

1 Corinthians 7:17 – 40

¹⁷ Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one,
as God has called each, in this manner let him walk.
And so I direct in all the churches.

as God has called each

¹⁸ Was any man called when he was already circumcised?

He is not to become uncircumcised.

as you were called
circumcised or not

Has anyone been called in uncircumcision?

He is not to be circumcised.

¹⁹ Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing,
but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God.

as God commands

²⁰ Each man must remain
in that condition in which he was called.

remain in condition when called

²¹ Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it;
but if you are able also to become free, rather do that.

slaves: become free if possible

²² For he who was called in the Lord while a slave,
is the Lord's freedman;
likewise he who was called while free,
is Christ's slave.

in slavery: Christ's freedman
in freedom: Christ's slave

²³ You were bought with a price;
do not become slaves of men.

free: do not become enslaved

²⁴ Brethren, each one is to remain with God
in that condition in which he was called.

remain in condition when called

²⁵ Now concerning virgins I have no command of the Lord,
but I give an opinion
as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy.

my opinion
I am trustworthy (by the Lord)

²⁶ I think then that this is good in view of the present distress,
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 But if you marry, you have not sinned;
and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned.
Yet such will have trouble in this life,
and I am trying to spare you.

you – marry or not
a virgin – marry or not

²⁹ But this I say, brethren, the time has been shortened,
so that from now on
those who have wives should be as though they had none;
³⁰ and those who weep, as though they did not weep;
and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice;
and those who buy, as though they did not possess;
³¹ and those who use the world,
as though they did not make full use of it;
for the form of this world is passing away.

caution and limits on relations
do not make full use of the world

³² But I want you to be free from concern.

One who is unmarried
is concerned about the things of the Lord,
how he may please the Lord;

³³ but one who is married
is concerned about the things of the world,
how he may please his wife,

things of the world vs. the Lord
pleasing others vs. the Lord

³⁴ and his interests are divided.

The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin,
is concerned about the things of the Lord,
that she may be holy both in body and spirit;
but one who is married
is concerned about the things of the world,
how she may please her husband.

³⁵ This I say for your own benefit;
not to put a restraint upon you,
but to promote what is appropriate
and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord.

not to restrain you
do be fully devoted to the Lord

³⁶ But if any man thinks that he is acting unbecomingly
toward his [fiance? virgin daughter?], if she is past her youth,
and if it must be so, let him do what he wishes,
he does not sin; let [them/her] marry.

³⁷ But he who stands firm in his heart,
being under no constraint, but has authority over his own will,
and has decided this in his own heart,
to keep his own [fiancé/virgin daughter], he will do well.

a daughter or fiancé – marry or not
a widow – remarriage or not

³⁸ So then both he who [marries his fiancé/gives his own
virgin daughter in marriage] does well,
and he who [holds back/does not give her in marriage] will do better.

³⁹ A wife is bound as long as her husband lives;
but if her husband is dead,
she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.

⁴⁰ But in my opinion she is happier if she remains as she is;
and I think that I also have the Spirit of God.

my opinion
I am trustworthy (by the Spirit)

Historical and Cultural Background

Marriage

- ‘This present crisis’ (7:26) probably refers to an acute shortage of grain in the Greek-speaking world. This would have placed some anxiety on couples: if you struggle to feed yourselves, can you feed the extra mouths of children?¹ Christians would certainly have considered Jesus’ warning that famines, wars, earthquakes, etc. would precede his return (Mt.24:7), but they may or may not have believed Jesus was returning ‘soon.’ Paul himself was making plans to deliver a financial collection from the Gentile Christians to Jerusalem in an effort that would last 2 – 3 more years.
- Greek dualist views: body (negative) and soul (positive). Stoics believed that the body was inherently filthy. Therefore Stoics discouraged sex and marriage, and treated their bodies very severely. Epicureans believed that the body was irrelevant. Therefore Epicureans indulged the body in food, sex, and pleasure. Whereas Paul rebutted the Epicureans in 6:12 – 20, he seems to be rebutting Stoic tendencies described here in 7:1 – 5.
- Roman law: A mixed-faith marriage presented a real problem because in Roman culture, the father ruled the family, and his wife would simply worship the god(s) he did.² Notice that Paul does not urge a Christian husband to force conversion onto an unbelieving wife. Also, there was a financial tax penalty that some Christians might have incurred: Caesar Augustus had instituted a law penalizing married couples who had no children, or those who had chosen not to remarry after an earlier marriage ended with fewer than three children.³
- Christian teaching: Jesus warned that he would bring tension to family relations (Mt.10:34 – 36; Lk.14:26). Also, given what Paul himself wrote earlier about community defilement (1 Cor.5:6) and sexual relations clearly outside of God’s moral vision for marriage, in the cases of incest (5:1 – 13) and prostitution (6:15 – 17), some Corinthian Christians might have extrapolated that a spouse who comes to faith in Christ must then divorce the unbelieving spouse. On the other hand, Jesus had said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery.’ (Mk.10:11 – 12; cf. Mt.5:31 – 32; Lk.16:18)
- The term ‘virgin’ in v.36 – 38 (NASB) probably refers to both a ‘fiancé’ and ‘a young, unmarried person’; the Greek is difficult to translate but culturally it would make more sense.

Slavery

- Slaves, both male and female, were sexually used by their masters, without any say in the matter. This would have raised very significant and painful questions for a new Christian who was a slave.
- Greek slavery: Corinth, because of its location on an isthmus facing the Adriatic Sea to the west and the Aegean Sea to the east, had one of the largest slave markets in the Roman Empire. Athenian philosophers Plato and Aristotle opposed enslavement of fellow Greeks, but favored mass enslavement of ‘barbarians’ while the Athenians worked on theoretical science, political philosophy, and art. They were the first civilization to use mass slavery – under the justification that the Athenians and the ‘barbarians’ were descended from different ancestors, and hence slaves were inferior by nature. Plato and Aristotle owned five and fourteen slaves, respectively, as enumerated in their wills.⁴
- Roman slavery: At the time of Christ, in the Roman heartland, there were an estimated 2 – 3 million slaves, about one third the population of the Empire. Slaves came from military conquests, birth to slave parents, rescue from infanticide, international trade, piracy and kidnapping, debt servitude, penal servitude, and voluntary servitude.⁵ Many slaves would have been children or elderly, without the means to live in

¹ Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians* (London: SPCK, 2003, 2004), p.91; Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Donald A. Carson, editor, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Erdmans, 2010), p.335 – 337

² Plutarch, *Marriage Advice (Moralia)*, 143A, for example, wrote, ‘A wife ought not to make friends of her own, but to enjoy her husband’s friends in common with him. The gods are the first and most important friends. Wherefore it is becoming for a wife to worship and to know only the gods that her husband believes in, and to shut the front door tight upon all queer rituals and outlandish superstitions. For with no god do stealthy and secret rites performed by a woman find any favor...’

³ David Potter, *Constantine the Emperor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.178

⁴ Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason: Why Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success* (New York, NY: Random House, 2005) p.27.

⁵ See Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), p.105 – 131 on the enslavement of previously ‘free’ persons, especially p.111 – 112 for war captives, p.116 for kidnapping and raids by pirates, p.122 – 123 for Romans accepting tribute and tax payment in slaves in the eastern provinces, p.125 for debt enslavement, p.126

freedom. Manumission (freeing a slave) was widespread, relatively frequent, and expected by a majority of slaves, but this depended on the slave-owners' wealth and the type of work the slave did.⁶ 'Of themselves, slaves had no real rights before the law, and no proper means of appeal against their masters. Moreover, their word was of no account. A slave was so entirely devoid of any personal dignity that, when called to testify before a duly appointed court, torture might be applied as a matter of course.'⁷ Roman law did not recognize marriage among slaves. The Christian community did. People sometimes chose to become slaves to wealthy masters for the sake of advancement, hopes for sharing in an inheritance or in social prestige, etc.⁸

Circumcision

- Cutting off the foreskin of the penis was a surgical procedure initiated by God with Abraham (Gen.17). It symbolized God cutting away Abraham's male cultural privileges, namely: the right of a man to name a non-biological heir (Gen.15) and to use a surrogate mother (Gen.16). These practices marginalized the wife and were not in accordance with God's original vision of marriage from Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 and 2:4 – 25. As God shaped His people to reflect the original Adam and Eve, and marriage as originally designed, circumcision became a mark on the male body of cleansing from typically male sins.
- Jewish infant boys were circumcised on the eighth day in accordance with a command given through Moses, which reduced the time of their uncleanness in half (Lev.12). And circumcision was the Jewish rite of passage for a man to become a full-fledged member of Mosaic Judaism.
- Circumcision *upon the body* came to depict the surgery that God desires to do *within the body*. God desires to surgically remove from each person the corruption of sin (Lev.26:41; Dt.30:6; Jer.4:4; 9:23 – 26; 17:1 – 10; 31:31 – 34; 33:8; Rom.2:28 – 29; Col.2:11 – 13).

for slavery being a punishment for crimes, p.129 – 130 on abandoned children. On enslavement by birth in classical Roman times, see Patterson, p.139 – 141.

⁶ Jo-Ann Shelton, *As the Romans Did: A Sourcebook in Roman Social History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). See also Andrea Giardina, editor, *The Romans* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p.159; and Lesley Adkins and Roy Adkins, *Handbook to Life in Ancient Rome* (FactsOnFile, 1994), p.342.

⁷ David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and its Fashionable Enemies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), p.168; cf. S. Scott Bartchy, 'Slavery' in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Vol.4, Q-Z), edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), p.539 – 46.

⁸ Andrea Giardina, editor, *The Romans* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p.168, "Or what are we to think of free men who voluntarily became slaves, on one end of the scale, in order to be eligible for an important administrative post"; Paul Veyne, editor, translated by A. Goldhammer, *A History of Private Life: From Pagan Rome to Byzantium* (Belknap-Harvard, 1987), p.55, "Some ambitious men did the same [sold themselves] in the hope of becoming the stewards of noblemen or imperial treasures. This, in my view, was the story of the all-powerful and extremely wealthy Pallas, scion of a noble Arcadian family, who sold himself into slavery so that he might be taken on as steward by a woman of the imperial family and who wound up as minister of finance and *eminence grise* to the emperor Claudius." Keith Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.1, "In Roman Italy of the first century BC, it was evidently possible for the slave to achieve individual distinction despite his lowly origins and to be happily received into the free, civic community" and p.69, "It was possible for such men, whether born into the imperial *familia* or recruited from outside, to advance through what loosely resembled a career structure, beginning with subordinate positions while still young and proceeding to positions of greater authority after manumission, which typically came when they were about thirty. For some, especially in the first century AD, the way was open to participate directly in the highest levels of Roman government."

Questions

1. Leader: Ask, 'Does/did Jesus want you to get married?' Read the passage, focusing on 7:17 – 40. Go lightly over 7:1 – 16.
2. (First and last points, v.25 and v.40) What is Paul's authority as an apostle to weigh in on these matters?
 - a. Paul says in v.25 and v.40 what his authority is. On the one hand, in v.25, he is not aware of any direct quotation of Jesus about 'virgins' and how to discern whether to get married or not. In as many cases as he can, he quotes Jesus or 'the tradition' that the other apostles gave him (2:1 – 2; 4:17; 7:10; 7:17; 9:14; 9:21; 11:2; 11:23 – 25; 14:37; 15:1 – 4). He says that he knows everything Jesus said and everything he passed on, and in his Jewish rabbinic training, understands how to put it all together. He is trustworthy in that sense.
 - b. On the other hand, in v.40, he says that he has the Spirit of God. That is what the Hebrew prophets said in the Old Testament. Basically, it meant, 'Thus sayeth the Lord.'
3. (Second point, v.26 – 28) Why does Paul tell people to 'remain as he is' in v.26? What is 'the condition in which you were called' in v.20? Let's piece it together.
 - a. Joke: If you became a Christian while you were a student, you should remain a student for the rest of your life! Just kidding. But let's see what Paul means...
 - b. What is the chiasm in v.17 – 19 about? Circumcision or remaining uncircumcised. The Jewish or Gentile question.
 - c. What is the chiasm in v.20 – 24 about? Slavery or freedom. Note that slavery was extremely varied, but one aspect of Roman slavery was the possibility of social advancement, if you became a slave to the 'right family.' So, some people might have sold themselves into slavery to a wealthy or powerful family for the networking opp.
 - d. What is the chiasm in v.25 – 40 about? Marriage or singleness. Specifically, how singleness is preferable to marriage because of the flexibility it gives.
 - e. So the 'conditions' that Paul treats are especially strong commitments to others, when you give others some degree of authority over your body.
4. (Third point, v.29 – 31) Does it matter if Paul thought Jesus was returning 'soon' in v.29 – 31?
 - a. He does say that the time has been 'shortened' in v.29. But the word for shortened is also translated 'compressed.' The NIV translates it, 'the time is short.' It's not necessarily true that Paul thought Jesus was going to return within a few years.
 - b. The actual point Paul makes about Jesus' return is that it will show the reality of everything that was done: 'Each man's work will become evident; for *the day will show it* because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work' (1 Cor.3:13).
5. (Center point, v.32 – 34) Divided attention? Aren't you still doing God's work by loving your spouse? Why is Paul making this mutually exclusive in v.32 – 34 and in the points on either side, v.29 – 31 and v.35?
 - a. There can be a marriage narcissism that sets in to a couple! So it's not necessarily true that just by loving your spouse you are loving Jesus!! That's a radical statement! You can't just read Ephesians 5 as if that were the rule. You have to incorporate 1 Corinthians 7 into your view of marriage, from a Christian perspective.
 - b. Sometimes we ask God what His will is for us, assuming that it primarily means what major to choose, who to marry, and what job to take. How is God's will actually larger than that? Notice the way Paul talks here. The 'undistracted devotion to the Lord' is something OTHER THAN social advancement (through slavery) and something OTHER THAN getting married or not. It is LARGER than those questions.
 - c. What is devotion to the Lord? Start from the opposite direction, and think of a few things that Jesus commands us to do always, regardless of our circumstances. What are they?
 - i. Take a Sabbath, get rest and take care of yourself (Mt.11:28 – 30)
 - ii. Work on your character, healing if and when needed, and transformation (Mt.5:21 – 48)
 - iii. Have meaningful and healthy relationships with other Christians, especially those who are different from you (Mt.5:21 – 48)
 - iv. Invest in yourself spiritually, intellectually, missionally by taking in Scripture and understanding the cultures around you (Mt.13:52; 1 Cor.9:19 – 22); develop your spiritual gifts (Eph.4:1 – 16; 1 Cor.12 – 14)
 - v. Reach out to others in evangelistic friendships (Mt.13:1 – 23)
 - vi. Disciple others (Mt.28:16 – 20)

- vii. Be flexible and available for the prompting of the Spirit (e.g. Acts 13:1ff.)
 - d. So once you do those things, figure out how much time you have left over. Fit your career choices in after that. And if you're looking for someone to marry, find someone who wants to do the same thing and loves you for making choices that honor Jesus.
6. **WHY? WHAT IS THE BASIS FOR ALL THIS?** Because of **THE LORDSHIP OF JESUS OVER OUR BODIES IN 6:19 – 20**. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, and we are not our own, we are bought with the price of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection on our behalf. Paul is trying to safeguard Jesus' lordship over our bodies. His argument against slavery is Jesus' lordship! Notice that he doesn't sanctify the social hierarchy! Jesus' authority is not about reinforcing the social hierarchy, but disrupting it, cutting into it, and interfering with it. That's why he doesn't want Christians to voluntarily become enslaved, even if it did mean social advancement later. Being available to Jesus and flexible with one's own life was far more important. The same is true with marriage. Paul is in favor of singleness, even though marriage is still good – it is from the creation order (Gen.2:24; quoted in 1 Cor.6:16), unlike slavery which is not from the creation order.
- a. Illus: When I graduated from college in 1994, I got a job at Intel, and soon afterwards I moved into a Mexican immigrant community to do ministry there. One morning, I was heading out to work, and Graciela Sanchez, a grandmother who was about 50 years old, asked me if I could give her a ride to work. Her usual ride, she told me, had been arrested. So I gave her a ride that day. We spoke in Spanish so I could practice. I gave her a ride the next day. I got to know her family better. I gave her rides to and from her work for over a year. Needless to say, that constrained my work hours. This was during the heyday of the late 90's when the stock price was doubling every year. Employee surveys showed that over 2/3 of all Intel employees worked more than 50 hours a week. Usually, single people lead the rat race because it's not until you're married do other people look at you as if you have a life outside of work. But I wasn't married then; instead, I was doing enjoying what Jesus was doing through me, enjoying my Christian team of friends, and discipling some younger guys. One day my supervisors offered me a promotion. I thought and prayed about it, studied Scripture, and decided NO. It would require too much from me. Some said, "Really? You'd get more stock, more impact in the company, more visibility." I said, "I'm sorry. I'm a Christian, and I feel like what Jesus is doing with me outside of work is too valuable – I don't want to cut into that." Within the next year, they offered me another promotion, and I turned that one down, too. By the time I was there for 4 years or so, I had mastered my job and was working about 30 hours a week. People knew that I loved Jesus and that he mattered to me, not least because every Monday, my co-workers asked me how my weekend was, and I told them about the youth in my apartment, about how we prayed for them, about how we valued spiritual mentoring, about how I saw families that had been transformed. And most importantly in this example, Grandma Graciela had asked me if I could be 'el padrino' – the godfather – to her son Uriel. In Mexican culture, that is a huge privilege, and I felt very honored. I was able to share that. All these opportunities happened because I allowed Jesus to shape my response to those who 'detracted' from me.
 - b. Illus: The same principle was true when I dated a friend J, before I met my wife Ming. Even though J was a Christian, she and I had too many differences about some core values. I wanted to live in a low income neighborhood; she wasn't sure about that and was fairly fearful about it. I wanted to leave my job at Intel at some point and possibly be a high school teacher because I loved investing in young people; she wasn't sure about the pay cut and how her parents would feel about the husband making less money than his wife. I wanted to adopt or be a foster parents; she wasn't sure about that. In the end, after a few months of dating, we decided it was too much. It's possible that we could have made it work but we would have had to fight over every major decision, and probably constantly look back. I didn't want that. Not one bit. So when Paul says, 'I want to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord' in v.35, I think that principle still stands firmly in place. If you are dating someone fearful and greedy, I would advise you to break up. You may not know it now. But you will set yourself free to not have to worry about the other person's fears and greed and insecurities, and grow more with Jesus. You can have more of Jesus' love, courage, and boldness.
7. What about producing kids for your family, or for your nation?
- a. Notice also that Paul is not afraid of Christians having to pay higher taxes for producing less than 3 children. That was standard Roman law. It wasn't changed until Constantine. Bearing children

is not a stated priority for Paul, at least not in the same way that many families think about it as for the *family per se* or the *nation per se*.

- b. However, in 1 Cor.7:14, Paul refers to children and seems to assume that Christian believers will mentor and disciple their children. So children are important. It is part of Genesis 1 and 2 that a married couple be fruitful and multiply, and train up children in the ways of Jesus. It is still part of being in the image of God for a married couple to make more human life. And Paul recognizes that in 1 Cor.6:16 when he quotes Gen.2:24. Marriage comes from God's creation vision of relationship.
 - c. At the same time, it seems like a 'marriage union' with Jesus in 6:16 – 20 and producing spiritual life with him through ministry and evangelism is a priority that takes a higher general priority. This comes out of Jesus' Great Commission (e.g. Mt.28:16 – 20).
 - d. Notice also that this was also the moment in the Greco-Roman world when a dignified path of life opened up for women that was not being a wife and mother!! The Christian elevation of singleness is what gave women an entirely new place in the Christian community.
8. (Second to last point, v.36 – 39) So in v.36 – 39, what's the motivation to get married? How should a Christian decide between singleness and marriage?
- a. Note that in v.36, I favor the interpretation of 'fiancé' and not 'virgin daughter.' So Paul is speaking to men about their own bodies and their own choices, not to fathers about their daughters. This fits better with him speaking to 'widows' in v.39 about their own bodies and their own choices. A man who is 'acting unbecomingly' towards his fiancé is probably romantically courting her, and perhaps displaying some modest level of affection. 'If she is past her youth,' then she is of marriageable age, and 'he does not sin' by marrying her.
 - b. But in v.37, the expansion of singleness enters in, just as it did in the parallel part of this section in v.26 – 29. He who 'stands firm in his heart' and 'has authority over his own will' is contrasted with 'acting unbecomingly.' He can 'keep his own fiancé' probably in the sense that he keeps her as a fiancé only, and not as a wife.
 - c. So are sexual urges enough to get married? Those are a factor but will have to be tempered one way or the other!!!
 - d. Do you have to be attracted to a person to get married? Apparently, if we read 7:1 – 5. But it's not the only consideration.
 - e. Does a Christian need to marry a Christian? YES. According to 7:39, when Paul speaks to widows who might want to remarry, he says that she can, 'only in the Lord', meaning she can marry a Christian man. But there is more to it than just finding someone who 'calls themselves a Christian.'
 - f. In order for me to feel good about a Christian couple, both people have to be mature and be bought into the mission of Jesus. They have to resist the narcissism that can develop between husband and wife. That is the point of v.29 – 35.
9. What about arranged marriages and sex slavery?
- a. Those are difficult realities. It seems like Paul makes allowance for people who are already enslaved for reasons they can't undo. He seems to spare them the moral responsibility, because they are not entirely in control of their own bodies. It's humbling and not ideal. But he seems to 'give them a pass.'
 - b. Illus: As a heroic counterexample, though, I respect the Ugandan martyrs. Other than Jesus, of course, the memory of the Ugandan martyrs is a source of inspiration for Ugandan Christians. Between 1885 and 1887, the king of Buganda (the largest of the traditional kingdoms now part of Uganda) killed young men in his court who had turned to Jesus through both Catholic and Anglican missions. These were the earliest Christians among present-day Ugandans. King Mwanga was a young man who felt that Christianity was a foreign influence; he felt threatened by colonial powers, Islam, and other African kings. But one of the major factors in his hatred for Christian faith was that he was a pedophile; the courageous and faith-filled young men refused to consent to him after they gave their lives to Christ. They died by burning, dismemberment (including castration), beheading, being speared, and in one case, torn apart by wild dogs. In 1977, Uganda observes June 3rd, the day most of the early martyrs were killed, as a national holiday: Uganda Martyrs Day. The 22 Catholic martyrs were canonized by Pope Paul VI in 1964, during Vatican II; that was the first time saints were named from among Christians in

modern Africa. Also, I thought it was very interesting to learn that there is a university called Uganda Martyrs University, with a student enrollment of over 4,600.

10. For those who are single, how do they image God?

- a. Availability to Jesus and flexibility with others
 - i. Illus: My friend Susie. She's been available to go to many different countries, serve in a ton of different capacities, including campus minister, retreat center director, and coffee shop manager. In 2014, in her 50's, Susie went to Uganda for a summer missions trip with InterVarsity, and then almost right away went to Guatemala for a missions trip with her church. I am constantly amazed at her energy.
- b. By becoming more and more like Jesus
 - i. Illus: Many people say that when a married couple stays together a long time, they start to look like each other. I think that is true also in a spiritual union with Jesus. We start to look more and more like Jesus.

11. How can we structure forms of Christian community life in a way that supports single people?

- a. I would prefer not to structure ministry groups according to 'marrieds' and 'singles.' I would prefer not to assume that people who are single want to be married. Instead, I would organize ministry groups according to career field, like: health care, engineering, business, law and policy, education, etc. That way, people are organized missionally, according to how they are involved in the world. They can be discipled in that way. If romantic relationships form, that is great. Certain things like 'speed dating' can be encouraged and there can be a healthy culture for men and women to interact without the primary groupings be about 'married vs. single.' In fact, I think one of the most maturing things for single people to do is to help married couples with children.
- b. Living in intentional Christian community. My wife and I own a three story house with an apartment on each floor. At various times, we've had other single and married people live in our house. We peaked at 19 people during one year! After about ten years, our housemates and other friends moved into houses in our neighborhood. Leslie and Laura, two single women, started 'Traction House' for young women with young kids who need a residential support and discipleship program. Liza married Dan and moved a few minutes away, and they opened a room for our mutual friend Jose to be 'uncle Jose' to their two kids. It really makes a difference to see people regularly and in our homes.