DISCUSSION GUIDE

BUILT DIFFERENT : *“A Disciple Is Faithful Where God Places Them”*

SCRIPTURE | 1 Corinthians 7:1–24

MEMORY VERSE

“I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought” (1 Corinthians 1:10).

MAIN IDEA OF THE TEXT

Built different: disciples honor God in all situations, specifically in marriage, singleness, and present circumstances.

DISCIPLESHIP RHYTHM

Discipleship Distinctive: family, dating, and marriage

OBSERVATION: WHAT DOES IT SAY?

Gather in groups of three to five people to discuss the Observation and Interpretation questions.

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 1: MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIPS

Read 1 Corinthians 7:1–7. What relationship instructions did Paul give to husbands and wives? What did he say singleness and marriage have in common?

Suggested Response: Paul said each man should have sexual relations with his own wife and each wife with her own husband. He said husbands and wives should fulfill their marital duty to each other and should not deprive each other except by mutual consent, for a time, and for prayer. Paul said both singleness and marriage are gifts from God. Each person has their own gift from God, one with one kind of gift and another with another kind. Notice that the context is not limited to a spiritual gift. Paul was talking about marital relationships and singleness. It is striking that Paul's connection is that relational status is a gift from God, not a lack or deficit.

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 2: THE UNMARRIED, WIDOWS, AND UNEQUALLY YOKED

Read 1 Corinthians 7:8–16. What instructions did Paul give to the unmarried, widows, married believers, and believers married to unbelievers? Make a list for each relationship status.

Suggested Response: Paul said the unmarried and widows may remain unmarried as he is, but if they cannot control themselves, they should marry. To married believers, he said a wife must not separate from her husband, and a husband must not divorce his wife. He said believers married to unbelievers should not divorce if the unbelieving spouse was willing to live with them. If the unbelieving spouse left, Paul said to let it be so, because God has called believers to peace.

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 3: REMAINING WHERE GOD CALLED YOU

Read 1 Corinthians 7:17–24. What repeated instruction did Paul give? What examples did he use?

Suggested Response: Paul repeatedly told believers to live in the situation the Lord had assigned to them and to remain in the situation they were in when God called them. He used the examples of circumcision and uncircumcision, slavery and freedom. He said keeping God's commands is what counts, that believers were bought at a price, and that each person should live as responsible to God in the situation in which they were called.

INTERPRETATION: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 1: MUTUAL FAITHFULNESS IN MARRIAGE

Why did Paul treat sexual intimacy within marriage as part of faithful discipleship?

Suggested Response: Paul was correcting both casual and overly spiritual views of the body. Remember from last week that there is a deep unity of the physical and spiritual in each person. Sexual intimacy is not something to treat as meaningless, but it also is not something married couples should reject as though holiness requires distance from each other. Within marriage, intimacy is part of mutual care, faithfulness, and self-giving love. From the creation account in Genesis, sexual union is part of God's plan for humanity to fulfill its purpose in His world (Genesis 1:28). Paul showed that disciples honor God not by separating marriage from faith but by bringing marriage under the authority of Christ.

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 2: MARRIAGE OR SINGLENESS CAN BOTH BE FAITHFUL

How does Paul's counsel show that marriage and singleness can both be faithful situations for disciples?

Suggested Response: Paul did not treat marriage as the only faithful path, and he did not treat singleness as second best. Both marriage and singleness can be received as gifts from God and lived for His honor. Paul also gave practical guidance for difficult situations, including separation and marriage to an unbeliever. His concern was that believers pursue faithfulness and peace rather than assuming a different relationship status is always the path to greater holiness.

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 3: CALLING OVER CIRCUMSTANCE

What did Paul mean when he told believers to remain in the situation they were in when God called them?

Suggested Response: Paul was not saying every circumstance is good or that believers should never seek change. He even said an enslaved person should gain freedom if possible. His point was that a person does not need a different status before they can obey Christ. Circumcision, uncircumcision, slavery, freedom, marriage, and singleness do not define a disciple more deeply than belonging to Jesus does. Faithfulness begins by honoring God in the situation where He has placed you.

APPLICATION: HOW DO I RESPOND?

QUESTION 1: In 1 Corinthians 7:17, Paul told believers to live faithfully in the situation where God had placed them. What life situation are you facing that you wish were different? How can you live faithfully in the midst of it right now?

Suggested Response: Responses will vary. Ask follow-up questions to encourage vulnerable sharing.

Some people wish they were married while others are struggling in marriage. Some wish for a different job, a different family situation, less life pressure, or to be out of a difficult life season. Paul reminded us that a change in our circumstances is not necessary for living faithfully. I can begin obeying Christ in the situation I am in today. Furthermore, Paul positioned life situations under God's sovereign control, not as mistakes or surprises.

QUESTION 2: In 1 Corinthians 7:3–5, Paul described marriage as a place of mutual care rather than selfish demand. We can expand this principle to all types of relationships (see John 13). Where do you need to practice more self-giving love in your friendships or with your coworkers? What would self-giving love look like in those relationships?

Suggested Response: I may need to practice self-giving love in dating, family, friendship, or work relationships, as examples. Self-giving love could mean listening more carefully, serving without keeping score, honoring another person's needs, or refusing to use distance, affection, or attention to control. Paul reminded us that relationships are not places for selfishness but places to honor God through faithful love.

QUESTION 3: Paul spoke honestly about desire, self-control, and temptation. Where do you need to be more honest with God about your temptations? How is honesty with God helpful?

Suggested Response: I may need to be honest about sexual desire, loneliness, frustration, discontentment, comparison, or the ways I look for comfort outside of God's design. Honesty before God helps me stop pretending, seek wisdom, and take faithful steps instead of letting hidden desires quietly shape my choices.

QUESTION 4: In 1 Corinthians 7:7–9, Paul treated both marriage and singleness as situations in which people can honor God. Which relationship status are you most tempted to idealize or resent?

Suggested Response: I may idealize marriage, singleness, dating, or a different season of life because it looks easier from the outside. I may also resent the situation I am currently in. Paul helps me remember that no relationship status automatically creates faithfulness. God can be honored in the life I have, not only in the life I imagine.

QUESTION 5: In 1 Corinthians 7:10–16, Paul gave guidance for complicated and painful relational situations. What would it look like to pursue faithfulness and peace in a good, but difficult relationship?

Suggested Response: Faithfulness and peace may involve patience, honest conversation, wise counsel, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, boundaries, or refusing to escalate conflict. It does not mean pretending everything is fine or ignoring serious harm. It means asking what obedience to Christ looks like in a real relationship with real challenges.

QUESTION 6: How can you live faithfully this week in whatever life situation you are experiencing?

Suggested Response: Faithfulness may look like loving my spouse with patience, honoring God in singleness, practicing self-control, staying present in my family, pursuing peace in a strained relationship, or refusing to compare my life to someone else's. Paul reminded us that obedience does not have to wait for a different season. God can be honored in the situation I am in right now.

QUESTION 7: How can our group help one another honor Christ in marriage, singleness, dating, family, and difficult circumstances?

Suggested Response: As a group, we can speak honestly without pretending every situation is easy. We can pray for one another, encourage faithfulness in ordinary responsibilities, and avoid treating one life stage as more spiritual than another. We can remind one another that Christ meets us in real life and gives grace to honor Him where we are.