

Date: October 23, 2022  
 Series: *Building Up the Family*  
 Title: *"How to Nurture Singles"*  
 Text: 1 Corinthians 7:25-40  
 Preacher: Mark Adams

As you know, since September 25<sup>th</sup> I've been doing a series of sermons entitled, *"Building Up the Family."* This has been part of the vision this year: *BUILDING UP THE CHURCH*. So far, I've preached on *Nurturing the Child*, *Nurturing a Marriage*, *Nurturing the Family*, and Pastor Kevin preached on *Nurturing the Teen*. Can anyone think of any part of our church family that we've left out?

RIGHT---SINGLES.

And that's a big mistake because we can't build up the church family---unless we include our singles---hence today's message---the SINGLE sermon left in this series.

By the way, when I say *"our singles"* I'm not referring to five or six individuals. Of our 529 active members 151 are single---that's right at 30%---or in layman's terms A LOT. Of course, like the rest of the world, our 30% come in all ages and varieties.

- There are younger single adults who have yet to marry.
- There are older single adults who have decided NOT to marry.
- There are young and older divorced singles.
- There are widows and widowers.

And lest the other 70% of you think a sermon on singlehood doesn't apply to you, I would remind you that singleness makes up a large portion of ALL our lives---either at the front or at the back end. Think of it this way. Suppose you are married at age 26, your spouse dies when you are 70 and you live to be 82. You would have been married 44 years, but you would be single for 38 years---almost half your life. My point is the challenges of being single apply to us all. Just to make sure you get that---let's have a show of hands. How many of you have been or are now single? Feel free to chuckle but do you get my drift?

Everyone has a stake in this sermon—and not just because we are all single at one time. We all have a stake in this because as a church we are responsible for helping bear the burdens of ALL our members—including that 30% who are single. PLUS---that 30% is a big chunk of GIFTED people who can help us do the things God calls us to do.

So, let's do what we've done in the rest of the sermons in this series---let's start addressing this particular issue by going to God's book for guidance. Take your copy---actual or electronic---and turn to 1 Corinthians 7. Follow along as I read verses 25-40. And if able let's stand in respect for God's Word as it is read.

1 Corinthians 7:25-40

**25 – Now about virgins: I have no command from the Lord, but I give a judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy.**

**26 – Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for a man to remain as he is.**

**27 – Are you pledged to a woman? Do not seek to be released. Are you free from such a commitment? Do not look for a wife.**

**28 – But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this.**

**29 – What I mean, brothers and sisters, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they do not;**

**30 – those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep;**

**31 – those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.**

**32 – I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord’s affairs—how he can please the Lord.**

**33 – But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife—**

**34 –and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord’s affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband.**

**35 – I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.**

**36 – If anyone is worried that he might not be acting honorably toward the virgin he is engaged to, and if his passions are too strong and he feels he ought to marry—he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. They should get married.**

**37 – But the man who has settled the matter in his own mind, who is under no compulsion but has control over his own will—and who has made up his mind not to marry the virgin—this man also does the right thing.**

**38 – So then, he who marries the virgin does right, but he who does not marry her does better.**

**39 – A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord.**

**40 – In my judgment, she is happier if she stays as she is—and I think that I too have the Spirit of God.**

Okay, based on this text and others, here’s the issue I want us to address: *“How do we nurture these precious individuals who make up nearly a third of our church family? How do we minister to singles in ways that both meet their unique needs and allows us to tap into their God-given potential---so as to BUILD UP this church?”*

### **1.) WELCOME them.**

This is a vital step because sadly singles often feel left out—they don’t feel welcomed. In fact, many times church families like ours entertain biases against singles. In his book, *THE BABY BOOMERANG*, Doug Murren says,

*“Marriage is perceived as being part of the success ethic, of being a total person. Being single is perceived as being flawed. Singles have been unfairly and unkindly treated as a kind of oddity—persons that others have to tolerate until they get married. This attitude is the result of a basic disposition in the Church that if you’re not married, you’re out of the will of God.”*

Sadly, Murren is right. The most commonly held view of relationships within the church community is that marriage is the highest form of relationship. The thought is that to be married is to be normal, which implies that those who have never been married are then abnormal---incomplete or unfinished.

And this kind of thinking is counter to the Bible’s teaching. As we just read, a famous single named Paul advises people to remain single if possible. And Paul is not the only SINGLE mentioned in Scripture.

- I know this will upset the author of *The Davinci Code*, but Jesus was single.
- So were most of His disciples.
- His three best friends, Lazarus, Mary, and Martha were single.
- His mother, Mary, was single---a widow.
- John the Baptist was single.
- The prophetess, Anna, who held Jesus as an infant that day in the temple was single. She had been married seven years then widowed and remained single well into her 80’s.
- Ruth was widowed---single---so was Naomi.
- There is no indication that Daniel ever married.

I could go on and on.

This week I “email interviewed” several of our singles here at Redland and one said, *“It feels like singles like me are considered an afterthought...because many ‘things/events/ministries’ always focus on the married, those with kids or youth. It makes me feel like a third wheel.”*

This is a sad reminder of the fact that whether we intend to or not---too often we don't welcome singles---we don't make a point of including them. I hurt that we've hurt this particular single---even though it was not our intent---for he is like a brother to me and you. So---one thing we must do is stop treating singleness as if it was a disease. We need to welcome them as they are---providing opportunities for them to grow and get involved in ministry---the good work God has prepared in advance for THEM to do.

This week I read about a family that had gone to the movies, and on the way in the teenager of the family stopped by the refreshment stand to pick up some popcorn. By the time he got into the theater the lights were already dim. He scanned the theater and evidently couldn't find his family. He paced up and down the aisle searching the crowd in the near darkness. As the lights began to go down even further, he stopped and asked out loud, *"Does anyone recognize me?"*

I thought of this story because when singles come into this church, they want a family. They walk THESE aisles looking for people who will *"recognize"* them---loved ones who will call out to them and say in essence, *"We are your family. Come 'SIT' with us! You are loved here. You are valued here. You are an integral part of this church family!"* We need to WELCOME our single family members into the family---and include them in family circles---especially on holidays.

Another Redland single said, *"I will serve in the church---but the unfilled desire to be married remains and some days, it's just painful---and then the holidays come."* I'm hoping some of you families are already thinking of inviting a single member of our church for Thanksgiving Dinner---or even better for Christmas!

We must remember that Jesus never said that marriage is the only option in life. In fact, He underscored the importance of His SPIRITUAL family. Do you remember the time when Jesus' half-biological family came looking for Him? He'd left the family carpentry business and started preaching and healing. In Mark 3:21 His family says, ***"Jesus is out of His mind!"*** Jesus' response was to say, ***"Who are My mother and My brothers? Whoever does the will of God is My brother and sister and mother."*** Our Lord was saying a faith bond---can be stronger---and even more important than a blood bond. Do you remember how Solomon put it in Proverbs 18:24? ***"There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."*** And we need to be those kinds of friends to our singles. We must constantly work to WELCOME THEM---make them know we LOVE having them in our family.

## **2.) UNDERSTAND them.**

Our singles face unique---often difficult challenges---ALONE. And we need to understand that---so we can empathize with the "single body parts" God has blessed us with.

One BIG challenge for our singles is just plain loneliness. Almost all of them mentioned this. One Redland Single put it this way, *"When I get home, I am alone. I have no one to share events of my day with. I have no one to help me if I need help or just give me a hug. Fearful thoughts come like, 'Who will help me if I am sick? What if I can't work? I rely on my one income.'" Another said, "What happens if I fall in the shower?" Another said, "What if I need a medical procedure? Who will take me to and from the hospital? Who will care for me as I recover?"*

Our singles NEED us to UNDERSTAND THEM---and we show that EMPATHY by making them know they are never alone---that we understand their worries and burdens and are there for them whenever they need us.

## **3.) We must CAUTION them.**

The point here is that singles who yearn to get married need their church family members to caution them---to lovingly warn them be patient---and trust God's timing. We need to tell them not to be too eager---not to rush things because as one of our singles said, *"It is far better to be happy and single than to be unhappily married."*

This particular single understands that marriage is wonderful, but it was never meant to be a cure-all. And sadly, that's what we often infer. We incorrectly use God's Words in Genesis 2:18 --- ***"It is not good for man to be alone"*** to mean,

EVERYONE MUST GET MARRIED. Yes, Adam and Eve needed to marry or none of us would be here. But the Bible does not teach that everyone has to be married---to be complete.

The fact is people who marry can be just as “incomplete” as those who do not. Too many singles think that marriage will turn them into happy, complete people because they believe marriage has the ability to change a person. They think, *“I’m unhappy but that’s just because I’m not married. If I get married, whoever he or she is, I will become happy.”* But in truth,

- An unhappy single person will be an unhappy married person.
- A bitter, angry, single person will be a bitter, angry, married person.
- A greedy single person will be a greedy married person.
- An impatient single person will be an impatient married person.

Saying “I DO” does not change people. In fact, without the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, when it comes to a marriage partner, what you see is what you get. And sadly, sometimes what you see before marriage is better than what you get after marriage.

So—there are times when our singles need to be lovingly cautioned. We need to help them see that marriage is not the key to happiness and completeness. Neither is it the key to ending loneliness.

One single shared, *“I can’t think of anything I hate more than being alone. Everywhere I turn I see couples—couples on television, couples in cars, couples on planes, couples in restaurants. Everywhere there are reminders that I am alone. I wonder if I will ever find a person to fill the hole in my heart.”* I feel for this single---but the truth is that there are millions of lonely, married people. They may share a table, a sofa, and even a bed but they still feel lonely. They may even have an ideal marriage---a genuinely intimate and loving relationship and still feel lonely deep inside. As that old THREE DOG NIGHT song goes, *“One is the loneliest number that you’ll ever see---but TWO can be as bad as one. It’s the loneliest number since the number one.”*

You can be married and be just as—or even more—lonely than you were when you were single. This is because God created us for not one but two levels of relational intimacy. One level CAN be met by establishing a deep, honest, trusting relationship with a marriage partner. But the other level can only be met by entering into an authentic, growing relationship with God through Jesus Christ. A good marriage to the right person, entered into under God’s direction and nurtured carefully, can go a long way toward meeting the human need for intimacy that the Bible calls ONENESS. But within every human heart there remains a hole that only God can fill. No marriage partner will make you feel like you are a whole person. No friend or spouse can provide soul—“S-O-U-L”—satisfaction. Only God can do that.

So, the secret to completeness—to true joy and fulfillment in life—is not in our marital state. It is in our spiritual state. Only a personal relationship with God can bring us true contentment. To disagree with the THREE DOG NIGHT song, *“Two doesn’t have to be as bad as one---if the other Person is God.”*

And I’m proud of our singles because many of them said they understood this. One said, *“I am trying to focus on Jesus and enjoy all the fellowship and friendships that the Lord has brought into my life since the time I got divorced.”* Another said, *“What helps me to keep going is surrendering my desires to God every day, and continuously seeking the Lord, trusting Him, His Word, His plan for my life.”* One quoted, Colossians 2:10: ***“In Christ you have been brought to fullness.”***

That late, great single, Corrie ten Boom, once said,

*“God does not take away from us. He might ask us to turn our backs on something, or someone we should not have. But God never takes away, God gives. Often, He protects us from someone we should not have because He has a far greater purpose for our lives. Happiness is not found in marriage or work or ministry or children. Happiness is found in a balanced relationship with Jesus.”*

This is another reminder that we must not prejudge our singles as being unhappy and incomplete. Paul said that because of his relationship with Christ—he had learned ***“to be content in any state.”*** (Philippians 4)

#### 4.) We must REMIND them.

They need to be reminded that SINGELNESS should be seen not as a curse—but as a gift from God—because singles can do things—and many times do them better than married people. Referring to his own single state Paul said, ***“I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.”*** (verse 7) So, singleness can be a gift—and like all gifts from God it must be cherished. To be clear, it may be a temporary gift—just for a season of your life—so don’t waste it. There are things you can do as a single—that you can’t once God guides you to marriage.

One of our singles said, *“There are some pluses to being single---like getting to be on your own schedule and do the things that you want to do.”* Another put it this way, *“I see singleness as a way to fully devote oneself to the Lords’ work.”* Another said, *“Being single opens lots of volunteering opportunities.”* These are all mature responses.

Another great single, the late John Stott, would get up every morning and pray for 4 hours. He gave his life to the study of God’s Word and has blessed countless thousands. He couldn’t have been as effective as he was—if he had to worry about a wife and children. Henrietta Mears was a creative visionary who wrote books, established a Christian publishing house, started Forest Home Christian Camp---and led some very influential men and women to faith in Jesus. She was an important source of encouragement for Billy Graham when he was just starting out as an evangelist. There probably wasn’t a man alive who was capable of marrying Henrietta without stifling her creativity, so God kept her single. She and the other singles down through the years shook their world for the cause of Christ---because instead of complaining about their state they accepted singleness as a gift from God.

Remember---Paul reminds his readers that in view of the current CRISIS—remaining single may be best. Now—what “crisis” was he referring to? Some say the imminent return of Jesus—some say it was all the persecution of Christians—some say the fall of Jerusalem. We may not know until we get to Heaven, but the principle is this: life is temporary—so we must use every minute doing things of eternal significance.

And the fact is, this can be easier for singles. Again—don’t misunderstand me—being married is a gift just as much as being single—but being married takes time and energy. I remember, when I first went to seminary—as a single man—all my possessions fit in the back of my compact car. I moved all my stuff into my dorm room by myself in two trips. When Sue and I married and moved into Seminary Village—our possessions filled the back of my car—and a small U-Haul. It took Sue and me and some friendly seminarians dozens of trips to get our stuff in the apartment. When we moved to Derwood with three kids—we required a large moving truck, two cars, and three strong men. I lost count of how many trips they took to get it all in the house. When I was single—I was only responsible for my own finances. Once we married—I was responsible for Sue’s financial needs and then for our children’s clothing, healthcare, college education, etc.

My point is that married people have more things to worry about than singles—which makes singles free-er—and more able to do certain things. And, I’m not saying that every single person should choose to remain single forever. I’m saying every single person should submit his or her singleness to God, and use this era of freedom, for as long as it lasts, to serve God unhindered.

So, singles, ***“CARPE DEIM--- SEIZE THE DAY!”*** or better yet, ***“CARPE TEMPUS---SEIZE THE SEASON!”*** Take advantage of the unique ministry opportunities that are available to you as a single person! The church of Jesus Christ needs more men and women who are mature enough to let God use them even in their singleness.

In his book *The Rich Single Life* Andrew Farmer writes:

*“Undivided devotion to the Lord is the essence of Biblical identity for the single adult. It is rooted in the sovereignty of a God Who places people in appropriate situations for the best possible reasons. It is steeped in the love of a God who uses even the most difficult of situations for the greatest possible benefit. It is sustained by the wisdom of a God whose timing is perfect and whose guidance is sure. If you are a Christian, don’t despise the state to which you have been called. Live in the gift of your singleness for as long as you have the gift. And whether or not God ever ordains*

*the prospect of marriage for your life, bring faith for the present and hope for the future, because there is much to be done. Who better to set a hand to the task than you?"*

### 5.) **ENCOURAGE them.**

Specifically, we must encourage them to cultivate deep, caring relationships—and as a church we need to provide opportunities for that through small groups, fellowships—mission trips, etc.

You see, every healthy human being, whether married or not, needs friends. Everyone needs people who will pray with them—people who will encourage them to grow in Christlikeness—people who will support them when they carry large responsibilities—people who will listen to their doubts and fears, and who will celebrate their joys. And these friends don't necessarily need to be other singles. In fact, I love it when a family group reaches out to include a single—I love it when an elderly person adopts a younger person. Intergenerational friendships can be wonderful.

Another reason singles need close Christian friends—friends that stick closer than a brother—is to lovingly admonish them to live a sexually pure lifestyle. Paul refers to this back in verse 9. One of our singles confessed, *"When you are single it's harder for you to have others who can keep you accountable, encouraged in healthful things. Trying to be moral, honest, someone who keeps their word or even someone with a moral compass and a sense of right and wrong are challenges for singles like me. Singles are even more impressionable than children."*

Speaking of *"impressionable,"* how many of you are fans of the old sit-come, *Friends*? I mention this because I think there are a number of singles today—who are messing up in the purity area—because they have fully embraced what is called the *"Theology of Friends."*

Let me explain. The story line of *Friends* contains the message that living together and having an open relationship is not only NOT wrong—it's normative. Think about it. Do the six characters of *Friends* ever admonish each other after a one-night stand? No—if anything *Friends* shows like it encourages that kind of thing. According to the *"Theology of Friends,"* living together is actually a way to test the compatibility of the relationship—without going through the whole marriage commitment thing.

This way of thinking has made it harder for young Christian women who want to marry to find a good husband. Too many men feel they can enjoy the physical benefits of a relationship without the trouble of a life-long commitment.

TRUE theology—theology based on God's Word clearly says that if you're a Christian who loves God while you are single—there must be a strategy for sexual purity in that plan.

One final point and I'm done. When it comes to the singles God sends our way,

### 6.) **We can and must LEARN from them.**

As I said earlier—it's easier for singles to be single-minded—and with the help of our singles we can all learn this. We can learn that people who embrace the quality of SINGLE-MINDED DETERMINATION have amazing POWER at their disposal. You see people who vacillate between purposes in life are weak and ineffective. As James 1:8 says, ***"a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways."***

As I'm sure you know, our hectic culture embraces a form of double mindedness known as "multi-tasking."

- Texting while driving? No problem.
- Watching television and reading the Bible? No problem.
- Checking your email while listening to a spouse, a child, a friend OR A SERMON? No problem.
- Playing a video game while doing your homework—easy peasy.

But the truth is—multi-tasking causes BIG problems.

Scientists at Stanford University announced the results of a study on multi-tasking this way: *“Attention, multitaskers (if you can pay attention, that is): Your brain may be in trouble.”* The researchers originally set out to discover what gave multitaskers their special focus; instead, they were surprised to discover that in many ways multitasking IMPAIRS performance. So, while many people think they’re effective at juggling multiple tasks, they’re actually pretty lousy at it.

For instance, heavy multitaskers are suckers for distraction and for irrelevancy. Multitaskers were also more unorganized in their ability to keep and retrieve information. The study showed they were even worse at the main thing that defines multitasking: switching from one task to the next. Heavy multitaskers underperformed in almost every area. The study concluded with this advice: *“By doing less, you might accomplish more.”*

And this makes sense doesn’t it!? People who are single-minded can focus their efforts—and God’s Word teaches that all Christians are to embrace this attitude. Paul expressed his own single-minded outlook by saying, ***“This ONE THING I do.”***—and we should follow his example.

Listen. The most important thing for all Christians, married or single, is to keep the main thing the main thing---and that main thing is to follow Jesus’ guidance and determine to—***SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD.*** Understand—the word, *“SEEK”* implies a strong-minded, focused pursuit. The Greek literally says, *“Keep on continually seeking”* the things that further the Kingdom of God. That has to be our single-minded focus because this world and everything in it is passing away. Listen to these words from 1 John 2:15-17: ***“Do not love the world or the things of the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away and also its lusts but the one who does the will of God abides forever.”*** Since the things of this world are passing away, Christians are to give focused devotion to those things that do last forever.

Before he died in 1978, another famous single, Bob Pierce, founder of Samaritan’s Purse, wrote,

*“On my deathbed, I have one message only. I don’t care what you have attempted, what you have succeeded at, or what has been your work in Christ’s Name while you are here on earth. Only ONE thing matters when you have reached the last step before you go to stand before Christ: Did you show—and tell—men and women Who Jesus is? Did you bring them to some comprehension of His redeeming love? Did you make it plain to them that He alone can pay their way to Heaven through His atoning death on the cross?”*

Bob Pierce knew that only eternal things were important in life. He knew that all Christians married and single must be SINGLE-MINDED—in their efforts to fulfill the Great Commission.

Let’s pray.