

BLOOM WHERE YOU ARE PLANTED

1CORINTHIANS 7:17-24

But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches. Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters. Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called.

Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it. For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. Brethren, let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called.

In the game of football there's a genre of offensive plays known as "*misdirection*." This includes reverses, counters, options, trick-plays, and play-action passes.

Football is a game of aggression, and the idea behind a misdirection play is to get the defense moving one way; then suddenly attack in an opposite direction.

The unexpected shift in the point-of-attack is intended to catch the defense out of position, and unable to make the tackle. It's often a winning strategy.

That's why defensive players are taught to maintain their position... *A linebacker or defensive end has outside containment... the kick-off team is suppose to run in their lanes... safeties are to keep the receiver in front of them...* If a defensive player gets sucked in too far, or comes up too quick - if he over-pursues, and leaves the place on the field he was told to occupy...

It doesn't matter how good a player he is he won't be *skilled enough, or strong enough, or fast enough* to make up the loss ground. A team gets beat because a player fails to remain where the coach tells him to be.

And this was a problem for the Christians at Corinth.

These believers loved the Lord. Formerly mired in sin, they'd been forgiven freely and fully. They were clean and pure in Christ - a temple of the Holy Spirit.

The Corinthians had received blessings untold, and they were enjoying their spiritual windfall. This Church had even been the beneficiary of spiritual gifts!

Think of the Corinthians as a talented and energetic football team. Yet they were getting beat time after time. They were losing the game because they lacked discipline. They failed to hold their ground and play their position. They kept getting set-up and sucked-in by the enemy's misdirection. The Corinthians failed to grasp one of the first principles in the Christian life, and that's to stay where you're called - play your position. Another way to say it is, **"bloom where you're planted."**

In 1 Corinthians 7 Paul has been discussing marriage and singleness. And apparently, the Corinthians were approaching marriage like flies on a screen door... Those on the outside were trying to get in, and those on the inside were trying to get out.

Single folks wanted to get married, thinking that marriage would enhance their Christian life.

And married folks wanted to be single again assuming that celibacy and singleness would make them more spiritual... *But neither assumption was true...* Paul's point is to remain where you're called!...

If you're married - even to an unbeliever - God has a reason for your marriage! Your godly example and access to God will sanctify your children and your unbelieving spouse. It puts the members of your family in the unique position for God to work in their lives.

And if you're single, there's a purpose for your singleness. You can be *singly devoted* to God's work.

The day may come for a single person, when it's God's will for them to marry... And a situation can arise where a married person finds themselves single again in the will of God... But until that day comes, God's will for all of us is to remain where we've been called!

Paul states this basic premise in verse 17, **“But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches.”** Paul is saying this was a lesson he'd taught in every church. It was a universal principle for all believers. Paul's thoughts here apply

as much to us today, as they did to the Corinthians in the first century.

For we too, need to “**bloom where we’re planted!**”

I want us to work our way through this morning’s text, and notice three points along the way... Paul is encouraging us to **first, clarify our calling - second, specify our concern - and third, glorify our God.** *Clarify our calling, specify our concern, and glorify our God.*

First, we all need to **clarify your calling.**

Remember, when the Corinthians came to Christ a volcano of change erupted in their hearts. Instantly, they were transported from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. Forgiveness flowed from the fountain of grace. Their parched lips drank deeply of God’s joy. They were pointed in a brand, new direction.

Peace filled their hearts - festering wounds were healed - emotional shackles were broken - love flooded relationships - Jesus turned their world topsy-turvy!

It was to these Corinthians that Paul later wrote, “**If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.**” *But what does that really mean? How far does that newness go? The changes I noted occur inwardly, but does following Jesus change our circumstances?*

Does it alter my *status* or *stature* or *station* in life?

The pressing issue in Paul’s day was circumcision.

Under Judaism, circumcision was the sign of God's favor and choosing - it was a badge of honor. And this created a great controversy in the early church...

Some Jewish believers in Jesus insisted that if a Gentile wanted to be a Christian he first had to become a Jew, or get circumcised... And I would suppose there were some Gentile believers who assumed that Jews who became Christians should ignore their Jewishness, and live as if they were uncircumcised...

Both schools of thought assumed Christianity caused a change in one's *physical stature* and *social status*.

The spiritual transformation that occurs in Christ wasn't enough. Being a Christian required changes in a person's circumstances. Yet Paul says "*not so!*"

He writes in verse 18, "**Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised.**" In essence Paul is saying, God intends for Gentiles who come to Jesus to still be Gentiles - and for Jews who come to Jesus to still be Jews.

Becoming a Christian does set off seismic spiritual changes, but in terms of earthly circumstances nothing changes... *Jews stay Jews and Gentiles stay Gentile.*

Here was the bigger question facing the Corinthians, what effect does being *in Christ* have on being *in this world*? How does *status with God* impact my *station on earth*? Does a *new start* go beyond a *new heart*?

The Corinthians might've read, "all things have become new," yet they thought, "Yea, but the day after I became a Christian I woke up on *the same cheap mattress* - in *the same rundown house* - next to *the same boring, snoring spouse*... I looked in *the same cracked mirror* at *the same wrinkled face* - drove *the same gas guzzling bomb* to *the same dead end job* - to work for *the same unappreciative boss* at *the same lousy wage*... "Lord, what do you mean, 'all things have become new?' I felt new when I was saved on Sunday, but I feel pretty much the same on Monday."

When you came to Christ **you** might've thought, "If God gave me a brand new start *spiritually*, doesn't it stand to reason He would give me a brand new start *physically, vocationally, relationally, even financially?*"

I can hear someone asking, "Pastor Sandy, if God makes all things new, tell me He'll wipe out my criminal record... Surely, He'll have my creditors cancel my debts... Won't he void my old grades, and give me a new crack at my GPA... *If I'm getting a brand new start why should I have to tote around all the old baggage?*"

When the Corinthians read, "all things have become new," perhaps they thought... "God, I'd like to start with a new wife - a younger model... Or God, give me a new husband - one with more income... Or how about new children - of the obedient variety... Or God, I'd like a new job, where I'm *appreciated and compensated.*"

As kids we use to play a board game called, “Life.” At the start of the game each contestant got a car, \$10,000 cash, and their choice of a career and salary.

Don't you wish that's how it worked in the Christian life? God started you out with a new car - with \$10,000 cash - and with a choice of career and steady income!

That may be how it works in *the game of Life*, but it's definitely not how it works in *the Christian life!* You start wherever you're at when you became a Christian!

Some of you began your Christian life with a wrecked car - you were \$10,000 in debt - and you not only lacked a job, you had few possibilities of getting one. Rather than change your circumstances, God used your circumstances to continue to change you.

Think of it this way, when God builds a new life, He demolishes the old house, but keeps the same parcel.

Jesus constructs a testimony to His grace on the very same lot, in the very same set of neighborhood, in the same surroundings that were created by your sin.

God changes us *amid the reminders of our past.*

He creates for us a new life *in the shadow of our former failures.* God builds a new character *under the stigma of a bad reputation...* Rather than transform your circumstances God transforms you; then He uses *a new you* to alter and improve your surroundings.

Don't wait on God to change your environment and make things easier - you start right where you're at!

I'll never forget Scott. He gave his life to Jesus and was gloriously saved. The changes were immediate.

The problem was Scott's occupation. He was a beer distributor for Budweiser. In fact, he drove a company van, which had "Budweiser" plastered on the side.

He was too embarrassed to park it in the church lot.

When he came to church he parked it down the street, and walked so no one would see his vehicle.

One day Scott asked me what I thought he needed to do about his job... I thought for a minute and remembered this passage. I told him, "Scott, You need to be the best beer distributor for Jesus you can be."

I knew over time that would become more and more problematic, *and it did*. Eventually he got a new job.

But in the beginning he needed to start living the Christian life where he was at - where he was called.

This is where Christian discipleship begins - *you play the hand you're dealt*. The job you got - the house your in - the spouse your with... that's where you begin.

As Paul puts it, "Wherever you're at in life at the time you're saved, that's where you're *called*." That's where you start to walk with God. I love this paraphrase of verse 24, "Friends, stay where you were called to be. God is there. Hold the high ground with Him at your side." Hear again those words, "God is there!"

He's right there in the mess you've made - in the pain you're in. Don't ask out! Don't seek a change of venue. God wants to prove He's right where you're at!

This is why Paul wants us to **clarify our calling**, but then He tells us to **specify our concern**.

Usually our concerns revolve around *the elimination of our problems*, or *our evacuation from uncomfortable and unpleasant circumstances*. *How can we possibly be happy in what have been miserable surroundings?*

And usually we manage to somehow squirm our way out. The problem though is that often all we do is swap one set of problems and difficulties for another.

Again, this is what Paul was saying about marriage.

Singles think, **"Oh, if I were married I'd be so happy."** Married folk think, **"Oh, to be happy and single again."**

Paul's is saying it's a false notion to think that your marital status is a determinator of your personal happiness. This is why he writes in verse 27, **"Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife."**

Because Paul knows that real, lasting happiness has nothing to do with a change in your circumstances!

A little girl was telling her mother the story of Snow White and Prince Charming. She described how he arrived on a white horse, and woke her with a kiss.

The little girl quizzed her mom, **"And do you know what happened next?"** Mom smiled and replied, **"Yes, of course, dear, they lived happily ever after."** The little girl frowned, **"No, No, they went out and got married."**

You can go out and find a wife - or you can go and find another, for that matter - but that's not what's going to make you happy. Only Jesus can meet the deepest needs of your heart. Our soul was created with sweet tastes that only Jesus Christ is rich enough to satisfy!

And the same goes for the new job, or nice car, or prestigious position, or updated wardrobe, or financial freedom, or the new set of friends you're seeking...

I'm sorry, but as Jesus told the woman at the well, **"You will thirst again."** In fact, whatever earthly thing it is that you've been seeking that you've convinced yourself will make you happy - you need to write above it in your mind these words, **"You will thirst again."** It might slake your thirst for a time, but **you'll thirst again!**

This is why Paul writes in verse 19, **"Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters."** Living in a right relationship with God is what produces happiness.

This is why we need to *specify our concern* - our top concern - what really matters - is not a change of circumstance, but a right relationship with Jesus!

Circumstances won't make you happy... but here's what they will do - they'll build endurance, and forge character, and strengthen your faith. This is why God wants us to *remain where we're called, start where we're at, bloom where we're planted* - because in doing so He uses the rough places to smooth out our edges.

This is why Paul says again in verse 20, “**Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called.**”

Realize, when we're too quick to opt out of difficult circumstances we only circumvent our own spiritual growth, or short-circuit our spiritual usefulness.

God has you where you are so you can be broken, sanded, stretched, pruned, polished - so stay there!

Scott Mitchem is a treasure hunter. He's retrieved gold coins and jewels from the ruins of sunken pirate ships in the Caribbean. But lately Mitchem is mining an unlikely treasure he found at the bottom of Lake Superior. He's pulling up hardwood trees that sunk on the way to the sawmills over a century ago.

These trees have been preserved in the low-oxygen, icy waters. The underwater deep freeze, and the years of curing - have produced extremely high-grade, fine-grained hardwood. Mitchem sells the maple for \$42 a foot. Because these logs have stayed where they were put they've developed incredible value! And we'll do the same if we learn to bloom where we're planted.

Why is it that all too often our concern is to *escape* our circumstances? It happens for different reasons.

Sometimes we get restless or bored - *we want a change, just for the sake of change.* We move - *we change cities or jobs or churches* - but go nowhere.

At other times we're lured away from the place we've been called by carnal goals. We'll make more money over there.

She's prettier and sexier than my wife. He takes more of an interest in me than my husband does.

We need to wake up! Don't think that the grass is greener - it's an illusion. *Stay put* where God *puts you*.

At times we seek a change because we think its going to be a quick fix. Fear overwhelms us. Rather than trust God, we take a shortcut. Be careful!

Satan specializes in shortcuts. I know folks who took a shortcut only to discover it was the long way around.

Remember the words of Jesus, "Broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life." God's way is rarely the *easy way*, but it always proves to be the *better way*.

For years I wanted to move. My next door neighbors were driving me nuts. I was surrounded by a yapping dog, and an elderly lady who hated my kids. But God wouldn't let me move. Every time I prayed, He answered, "*Stay where you've been called.*" *And I did.*

I fought to be content. I tried to be a good witness.

Then one day I prayed and God said, "*Sandy, you've been in Egypt long enough. It's time to move to the Promised Land.*" I put my house up for sale the very next day. And it sold in a week. *A week mind you!*

I ended up in a great place. But I believe it was because I was willing to *stay put* until God said *move*.

I learned this lesson years ago in a funny way. One morning I was on my way to work when I pulled up to the intersection of Old Rosser Road and Hugh Howell.

My car stalled out. I tinkered with it for awhile, but to no avail. In the terminology of this morning's text, *I was going to remain where I was called* - like it or not.

That's when a Dekalb Police car pulled behind me and the officer offered me shelter while I waited on the wrecker. I spent a half-hour sharing Jesus with him.

Later the same guy came to our church, not knowing I was the pastor. I was able to speak into his life.

And here's what I learned... *What I had interpreted as being stalled, was in reality being called.* Sometimes *staying put* feels like *being stuck*, but this is where God teaches you faith - by remaining where you're called.

Listen to author Mike Yaconelli on the meaning of real faith, *"Faith is not the way around pain, it is the way through pain. Faith doesn't get rid of the opposition, it invites it over for dinner. Faith doesn't give you the winning point at the last second, it ties the game and sends you into overtime. Faith doesn't give you the solution, it forces you to find it. Faith doesn't teach you at the moment, it teaches in retrospect.*

*Faith doesn't provide a net to fall into when your fingers are about to give way as you hang suspended over the cliff, faith gives your fingers the strength to hang on just a little longer. In other words, **faith doesn't do anything when it's doing something.**"*

Do you understand his point? Don't trust God to bail you out, when God is using the trial to build you up.

Don't believe God will provide an escape, when He's using that very situation to *reshape* you. As he puts it, "faith doesn't do anything when it's doing something."

In this text, Paul encourages us to **clarify our calling**, to **specify our concern**, and finally to **glorify our God**.

Rather than ask God to *alter our circumstances*, or to *remove us from our circumstances* - Paul says we should be open to how God wants to *use us in our circumstances*. We may not have considered it, but maybe God knows He actually has us where we can do the most good, and bring Him the most glory.

Among the Corinthians there were believers married to unbelievers. These Christians felt trapped - stuck in a relationship void of any spiritual depth and fulfillment.

The believers saw how Christian couples prayed together, grew together, ministered together. These believers cried themselves to sleep at night, "Oh, what a joy to be married to a fellow Christian." But Paul asked them in verse 16, "For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?"

We bellyache *about our circumstances*, while God is wanting to use us *in our circumstances*. God may have you in that difficult marriage because He knows you are the only way He'll be able to reach your spouse.

In verse 21, Paul is teaching the same principle, but with a different scenario, "Were you called while a slave? Do not be

concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it. For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.”

Many of the first Christians came from the ranks of slaves. Slavery was rampant in the Roman world.

And Paul didn't want anyone to erroneously think that God had sanctioned slavery. That's why he says, *“if you can be made free, rather use it.”* If a slave can earn his freedom, or find a loophole, by all means do it.

But at the same time, he shouldn't think he has to be free before he can start growing spiritually, or be used by God. The principle is to start where we're called!

Again, our station in life is not our primary concern.

A slave who is a Christian is spiritually free in Jesus. And a freedman who's a Christian is the Lord's slave.

Whether slave or free our priority is to live for Jesus! Paul puts it in verse 21, *“Do not be concerned about it...”* Don't make slavery the issue. Jesus is the issue!

Certainly, we thank God for courageous Christians who came along later in history and did make abolishing the institution of slavery an issue. They worked in harmony with God's providence. At the right time, in the right place they stood against a terrible evil.

Yet there were slaves through the centuries who expressed just as much courage by remaining where they were called, and making the most of the situation.

Paul's point is if we believe we're in the place God has called us, then we need to cooperate with our circumstances. Paul says to the Roman slaves who know Christ, if God opens a door for freedom, by all means take it - but if He doesn't, don't get bummed.

In a spiritual sense, a Christian is nobody's slave. He belongs to Jesus. He was bought at a price. A believing slave should never see himself as a slave of men, but as the Lord's freedman. God will take care of him, and use him, despite his earthly circumstances. Even if those circumstances are as horrendous as slavery.

And this is the key, to remain where we're called, we've got to know to whom we belong! We can't stay in a difficult place without being confident God is with us.

Remember this, **if you're not confident in *Who's you are*, you'll be overwhelmed by *where you're at!***

If you're in what might be considered an enslaving situation - you've got to know you belong to Christ...

You might work for the company, but you take orders from Jesus... You might be married to an unbeliever, but you're really the bride of Christ... You might be picked on by your peers, but you've been picked by the hand of God, and called to be a light to a dark world...

Keep in mind, we're in the tough place not because we've got to be, but because we've been called to be!

If you choose to be where God calls you - even though it's hard - you're *the victor*, not *the victim*. If you believe that

"GOD IS THERE," and you're waiting on Him to reveal Himself - then you're an overcomer!

Recall, Jesus on the cross. He remained where He was called! He could've climbed off that cross. He could've called on a thousand angels to do battle.

He was free to do as He pleased, but He was a slave to the will of God - He was committed to the glory of God - so *He stayed put!* Jesus wasn't a doormat. He became THE DOOR. His obedience won our salvation.

Paul wraps up our text, by repeating his premise for a third time, in verse 24, **"Brethren, let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called."**

If your goal is truly God's glory; then there'll be no delay. You'll start to glorify Him right where you're at!

I talk to people who are lured by the glamor of going overseas as a missionary. They want to win pygmies to Jesus. They start making plans to go to Africa to share the Gospel, *but they've never even gone next door.*

The place to start serving the Lord is right where you're at. If *you can't do it in Lilburn, don't go to Liberia!*

I love this poem, **"Do what you can, being what you are: shine as a glow-worm if you can't be a star. Work like a pulley if you can't be a crane; be a wheel-greaser if you can't drive a train. Be an oar if you can't be the sailor: be a needle if you can't be the tailor. Be a broom if you can't be the sweeper: be a sickle if you can't be the reaper."** In other words, start where you're at!

Glorify God where He's got you right now - and as you're faithful He'll open up more doors in the future.

Remember the demoniac from Gadara. Demons had possessed his heart, and crashed his mind. He ran naked and hid in the caves along the seacoast. He lived like an animal. That is, until he met Jesus...

Jesus drove the demons from the man. Set him free. Restored his sanity. When the townspeople found him, he was "sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind." It was an amazing transformation.

We're told in Luke 8:38, "Now the man from whom the demons had departed begged (Jesus) that He might be with Him." And who could blame him?

It seems only natural that the former demoniac would pack his bags and become *a full time follower of His Lord*. But Jesus told him, "Return to your own house, and tell what great things God has done for you."

In other words, he didn't have to move locations, or change his circumstances to be *a full time follower*.

Jesus wanted him to follow right where he was at!

And this is the lesson for us... Bloom - begin to bear fruit - wherever it is that you happen to be planted!

Let me close by saying, it takes guts to stay where God has called you - bloom where you're planted - to trust in God's providence. It's not easy to forego your comfort and security to stick it out in a prickly place.

But realize, you're not going to be in your current situation forever. God is at work in your tomorrows.

He has us in certain places, at certain times, but then nudges us on. Your trial, like all trials, isn't permanent.

My question though, is not about your tomorrow. But "*what about your today?*" Will you cooperate with God today? Will you hunker down where He has you right now... Let Him use you right where you're at, today?

Clarify your calling - **specify** the real concern - and pledge yourself to **glorify** God despite the situation.

In light of eternity our trials and troubles are so short lived. The potter's wheel spins for just a brief moment.

We only have a few hours to let God mold us and shape us into the people He desires us to be. Once we're on the other side it'll all be worth it. So, stay in the place God has you... *Bloom where you're planted!*