

Christian Singleness

Handout - Sunday School - June 28

1. Introduction

- Definition of Single: Not Married
 - Times of Singleness:
 - As a child
 - As an adult: pre-marriage or never married
 - As an adult: who has lost their spouse by death or divorce
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2. God's Calling and Gifts

- **Ephesians 2:10** - "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."
 - God prepares our works beforehand.
 - God assigns each believer's station. (*Calvin's Commentary on 1 Cor. 7:17*)
 - Marriage and singleness are **divine vocations**. (*Murray: Principles of Conduct*)
As in all our vocations, these involve doing good works. In whichever time of life we are, God has ordained specific good works for us to do, for His glory.
 - **1 Corinthians 7:17** - "Let each person lead the life the Lord has assigned."
What God gives you to do each day is His gift to you. God provides what you need to complete the assignment.
 - **1 Corinthians 7:7** "I wish that all were as I myself am. But that we should each have his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another."
 - Singleness/abstinence is a "special gift", given only to some. (*Calvin's Institutes 4.12.28, Commentary on 1 Cor. 7:7*)
 - Singleness is also a divine vocation or calling, it is not an accident. (*Murray: Principles of Conduct*)
 - Singleness is a good "gift from God", as is marriage. In whichever station of life you are, live in joyful gratitude to your Creator.
 - **Romans 8:28** "And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, to those who are called according to his purpose."
 - This includes the calling of singleness or marriage, at the times in our life when each is ordained.
 - **Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 27-28** - God governs all things for our good
 - God distributes gifts differently; singleness is one such distribution.
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3. Singleness - Unique Advantages in Ministry

- Singleness - a "strategic gift for radical ministry." (*Piper - Desiring God*)
- **1 Corinthians 7:28**, - "Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles."
 - Marriage brings new responsibilities, and divided concerns. Singleness avoids some of these pressures.
 - The unmarried can "serve God more freely." (*Calvin Commentary on 1 Cor. 7:32-35*)
- **1 Corinthians 7:38** - Singleness may be "better". This refers to circumstantial advantage and calling, not moral superiority. (*Calvin Commentary on 1 Cor. 7:26, 38*)

- **1 Corinthians 7:32-35** “I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, 34 and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.” The unmarried person can be “anxious about the things of the Lord.” “It is good... to remain single.”
 - Paul’s preference for singleness is based on kingdom usefulness, not superiority. (*Hodge - Commentary on 1 Corinthians*)
 - A strategic kingdom calling, especially in distressful times. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Paul was writing to the church in Corinth, just before the persecution brought about by Nero.
 - Paul’s preference is practical, not hierarchical. (*Hodge Commentary on 1 Corinthians*)
 - Singleness can be “better” when it maximizes gospel fruitfulness. (*Piper*)
- Undivided Devotion to Christ. A unique opportunity for focused discipleship.
- Flexibility for Ministry
 - Missions, hospitality, service, mentoring, discipleship, prayer.
- A living witness to the sufficiency of Christ
 - Singles uniquely display that Christ is enough.

4. Singleness Points to the Coming Kingdom

- **1 Corinthians 7:29–31** - The world is passing away. Singleness is shaped by the reality that earthly marriage is temporary.
- **Romans 7:2** - “For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage”
- **Matt. 22:30** – “For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven”. Singleness anticipates the resurrection life when marriage is no more
- Our deepest identity is in Christ. He is the ultimate Bridegroom.

5. Singles have an integral role in the family of God

- **Eph. 2:19; 1 Tim. 5:1–2** Singles are sons & daughters of the heavenly Father, in His Kingdom
- The phrase “Family of God” indicates a relational nature between all Christians. Being a brother or sister in the church is independent of your marital status.
 - **1 Tim. 5:1–2** “Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.”
 - **Rom. 12:10** - “Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.”
 - Pursue relationships with brothers and sisters in the church

- Paul describes the church as: a household in **Ephesians 2:19** -"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God"
- How can the church better care for singles?
 - Be aware of common areas of struggle
 - Include them in family meals, gatherings and vacations
 - Don't assume they want to marry
 - Be available for accountability if desired
 - Pray with and for them, ask how you can help

6. We have Jesus as a perfect role-model of living a victorious single life. But God in His grace also gives us the apostle Paul as a Model of Fruitful Ministry as a single

- **1 Corinthians 7:8** - Paul commends his own singleness. "**it is good for them to remain single, as I am**"
- **Philippians 3:13-14** - Paul's life is marked by undistracted pursuit of Christ.
- **1 Corinthians 9:5** - Paul notes he has the right to marry but chooses not to.
 - Paul's life proves singleness is a noble calling. (*Calvin's Commentary on 1 Cor. 7:7-8*)
 - Paul's singleness shows marriage is not required for maturity. (*Murray: Principles of Conduct*)
 - Paul's singleness and achieving good things for God, is a pattern of kingdom-focused living. (*Piper - Desiring God*)

7. Singles Who Desire to be Married

- Pursue your desire in prayer. Ask God to lead you to a mate. Be content in the place you are now. Seek to be fruitful in the Kingdom.
- Protect your commitment and loyalty to Christ by marrying in the Faith.
- Prioritize your spiritual life above marriage. A marriage with an unbeliever often pulls the believer away from the faith and is in violation of **2 Corinthians 6:14**. From the Old Testament
 - **Genesis 24: 3-4** - Abraham instructed his servant not to take a wife for Isaac from the daughters of the Canaanite
 - **1 Kings 11:4** - Marrying foreign wives turned Solomon away from the Lord. For when Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods.
 - Ezra and Nehemiah confronted those who had married foreign women, reminding them of Solomon's downfall (**1 Kings 11:1-4**) "**You have married foreign women and brought in the guilt of Israel**" (**Nehemiah 13:23**)
- Prepare yourself for marriage: Grow in your intimacy and walk with God. Further develop your gifts. Work on areas you know will help you become a good spouse. Remain sexually pure. Pray for your potential partner.

- It may be God's plan for you to remain single. **1 Corinthians 7:8** - "To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am" Paul affirms the goodness of singleness.
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8. Single Again

Across the OT Laws, the Psalms, the Prophets, the Gospels, and in the early church, God repeatedly declares Himself the protector, provider, and defender of those who have lost a spouse.

- Scripture presents God Himself as the direct protector of widows.
 - **Psalm 68:5** - God is "a father of the fatherless and a protector of widows."
 - **Psalm 146:9** - "The Lord... upholds the widow."
- The early Church organized itself to care for widows.
 - **Acts 6:1-6** - Deacons were appointed because widows were being overlooked in food distribution.
 - **1 Timothy 5:3-16** - Paul gives detailed instructions for honoring and supporting widows in need.
 - The church is commanded to step in to assist, especially when family cannot.
- Find your identity in Christ, knowing God facilitates a fresh start so that we may live life abundantly, freed from the sins of the past.
- Continue to grow in the Faith knowing God will provide blessings in your future. We are redeemed to move forward in repentance, wisdom and hope.
- Specific areas of concern:
 - Loneliness
 - Discontentment.
 - Family relations, both current and former
 - Struggles with single parenting
 - Finances
 - Sexual Temptation

In these areas of concern, all of us need to be sensitive to and available to help our brothers and sisters as needed.

9. Singles – Be Active in the Body of Christ

- Actively participate in the life of your local church
- Practice hospitality.
- Be a part of Shepherding groups and prayer groups
 - Ask brothers and sisters for help as needed
 - Ask for accountability
- Serve in the nursery, teach Sunday School, volunteer with service projects, youth outings, VBS, meal trains, church clean-up, service music, etc.
- Partner with our missionaries.
- Pray, asking for God's help and direction in using your gifts
- Receive the blessing of giving and receiving in the Body of Christ

Ending

- God's gifts include singleness and marriage.
 - Marriage reflects creation and covenant.
 - Singleness reflects kingdom urgency and undivided devotion.
 - Neither is superior, both require holiness, and each is assigned by God for His glory.
 - Whichever state a believer is in—married or single—it is not accidental but part of God's wise ordering of your life.
- God provides the strength for each vocation. He is a good God and will give you what you need.

Contentment

1. God's personal interest

Isaiah 41:9-10

"You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off";
fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Jeremiah 29:11

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

2. God's commitment

Isaiah 54:5

For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name;
and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer,
the God of the whole earth he is called.

Isaiah 40:30-31

Even youths shall faint and be weary,
and young men shall fall exhausted;
but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;
they shall run and not be weary;
they shall walk and not faint.

Romans 8:38-39

For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

3. Contentment with self

Psalms 139:13-14

For you formed my inward parts;
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.

Philippians 4:12-13

I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

4. Contentment with intimacy with God

Psalm 17:15

As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness;
when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness.

Psalm 46:10

"Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth!"

Psalm 103:2-5

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits,
who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and
mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the
eagle's.

Psalm 4:8

In peace I will both lie down and sleep;
for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.

2 Corinthians 12:9

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in
weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that
the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Psalm 62: 5-8

For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence,
for my hope is from him.
He only is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress; I shall not be shaken.
On God rests my salvation and my glory;
my mighty rock, my refuge is God.
Trust in him at all times, O people;
pour out your heart before him;
God is a refuge for us. Selah

Psalm 84:11

For the LORD God is a sun and shield;
the LORD bestows favor and honor.
No good thing does he withhold
from those who walk uprightly.

Jeremiah 31:3b

The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying:
"I have loved you with an everlasting love;
therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you."