

**Sermon:** Following the Lord's Call

**Series:** Singleness, Marriage, & Sex (2)

**Passage:** 1 Corinthians 7: 8-24

<sup>8</sup> To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. <sup>9</sup> But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

<sup>10</sup> To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband <sup>11</sup> (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.

<sup>12</sup> To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. <sup>13</sup> If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. <sup>14</sup> For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. <sup>15</sup> But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. <sup>16</sup> For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

<sup>17</sup> Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches. <sup>18</sup> Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. <sup>19</sup> For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God. <sup>20</sup> Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called. <sup>21</sup> Were you a bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) <sup>22</sup> For he who was called in the Lord as a bondservant is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a bondservant of Christ. <sup>23</sup> You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants of men. <sup>24</sup> So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.

Let's pray together.

*Heavenly Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would teach us and instruct us in the words that you've given to us through scripture. We ask that your Holy Spirit would find hearts of fertile soil in which the Word of God may be planted and bear much fruit in our lives because of the brokenness and mistakes we've made and because of the need in this world. We pray*

*Lord that this morning the Word of God would build up, encourage, challenge, and convict us to live our lives in accordance to your perfect, wise love.*

When I was in my senior year of high school, I went to a summer church camp. In this particular youth group, we had a bunch of guys that I never quite fit in with. I went to a church that was far away from my school because, my parents being Chinese parents, wanted me to go to a good school and lived in that area. Additionally, they wanted me to go to the best church, which happened to be an hour away from where we lived. It meant that I didn't see anyone from church at my school. When I began to understand a little more about Christianity, I did what some of you might have done, I realized that I needed to change churches in order to meet people. The social scene in high school is tough and I never quite got into that group of guys.

Here I am, senior year, and it's our last summer conference. The day of the conference, as we're getting on the bus, the director of the conference approaches me and says, "Hey Enoch, I just want to let you know, because of the numbers of students in each grades and because we want to have good discussion groups, I know you're a senior, but we're not going to put you with the senior guys. You're not going to be in the small group and you're not going to be in their cabin. We are doing this because we think you are the most mature guy of the grade." When he says it that way, you really can't complain (well you can, but maybe just in your mind). I responded, "Okay, fine. I guess I can be a junior." He said, "Well actually, there aren't any juniors, so you're going to be with sophomores. Is that okay?"

The funny thing is, later that day, one of my good friends, a Christian believer, brought one of our non-Christian friends with him to the conference onto the bus. We're passionate about sharing the gospel and helping people believe in Christ, and so we bent the rules and allowed this nonbeliever who has never gone to a retreat before sign up for this conference. He was a senior guy, so guess what group he was put in? The thinking goes like this: He's a nonbeliever, is brand new to this church, and doesn't have any friends yet, so we want to make things as accessible and comfortable for him. When I was told that there was no more room in the senior guys' group, they put this guy in the senior cabin.

I share that story because I don't know if I took it that well. The key thing is this: I really wanted to do the right thing for God. I knew enough to think, "Well, this is kind of important. This is a guy who is new to church and has never gone to a Christian event. We definitely want to give

him all the breaks we can.” The challenge was to figure out how to stay where God put me, even though, in many ways, I thought it made more sense to move.

We’re coming to this point in 1 Corinthians where there is a series of questions this church is asking the apostle Paul. We know this because in the beginning of chapter 7, it begins with referencing the things the Corinthian church wrote to Paul about. In order to properly interpret this, we need to recognize that Paul is writing this in response to the questions this church had. We don’t have the exact detail of those questions and, because of that, some of the interpretation is a little bit more challenging. However, we are clear on Paul’s instructions.

Paul is writing about how followers of Jesus Christ can perform and live in obedience in a challenging situation, in a tempting situation, in a difficult situation, in a situation where an earnest Christian says, “I want to follow Jesus in any way, in anywhere. What do I do in this very tempting situation?” Temptations such as sexual temptations or temptations regarding housing arrangements.

In this passage, we continue the discussion of singleness, marriage, and sex. In particular, we’re talking about how does a person, in Christ, be obedient and follow Christ in certain difficult marital situations. However, this passage isn’t just about marital situations, it’s really about all of life. I believe the three points in this passage we will see are:

1. What is the principle about how a believer follows Christ in spite of difficult situations?
2. Why should this principle apply? Why does a Christian do that?
3. How does a Christian apply this principle?

If you’re not a Christian yet, this is really helpful because I think you’ll see in this case study what it means to follow Christ in His power and His grace.

### **1. What is the principle about how a believer follows Christ in spite of difficult situations?**

Here is what we probably get the sense of in the passage. There are people who were nonbelievers when they got married or began to live together. One of them might have become a believer. In that context of becoming a believer, the person’s ethics, values, view about sex begin to be conformed to the nature of Christ and His purposes for those things. It becomes

increasingly difficult and tempting, because of the sex culture in the homes or that time period, for these Christians to live faithful lives, according to God's Word, in those situations.

Paul goes from marriage to discuss other situations such as circumcision and the economic and vocational status of a slave. He is on the issue of marriage, but the principle applies to more than just marriage; it applies to any situation that is tempting and hard. What does a believer do to follow Jesus Christ? Let's take a look back at Paul's wording as we refer back to the passage, beginning in verse 8. Notice the pattern of what Paul says to different people in different situations.

<sup>8</sup> To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. <sup>9</sup> But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

<sup>10</sup> To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband <sup>11</sup> (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.

<sup>12</sup> To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. <sup>13</sup> If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him.

And then jumping down to verse 17:

<sup>17</sup> Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches.

The pattern shows that we're not just talking about marriage.

<sup>18</sup> Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision.

Apparently during that time, there was a surgical procedure that could mask circumcision.

<sup>19</sup> For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God. <sup>20</sup> Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called. <sup>21</sup> Were you a bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.)

What is the pattern here? What does God want me to do? How does a believer follow Jesus in challenging, tempting situations? Here is the principle Paul says, which might surprise you: sometimes, the way to follow Jesus is to stay put. Sometimes, the way to radically follow Jesus is to stay where you are. Sometimes, the way to boldly go wherever Jesus calls you to go for His

glory to help other people become disciples of Jesus, sometimes the thing you and I need to do to go where Jesus wants to go and to follow Him, is to stay there. Do you see the pattern?

If you're single (which is a topic Pastor Steve will preach about next week) and it's hard, maybe you should stay there. If you're married and you have an unbelieving spouse, your spouse doesn't love you or treat you properly, maybe you should stay there. Then Paul goes on to talk about circumcision.

Circumcision is a surgical procedure done on males. Whether or not you were circumcised was very evident because, in the athletic competitions, bathhouses, and gymnasiums, people would strip down naked. If you were a male, it was very clear whether or not you were circumcised. There was a procedure that you could have to mask your circumcision. Paul says, "If you're circumcised, don't get uncircumcised and if you're uncircumcised, you don't need to get uncircumcised; if you're a slave, don't be concerned with it, but if you can get your freedom, then sure."

You need to understand that slavery back then was very different from slavery now. Some slaves and masters had incredible relationships, such that once the slave was freed and had finished his indentured service, he could actually petition to be permanently bonded to the household of his master because he loved his master so much and his master was so good to him.

The key thing here is: what is the way you and I might want to follow Jesus? Stay where you are.

I was speaking to someone who has recently come back to his faith. He works in the finance industry. I'll call this person Bill. Bill told me, "I went into finance because I wanted to be rich. I wanted to make so much money. I really wanted to be rich, but now that I'm more centered on the Lord, I realize that I had it all wrong. Everyone around me is so unhappy. We're working crazy hours and the pressure is so intense. When we do finally get out of work, we go to bars to hang out because it's all part of that culture. I'm following Jesus now and I have friends back home where I grew up telling me I shouldn't be in the finance industry anymore." This person asked me, "How do I follow Jesus? I'm willing to leave my field in finance." Based on this passage, how would you counsel this brother in the Lord?

You're struggling because of the incredible temptation for money encompassing that finance lifestyle. You're asking, "What do I do to follow Jesus?" Paul might tell you to stay put, stay in those crazy hours, stay in that intense, demanding industry, stay with those people who are so unhappy but are so driven and so passionate about making money.

There is this understanding that when someone becomes a Christian, and not even converts but advances a step in their walk with God and their understanding in what it means to follow Jesus, that there is this sense of, “Okay, God, I will do anything you want this time, even more than last time.” I think that as you go through life and say “God, I will do anything for you”, it means more as you get older because you understand more that God could really tell you to do anything. Sometimes we think the more willing we are do anything for Jesus, the more He is going to tell us, whatever road we’re on, to jump off that road and do something completely different like be a missionary. But sometimes, maybe more than not, your deeper commitment to Christ, your growing relationship with Jesus, means that no matter how tempting or hard your situation might be, Jesus might want you to stay there for Him. Stay on that sports team where they party and drink really hard and where girls or guys throw themselves onto you. You should stay there, stay with those group of friends who might not be very good influences because maybe that’s where God wants you to be.

If you’re like me, you’re thinking, “Wait a second, doesn’t the Bible say to not be misled, bad company corrupts good character, and being careful of who you hang out with? What about fleeing and running from temptation? Is Bible contradictory?” Paul, in fact, wrote all those things. Paul is the one who told Timothy to flee temptation, but is now telling perhaps the most messed up church to stay in tempting situations. Why? How do we avoid extremes? What is the balancing principle? That’s the second point.

The first point is: sometimes, when you’re in a tempting situation, you want to go to your pastor, your small group leader, your Sunday school teacher, your counselor and say, “I’m in this really tempting situation and if God wants me to leave my job, I’m willing to do that! What does God want me to do?” God may want you to just stay there.

## **2. Why should this principle apply? Why does a Christian do that?**

We see, in this passage, in addition to pattern, the principle of when and why you should stay. Let me give it to you this way. The principle of why you should stay in certain situations can kind of be summed up like this: Are you being influenced or are you influencing? Are you more being influenced and being molded and squeezed into another mold or are you influencing and blessing others? If you see this understanding, then as we go through the text again, I think you’ll see that regardless of the situation, whether it is about marriage, a physical circumstance like circumcision, or even an economic, occupational situation like being slavery, you will see

Paul appealing to this principle. Let me put it another way: are you becoming less holy or are you helping other people become more holy? When I mention holy, I don't want to get caught up with holy as in "holy cow" or light coming down from heaven. Holy, in this case, means set apart, more like Christ, sanctified.

What is the principle? If God wants me to stay in some places –why? Because of this: are you being influenced or are you influencing? Are you being dragged down or are you helping other people become more like Christ? Let's take a look at this in verse 8:

<sup>8</sup> To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. <sup>9</sup> But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

Again, we're not to say that Paul has a down-view of marriage. Paul is responding to the Corinthians' questions and he is addressing things that they have in mind. They are asking the apostle Paul, "I'm in a difficult situation. I'm unmarried, so should I get married?" Paul is like, "In your context, in this situation, I want you stay put, unless, in that status, you are influenced, you cannot control your passions, or you are becoming less holy in your daily living."

Let's continue on with verse 10:

<sup>10</sup> To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband

Now we get to this part regarding divorce. This is one of the most helpful passages about divorce, but we realize that Paul is really talking about divorce, whether it is permissible to divorce, as a side-bar. Christians go to this passage wondering what the Bible says about divorce or whether or not it is okay to divorce, and indeed there is some very clear teaching, but you and I need to understand that that is not Paul's main point. Paul does say,

<sup>10</sup> To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband <sup>11</sup> (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.

<sup>12</sup> To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. <sup>13</sup> If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. <sup>14</sup> For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. <sup>15</sup> But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. <sup>16</sup> For how do you know,

wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

Now we need to be clear. When Paul talks about making them [your spouse] holy, he isn't telling them to be like priests and throw holy water on the spouses to make them cleansed. He isn't saying that the wife's righteousness covers the sins of her husband. Paul is very clear in other parts of the book and we're just jumping right into the middle of the writing.

Here is the practical outworking: if you are two nonbelievers and one of you becomes a believer during the course of that time, the new believer might realize that your marriage unhealthy and really disastrous. I don't mean abusive, but destructive; two nice people can have a destructive relationship. It is easy to think, for the sake of holiness, that you should separate from your spouse. Like Paul said earlier, if you think you're going to burn with passionate and lust struggling with that, it makes sense to just marry. But, in this case, Paul says in verse 16:

<sup>16</sup> For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

Your presence, your persistence, your faithfulness, your influence may be the way God is going to use to bring your husband to know the Lord. Paul even says, "Well, it's working on your kids. Your kids are being made clean because of you. Your presence, your influence, your parental coverage is helping raise your kids to know Christ."

You might ask, "How do I know if I should leave a tempting situation? I have a certain lifestyle and the business, the vocation, the social life... is it too much for me or should I stay there? Do I leave because I should flee temptation or do I stay?" Paul would respond with this, "My preference is that you stay. God didn't save you and then tell you to leave all your friends who are non-Christian. God didn't save you and tell you to quit your job where the entire industry is full of people who don't believe in Christ. God didn't save you and tell you to move into a neighborhood full of Christians so you could hang out with them. God saved you so that by your influence, your humility, your witness, others would be made holy because they see Christ living through you. You've got a difficult tempting situation, but I would rather you stay there. Those people need to know Jesus. Those people need to see Jesus in your life. Those people need to be influenced for the sake of the Gospel. But if you're going to burn with passion, get married. If you're going to fall into temptation and money is going to become an idol, then fine, change jobs."



In terms of this marriage thing, Paul is really clear, “You stay. If they leave, then that’s fine. Be at peace.” Of course if they leave and they are not going to get married, you should stay unmarried because your vows are still there. In terms of all these other aspects of life, he says, “I want you to stay there so that you can be an influence.”

Friends, if you’re thinking about becoming a Christian and you might think the church is full of holy, nice people; that is not true. The church is full of sinful people who have been saved by grace. That is what holy means. Not holy as in saintly and never gets mad or never has problems; holy in that we are set apart by Christ’s blood for His purposes. Is there a situation, as you are considering Christianity that makes you think, “If I become a Christian, I might have to leave this job or group of friends.”? Maybe that’s true. This might apply if you’re younger and highly impressionable like a high school or college student. But wait, think about that. If you’re a teenager and teenagers are highly impressionable, think of the incredible influence you could have if you stayed.

There is a lot of debate about Christian schools. The upside to Christian schooling are instruction of the Lord in the Word, but I think one of the things that a non-Christian setting gives a Christian is this: we have a chance of influencing people for the sake of their salvation in Christ. I think most parents come down to this: if I’m trying to raise my kids to be Christian and they’re in a regular school that is influencing them and they’re not ready to withstand the arguments, struggles, temptations, and subtle persecution, then yes, maybe it is wise to move your kid to a place where the temptation is at an appropriate level for them to struggle with. However, if your kid is ready, find opportunities, whether it is at school or in social activities, for them to influence.

Stay in on that hockey team where the dads are all foul-mouthed and drinking beer after the game. Stay in your banking industry where people are burning their marriages to get that big bonus at the end of the year. Stay at that academic institution where faith is challenged and battled intellectually, where maybe you’re being ridiculed or not taken seriously because they need to see what a Christian scholar looks like. Stay in Boston where the winters are cold and maybe the people don’t have a very favorable impression of who Jesus is.

The best way for some of us to follow Jesus is to stay put. Why? Because we have a choice, an observation, a discernment to make. Are we being influenced more or are we influencing others more? Is our holiness being negatively impacted by all the temptation or are we a force for positive change in giving people a hope and a chance to see that. What about you? It doesn’t

matter if you're a student, retired, or working. You have these choices all the time. You have relationships, you have courses, you have jobs, you have projects, you have friends, and you have extracurricular activities. In all of these things, you make a choice whether to stay or leave. Often the Christian answer is to flee temptation, but Paul says, "No, whatever job you're in, whatever school you're in, whatever relationship you're in, stay put so that you can be an influence."

### **3. How do we apply this principle?**

Let's going back to Bill and him making money the center of his life. How does he actually stay in that situation, with incredible temptation? To do this, Paul goes into another realm of situations. Let's look at verse 17 and consider the truth that Paul tells us about how we actually stay in the midst of temptation and, by the grace of God, be a positive witness and influence.

<sup>17</sup> Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches. <sup>18</sup> Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision.

Now why was that a big deal? Because circumcision was a sign of Judaism and so a lot of people converted from Judaism to what would later be called Christianity, a lot of people felt the need to renounce that and uncircumcise themselves. Paul says you don't need to do that. The other side is true. There were people who said circumcision was the sign of God's people in the Old Testament and who were willing to be circumcised, but Paul says to not do it.

<sup>19</sup> For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God.

Paul is saying that the decision to stay or not stay is really about obeying God. How?

<sup>20</sup> Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called. <sup>21</sup> Were you a bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) <sup>22</sup> For he who was called in the Lord as a bondservant is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a bondservant of Christ. <sup>23</sup> You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants of men.

What is he saying here? Let's talk about the issue of being slaves of men. If you're a slave, don't think just because you have a new master you are supposed to eject yourself and run away. You need to stay there, but if you can gain your freedom and it is more desirable, then sure, go for it. You have to understand, if you're a slave, you are free in Christ. If you are a slave owner and you

become a follower of Christ, remember this: you are a slave of Christ. What is Paul actually doing here? How does this help someone stay in a situation, not to be influenced, but for the sake of a positive, loving, humble influence. Paul is saying this: you have to apply the truth of Jesus Christ, the Gospel, to your temptation. Apply the fact that Jesus has saved you to your temptation. It's kind of weird, kind of abstract.

Let's talk in terms of slavery. The temptation of slavery is autonomy and freedom. Paul says that if you're a slave, you are free, freer than anyone could ever explain; you are free from the bondage of sin, the penalty of sin, the power of sin, hell. Paul also says that if you are a slave owner, you need to remember that God bought you with the blood of his son. You are a slave. The Gospel recenters and recorrects all the societal differences we have. Remember that, in Christ, any temptation you are facing, your relationship with Jesus can combat it.

Take finance, take banking. Say, I'm in business and finance and I'm so tempted by money. Remember Jesus. Remember the Gospel. How does my relationship with Jesus help me stay in this field and not be influenced, but maybe be a positive influence. Remember, in Christ, you were poor, you are nothing, you bring nothing. You are indebted to a loving God who saves you. Also remember the opposite is true. You want to get rich? You are already rich. In a hundred years, a Christian will have more wealth than a non-Christian. Do you want to know why? Because you'll both be dead and everything that everyone works for in this life, you don't get to take. You can bury them with you; the Egyptians built tombs. The Chinese made armies and dug them into the ground. In a hundred years, everything that we ever worked for we will not have because we'll leave it here. If you struggle with being rich, remember that you are already rich. You have things in heaven that you would trade everything in the world for if you just understand the riches God has given you.

What about in marriage? What about Paul's question? What about a really broken, messed up marriage? If you feel like you don't want to love this person, remember that, when you and I were unlovable, God, in His mercy, loved us. He gave us his great love. Christ is the groom to the church, which is the bride. If you feel like you are unlovable or can't love, remember that God gave you love and you can love your spouse. If you don't feel love from your spouse, you can give the love God gave to you to love your spouse, even if they're absent minded, even if they're terrible, even if it's really hard. Paul says something so challenging: stay put. If you want the power of God to go anywhere, to do anything, and if you're ready to do anything for God, then

stay in your job, your marriage, your relationship, unless you are being more influenced or your holiness is going down, so that you can be a positive influence and bring the hope of Jesus.

Stay so you can show what it is like to be passionate about banking and finances, but be generous, passionate about making a great investment, but not being controlled by money, passionate about winning, but not because you need to or because you're insecure, passionate about publishing the best paper in your research field, not for your name, but for the betterment of humanity and for the sake of the One who gave the opportunities to write that paper. Stay in your field. We need Christians in every field.

C.S. Lewis has a great quote, "Wouldn't it be something if, whenever someone wanted to read a basic introductory book on any topic and every time he went to the bookstore to pick up a basic book, the author was a Christian?" The equivalent would be if you went to Wikipedia to read an article about something, and every time you read an article, you see that it is a Christian that edited it last. C.S. Lewis concludes, "We don't need more Christians writing things about theology or Christian things. We need Christians writing books about everything else because we need the Gospel in everything else and we need Jesus in every place."

Paul says to the Corinthians: what is a situation you find tempting? What is a situation you find discouraging, disheartening, and hard? Maybe you should leave. Maybe this is a time to flee temptation. Maybe this is a time to not be influenced. However, for a lot of us, he wants us to pray and discern if we should stay in this place or if God calls us to struggle. Paul says in the passage, "Wife, how do you know whether or not you will save your husband? Husband, how do you know if you will save your wife?" Employee, how do you know if you will save your boss? Group member, how do you know if you will save your other group members? Teacher, how do you know if you will save your administration? Students, how do you know if you will save your teacher? Because sometimes the toughest assignment is the assignment to stay. If you understand what Jesus did on the cross, I think it makes a lot of sense.

Jesus came, but not to take you out of this world. If you're a Christian, you are no longer of this world, but you are still in this world. Jesus came to redeem. He died for us on the cross. The more we understand that, the power of the cross, the power of the resurrection, that he has covered our sin, the less we have to worry or be afraid. You don't have to be afraid of temptation. Don't go run into the most tempting spot on the planet just to see what happens, but you don't have to be afraid of it. Fleeing temptation is a prudent, strategic retreat. A healthy fear of my

own sinfulness, my own capability, my own depravity, my own temptability, but in the power of Christ, you may go to places other people cannot handle.

The world needs to see what Christians do with a lot of money. The world needs to see what Christians will do with lots of fame and influence. The world needs to see what Christians will do with a lot of power. The world needs to see Jesus. That is what Jesus did. He used his power, his influence, and his fame to save us by dying on the cross. Because He saved us, we can do the hardest thing and go the hardest places to go, which might be where we already are.

Let's pray together.

*Father, I don't know all the situations we have and I don't know if I've even thought about it in my own life. This is a hard teaching. All of Corinthians is hard to preach and hard to hear, yet we see Paul, in all of his courage and in his loving pastoral way, say, "Yeah, if it's hard, go ahead. If you're a slave and you have the option, obtain your freedom. If you're in a marriage and your spouse is destructive and leaves you, that's okay. Just don't you remarry. For those of you, I want you to actively stay put because you, by the grace of God, can influence others." If that's the case, then God, help us be discerning.*

*Some of us have left things and maybe it was wise, or maybe we just took the easy way out or the Christian-culture way out. I don't know what all the situations are, but God, I trust that you will guide us as we wrestle and talk in community, in our small groups, in our friendships, in our mentorships, when we ask, "Is this a case where I am being influenced and burning with passion and temptation or a case where God is saying stay put, Fight the good fight, and finish the race?" God, I pray that You would give us the hope and the challenge to do that. Make us obedient like Christ was obedient to die on the cross for our sins.*

*For those of us who are tired. Let's not make two kinds of Christians: the strong ones and the weak ones. Lord, we are all weak. We are all so weak. The only one strong is You. Lord, help us remember.*

*For the non-Christians this morning, I pray that You would help us see our sins. Help us to see that we couldn't possibly influence other people for the sake of Christ until we lay our lives down before Him and receive His gift by faith. Do that this morning, do that in our church, do*

*that in our lives. We ask that You move us in our souls because You cover our sin. Because You cover our sin, we can follow You anywhere, including where we already are.*