. When one maximizes the good, it is the good impartially considered. My good counts for no more than anyone else's good.”

(<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/utilitarianism-history/>).

Pursue what's best for the most people. Pick a job that provides the most money to support the most people and bring honor to your parents, as is your duty. Volunteer because it makes the world a better place. Don't think about yourself. Think about the world. It's your duty! It doesn't matter if it makes you, an individual, happy or not. Sacrifice. Grind. Work. Serve.

People who grew up in duty-bound cultures know what it's like to always be told to do something because it's all for the greater good (<https://youtu.be/uYTeTK57sCQ>).

**Nihilism.** “Nihilism is the belief that all values are baseless and that nothing can be known or communicated. It is often associated with extreme pessimism and a radical skepticism that condemns existence. A true nihilist would believe in nothing, have no loyalties, and no purpose other than, perhaps, an impulse to destroy.”

(<https://iep.utm.edu/nihilism>). We all die someday. Nothing we do matters.

What's the point? Does anything I do matter? People here are like the Teacher in Ecclesiastes, “Meaningless! Meaningless! ... Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.” (Ecclesiastes 1:2; NIV). Freedom, truth, peace, love? A wise computer program once said, “All illusions ... temporary constructs of a feeble human intellect trying desperately to justify an existence that is without meaning or purpose.” ([https://youtu.be/D\\_7uc6iZhYc](https://youtu.be/D_7uc6iZhYc)).

If nothing really matters, then we're free to do whatever we want. There is no Truth with a capital T or beauty or purpose. Or we fall into despair.

**Gospel.** What I find interesting is that all of those philosophies do have some truth at their core. Yes, we will all die someday. Yes, our human, earthly achievements will all disappear. Our lives are like a board game where we accrue wealth and status. When our lives end, it all goes back in the box (<https://youtu.be/OZKwAGWrDTU>). In actuality, it's worse than what the world thinks! Our actions while alive actually lead us to God's righteous judgment against our sins (Romans 6:23). Yes, we should pursue what brings us joy and pleasure. Yes, we should do things that advance the greater good. But the Gospel brings everything into perspective.

But through Jesus Christ, there's eternal hope. Because Jesus died on the cross to take on the punishment for our sins, we can be forgiven (Matthew 26:26-29) and have eternal life (John 3:14-17). Not only will we live for eternity, but our work can, too. The things we do to serve Jesus will also lead to eternal reward (1 Corinthians 3:10-14). So, by sacrificing here on earth, we're able to benefit ourselves and others now and for eternity.

Paul writes in this passage that “the appointed time has grown very short” (v. 29). The Message Bible paraphrases it as, “...time is of the essence. There is no time to waste, so don't complicate your lives unnecessarily.” (MSG). Paul wants us not to waste our time on earth, but to pursue life with an eternal perspective in mind.

#### 4. What kinds of responsibilities or freedoms are associated with singleness and marriage?

When you were single, what was expected of you? For some, it was to live it up and experience life before getting married. Date around. Go travel, go party, go wild. Live your life before you get tied down to the old ball and chain! For others, it was to get married ASAP. Get an education so you can get a career so you can support a family!

How about in marriage? For some, it's all about duty to one's spouse and family. Everything is for the family. In some marriages, one spouse works super hard while the other spouse can do whatever they want.

What do you see or hear?

## 5. What responsibilities does someone take on when they become married?

Here are some suggestions.

**Planning.** Being married requires more effort in planning. When I was single, I only had to worry about my own schedule and energy levels. But now that I'm married, I can't just do whatever ministry I want. For example, when I'm visiting Life Groups, I have to see how my wife is doing. What's her schedule? Will I be out too many nights in a row? Does she have something going on? This also applies to big decisions. If someone feels God is calling them into missions overseas or to pursue a different career, they have to bring their spouse into the conversation, since it affects both of them. Pastor Brody shared the example of missionary William Carey, whose wife suffered greatly.

**Consideration.** Since married couples share a lot of things, both opinions and feelings have to be considered. You share the same living space, so you have to consider what works for your spouse, aesthetically and functionally. There's more laundry to do. You may have to compromise in picking the cuisine to eat. Guys suddenly have to put the toilet seat down.

**Priority.** If you're in a group of single people your own age, who you spend the most time/energy with/on can fluctuate. Maybe you and Person A join the same Pentasport team, so you spend more time together training and competing. After the season's over, Person B is struggling with something you can help so you dedicate more attention to them. Then they get counseling, so they don't need you as much. People come and go, but if you're married, your spouse should be your top human priority for life, and that doesn't change.

## Let's Dig In: Questions to discuss the passage and how we can respond.

### 6. How do we "live as though" (marriage, mourning, rejoicing, buying/selling/business) with an eternal perspective?

These things won't last forever. There's a legend about Solomon, who one day tried to humble one of his servants. (<https://medium.com/learning-for-life/this-too-shall-pass-tracing-an-ancient-jewish-folktale-6f5a1aaa0a0e>). He told the guy to find a magic ring that would make a sad person happy and a happy person sad. Long story short, he gets a ring that says "This, too, shall pass." Whenever he's sad, he'll remember this sadness won't last, so he'll cheer up. Whenever he's happy, he'll remember this happiness won't last, so he'll get sad. Fascinatingly, there are variations of this story with the same overall idea from different cultures. Humans have learned that things don't last.

As we live our lives, we know that marriage, mourning/rejoicing, and possessions don't last forever. We can use them to prepare for eternity and prepare others, too.

Here are some suggestions.

**Marriage.** Our marriages won't last forever (Matthew 22:30). But so often, marriage is about temporary goals. We want our homes to look a certain way or create little traditions that we do. We want our spouses to make us happy. Those aren't wrong, but they're all temporary and won't last.

A married couple can spur each other on to follow and experience God, since that relationship will last forever. Couples can also make sure they build up and pour into people outside of their relationship by making disciples. In eternity, that marriage relationship won't continue, but the general relationships between Christians will.

What does a couple do that will last into eternity?

**Mourning/Rejoicing.** Yes, life can be rough, so we mourn. But we know we'll be comforted (Matthew 5:4) because we have hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13). We know this suffering is temporary and is used by God to grow us to be more like Jesus (James 1:2-4). We rejoice, but know that there will be suffering in this life. We will be persecuted (2 Timothy 3:12) and endure suffering as discipline (Hebrews 12:7). And ultimately, we will experience far greater joys than what we can experience here on earth.

**Buying/Selling/Business.** In the past few years, I've noticed the term "forever home" pop up when looking at real estate. It used to be just buying a home, but now we differentiate between "Starter Home vs. Forever Home" (<https://www.zoocasa.com/blog/starter-vs-forever-home/>). There's even a show called Property Brothers: Forever Home (<https://youtu.be/ePdyRWZ1jbs>). One of the brothers says, "We're gonna' make sure they are happy here, forever."

But we know that our possessions, careers, homes, etc., are only temporary. They won't last! God's lending them to us so we can use them for His eternal purposes. So, how can we use our possessions to serve Him?

We can use our homes to host Life Groups or to bring the lonely into community. We can use our cars to give rides to people who need a lift to get to Sunday service. We can use our money to support the church, missions, and those in need for the sake of Jesus. We can provide for those who are in need. We can use our workplaces as mission fields to share the love of Jesus.

7. Pastor Brody said, "Dear single person: be on mission for Jesus with the time you have. Don't miss the opportunity to show Christ to the people around you. He mobilized and met needs, went where God led him, and ministered in unexpected ways and places. Like him, you are available and able to go. Single, you have been gifted a unique mission from God.

**If you're single, what's the unique mission God is giving you?**

Here are some suggestions.

Look at your gifts, abilities, and opportunities. There's a lot you can do. For example, there may be other singles looking for community. Show them that you don't have to be married to be part of God's family. Get a few people over for some game nights, prayer, or Bible study. Let them know they belong.

Pray for your single friends who are looking for spouses to make God the priority. Strive with them as they struggle and encourage them. Encourage them when they're feeling down or lesser because they're single.

Use your free time to serve the church. In my single days, I looked after others' babies so the parents could participate in classes or other ministries.

- 8. Pastor Brody said, “Dear married person: be on mission for Jesus with the time you have. Don't miss the opportunity to show Christ to the spouse you have, as he loved his church and met our needs, ministering to us in unexpected ways and places. Don't miss the opportunity to demonstrate holiness to the children you may have, or at least to the world around you as you love and sacrifice for your spouse, your family. Married, you have been gifted a unique mission from God.”**

**If you're married, what's the unique mission God is giving you?**

Here are some suggestions.

You can minister to the singles looking for marriage. Let them know it isn't a cakewalk, but takes work, so they'll have the right expectations. Help them to prepare their hearts and minds to have God-glorifying aims in finding a spouse. You can also demonstrate to other couples what following God looks like.

Invite singles and couples over so everyone feels like one big family. When I was single, I really appreciated married couples who invited me over to their homes for holiday celebrations, like Christmas or Thanksgiving.

Bring your kids behind the curtain to see your spiritual walk. Let them see how you're a sinner, but Jesus met you with His grace. Invite them to join you in this process of growing closer to Jesus.

- 9. Pastor Brody said, “Whatever you choose, to say I do or I don't, be confident in your decision. God does not micromanage your life. If you're waiting for God to drop the perfect spouse in your path, you'll be waiting a long time – the only perfect spouse is Jesus returning for his people. However, whether you marry or not, you can actively pursue Jesus and become more like your Saviour as you bring the gospel wherever you go and are transformed by it along the way. My girlfriend is better loved when I am more like Jesus.”**

**How does pursuing Jesus give us confidence in our decision to be single or get married?**

Yes, God knows every hair on your head (Matthew 10:30), but He doesn't tell you the answer to each and every decision you make. The Bible would be impossibly long! “To Jimmy Jams, who was born in 1999 in Burnaby, thus saith the Lord, thou shalt marry Susie Suze, who was born in 2000 in Surrey. To Jimmy Jims, who was born in 1999 in Richmond, thus saith the Lord...” Instead, God gives us principles to follow.

And an overarching principle that we follow regardless of relationship status is to pursue Jesus and make disciples. As long as you are doing that, you're on the right track, because marriage and singleness are both valid options in God's eyes.

And if we are pursuing Jesus and making disciples, it'll keep us from making lots of bad decisions, like pursuing a relationship with a non-believer. A non-believer may be attractive in many ways, but if Jesus-following-ness is your priority, their lack of Jesus-following-ness will make them overall unattractive.

## **10. How can we give people space as they consider whether to marry or not?**

Some of us have probably experienced pressure to pick one or the other. I've shared before, but when my cousin got married (at 38 years of age), my uncle said at his wedding that he was finally an adult. Even though he had a successful career, his own place, and so on. In China, women who aren't married by 27 are called “leftover women” and are showcased at a “wedding market” (<https://youtu.be/WBMcoJWo92Y>).

In many churches, the congregation gets suspicious when people are single past a certain age. “There’s got to be something wrong with them! Maybe they’re secretly gay. Or they just don’t know how to please a guy or girl.” Or they’ll point out their flaws. “You can’t find a guy because you’re overweight.” “You can’t find a girl because you’re such a dork.” These comments are *incredibly* unhelpful and *extremely* harmful, especially when they don’t take into consideration whether or not they’re pursuing Jesus.

Some of us may have experienced pressure to stay single. As Pastor Vinh shared a few weeks ago, he’s met a lot of guys talking about all the things they have to give up if they get married. There are many variations of wedding cake toppers of the bride dragging the groom away from his video games, sports gear, and other hobbies (<https://www.etsy.com/ca/listing/1394615380/funny-wedding-cake-topper-game-over>). To them, marriage means giving up all that they find pleasurable in life.

Some want to stay single because of what they’ve seen about marriage. I have several relatives who decided to remain single because their parents’ marriages were miserable and ended in divorce.

So, how can we love our singles? I have a few suggestions.

**Understand where they’re at.** When I was at another church, there was a single young adult. He told me that he struggled with gay pornography. He really wanted to get married to a girl and have a family, but he just wasn’t wired to be attracted to girls. He told me it really hurt when people asked him, “When are you going to have a girlfriend?”

Let’s not assume people want to get married or the reasons they’re single. Let’s get to know them. Are they called to be single? Are they pursuing marriage? How do they feel about it? Is it something they’re comfortable talking or even joking about? Or should we quietly pray in the background?

**Respect their decision.** Assuming it’s something Biblical, and not pursuing a relationship with a non-believer or with the Eiffel Tower (<https://youtu.be/OnEj71n3-R4>), let’s respect what they’ve chosen. Since God says singleness and marriage are both valid options, let’s respect both.

There was a professor at my seminary, Abraham Kuruvilla, who is celibate, so he could dedicate his time to preaching the Gospel. (Here’s a clip of him explaining his “Ecclesiological Singleness”: <https://youtu.be/yXsmaHHAnuA&t=1154>.) I remember in one talk that a lot of people kept trying to connect him with single ladies.

**11. Pastor Brody said, “We do not “flirt to convert”. If you’re not a Christian but you’re dating or interested in a Christian, ask yourself what your relationship will look like down the road. What will you compromise by being with them? Where do you see gaps between your worldviews, or values you’re ignoring, whether theirs or yours? Being unequally joined will lead to strife, maybe bitterness, and certainly challenges in your relationship.” What are some dangers of being in a relationship with a non-believer?**

I’ve heard of “missionary dating”, but this was the first time I’ve heard of “flirt to convert.” And I think it’s so much better. I also appreciate Pastor Brody listing out some big concerns.

What are the gaps between the worldviews and values of Christians and non-Christians? What potential conflicts and challenges will arise because of that?

Here are some possible areas you can consider:

**Goals for marriage.** Will the marriage be about personal happiness or serving Jesus as individuals and as a couple?

**Finances.** Will they be cool with using their money to serve Jesus? Will they give generously to the church or missions? Will they be willing to take a lonely person out to lunch or sponsor a Compassion child?

**Nature of the Relationship.** God calls for husbands to lovingly sacrifice for their wives to sanctify them like Jesus did for the church, while wives should respect and obey their husbands as they would for Jesus (Ephesians 5:22-34). Does pursuing this relationship encourage you to obey God? Are they going to strive to be the husband or wife God's calling them to be?

**Time.** It takes a lot of time to follow Jesus! Will gathering to worship God as the church or as a Life Group conflict with how they want to spend their time? Will you be dragged away to do other things?