

Last time we were all together here we were talking about singleness. In this class, we first considered a biblical perspective on marriage, and now are in the midst of considering singleness from a biblical perspective. Now, some of us may be thrilled to be single, for others it is a major bummer. Some may see it as just something to be endured until you arrive at marital bliss. But as we saw, the biblical perspective on singleness is not that it is not an abnormal or undesirable state, it is not simply a waiting period or holding tank, and as your notes say, "Singleness is not a disease, and marriage is not the cure." So what is the right way to view singleness??

We looked at a key passage in 1 Cor 7 and you guys took some time to discuss it. Then we began to look at some key understandings about singleness. As we first said, being single does not in any way make you incomplete. Nowhere is this communicated, and some of the greatest humans and servants of God never married, including our Lord Himself. Secondly, we looked at how the apostle Paul in 1 Cor 7 clearly presented singleness as a gift! The passage shows how your singleness provides great blessings and opportunities. I want to continue to talk about those today!

The first unique blessing of singleness we saw is how it results in less concerns in persecution and difficulty. The single person is more free to take risks and be bold for the kingdom of God.

Secondly, we saw that another blessing of singleness is Freedom from the difficulties of marriage. Marriage is inherently difficult. I am very pro-marriage, but it is not easy.

Certainly the central theme of Paul's reference to singleness as a gift is found in the third point and that is Greater opportunity to focus on the Lord and His work. Let's read 1 Cor 7:31-34 again. Notice the freedom and opportunity to focus on eternal things!

**I want to own this for a few moments. Please, first without discussing it together, write down in the space provided a few specific ways that you as a single person can utilize your greater freedom, time, and opportunity for eternal purposes. Not hypothetical, but what you specifically, where the Lord has you right now, can do. (2 minutes, then share with a neighbor, then several share out.)

(A quick aside about this group. We are a solid portion of the single adults at GBC. Let's be encouraging and spurring each other on in these ways!!)

There are so many ways that God can and will use YOU here, in this church, in your community, for His purposes and His glory. Also consider that it is possible that your singleness is connected to a broader purpose beyond this area. Torrey and I have the opportunity to be connected with, and support three single women who have been led by God to go to what we

might call the uttermost parts of the earth, to take the gospel to some of the most unreached people groups on the planet. In thinking of them, I'm reminded of a quote from Rhena Taylor, a single missionary in Kenya: "Being single has meant that I am free to take risks that I might not take were I a mother of a family dependent on me. Being single has given me freedom to move around the world without having to pack up a household first. And this freedom has brought to me moments that I would not trade for anything else this side of eternity". Inspiring.

One of the young women I'm referring to personally is one who a few of you know. (Redacted for security)

(The second redacted) Torrey got to see her come to faith in Christ, and was present at her baptism. Well, a handful of years later she is now a full time missionary in Tajikistan, another challenging field of unreached peoples, using her singleness in full time service to God.

Another former student of mine developed a great heart for missions during her college years. (Redacted for security) Torrey and I got to have her in our home just a month ago, as she was a few days from moving to Nepal to serve the Lord there in church planting and community impact among the poor. I told her about starting this class, and asked her about her singleness. Her response was inspiring, and not surprising as I know her faith. She talked about being interested in marriage, if God provides, but about first and foremost following His clear call to take the gospel to these lost and needy people - and how her singleness gives her the freedom to respond to that call with less hesitation and concern.

I share the stories of these young women not to manipulate you into going into foreign missions, but to inspire you to be an all-in servant of Christ, even right here. Their stories inspire me, as an older married guy to be such, and to be involved in whatever ways I can, in the global spread of the gospel. But, in particular, take seriously what the Word says in that pointing out how you, as single people have particular opportunities to be "all in" in pursuing and investing in eternal things. May you not neglect this! There's an old saying "Youth is wasted on the young" - we could say, "singleness is wasted on the single." Don't be someone who is wasting your singleness with selfish pursuits!

Let's move on in our notes.

After God created Adam he said that something was not good. What?? For man to be alone. God used that reality to create the gift of marriage. But I really think that the

statement that it is not good for man to be alone does not only apply to marriage. We can't extrapolate from the statement universal principal that it is not good to be single, that it is wrong to not get married. Jesus was single, Paul was single, some of the greatest missionaries and servants the church has ever known were single. It is okay to be single.... But I believe it is God's revealed will that no Christian man or woman be alone. It is not good to be alone. Single person, you are to have great companionship, you are to have relational intimacy.

c) The single adult is to experience great intimacy and family – through the church!

You are to experience true and deep love, impacting others deeply and being impacted deeply, and that is to happen in the church. While you are a single adult, whether that be for a short time, or perhaps a lifetime, you have a family.

Look at an interesting place where Jesus said this. Mark 10:28-30.....

What was the new commandment that Jesus gave to his disciples just before his betrayal?? (John 13:34-35) He said that it was the way that all men would know they belonged to Him....love one another!!

Many long for marriage thinking, "I just want someone to love. If only I had someone that I could share love with." What a narrow view! Marriage, of course provides a special kind of love, but even if unmarried We DO have a family to love. Perhaps others long for children and the opportunity to raise and nurture their growth. They may think that if I don't get married, I can never have children. Of course, in one sense, that is true, but in another sense, all of us are to be reproducing – in the church!

If you never get married, can you be a father?? Can you be a mother?? Yes!

One man that I am inspired by is Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German pastor who was murdered by the Nazi's. He never married, and yet one of his key legacies was a small book he wrote called "life together". It was about the family that is the church and how God's design is for no one to be alone, not because everyone is married, but because everyone is in genuine, deep, and intimate fellowship with other believers. "What determines our brotherhood is what that man is by reason of Christ. Our community with one another consists solely in what Christ has done to both of us. This is true not merely at the beginning, as though in the course of time something else were to be added to our community; it remains so for all the future and to all eternity. I have community with others and I shall continue to have it only through Jesus Christ. The more genuine and the deeper our community becomes, the more will everything else between us recede, the more clearly and purely will Jesus

Christ and his work become the one and only thing that is vital between us. We have one another only through Christ, but through Christ we do have one another, wholly, for eternity.” (BTW, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was single 38 year old, engaged to be married, when he was murdered by the Nazis in 1945)

All of us, married and single alike, are to have deep, intimate relationships in the family of God. My question would be – are you pursuing this?? Are you cultivating genuine Christian love in your life?? Now is the time!

What does this look like? Certain passages come to mind. Hebrews 10:24-25, End of Acts 2, 1 Peter 4:8-10, Eph 4:11-16. (Discuss each briefly after reading it. How can you apply the passage, as a single person at GBC??) **Brief comment on how the church has sometimes been guilty of marginalizing single people, of seeing or treating them as “second class”. I feel that GBC is getting better in this area, but still has a way to go. Community groups are helping.

Relevant question How do I lovingly respond to people who are NOT encouraging me in my singleness?

You may be sitting there thinking, “I’m inspired by the reality of being brothers and sisters in Christ, and I’m so thankful for the church and heavily invested in the church. I can see how singleness is a gift, and I want to use my singleness for God’s glory, but I still really want to get married.” I hear you, and there is nothing wrong with that. Wanting to get married is not a wrong desire (Paul was clear about that.)

I believe it is certainly possible to be satisfied in Christ and also desire to get married. A longing to marry does not necessarily mean you are sinfully discontent, or not focused on Christ.

That leads us to our next point: d) singleness should be a time of contentment –even for the one who desires to get married.

If my desire is to get married, how can I be content now, while I’m single?? Let me turn that question around on you. What are the keys to contentment? (Discuss) Where does contentment come from?

**Trusting in God’s goodness and sovereignty (Prov 3:5-6, Matt 6:32-33, Rom 8:28, etc).

**Leaning on Christ for strength – look at Phil 4. Paul was content. Did this mean that he didn’t strive for things? ?? No, Christian contentment isn’t the contentment of Buddha (let go of all desire and sit and contemplate your navel).

****Thinking rightly and biblically about circumstances.** I think that contentment also comes from right thinking and it is not a coincidence that Paul makes this statement just after a wonderful passage on right thinking. Look at verses 4-8. For many of us, singleness involves anxiety (big time). Pray, thank God, think on things that are true, rejoice.)

****Seeking God and his priorities first –** Back to Philippians again, in Phil 3:7-8, Matt 6:33, Psalm 37:4)

****Cultivating The fruit of the Spirit–** lets look at them in Gal 5:22-23. Which aspects of the fruit of the Spirit specifically relate to contentment??

****Realizing you are undeserving.** It's all grace. Rehearsing the realities of the gospel, truly understanding that we deserve nothing but God's wrath, is a great way to cultivate gratitude, and gratitude is the brother of contentment.

Wanting to get married doesn't mean you are sinfully discontent. Marriage is a good desire, as long as it is in the right framework of "Christ first".

Relevant question Is it appropriate to pray for a spouse, not knowing whether it is God's will to provide one?*

Lastly, singleness is a time to prepare yourself for the possibility of marriage. Are you ready to get married??? I don't mean do you want to. I mean are you ready?? Recall that one of my first statements is that you should not date unless you are ready to be a husband or a wife. That is the purpose of dating. So, what are you doing to get ready?? In our next few lessons, we are going to look at the man to be, and the husband to look for, and the woman to be and the wife to look for.

Book Report: 7 Myths (Torrey)