

05/30/21 Single, But Not Alone
1 Corinthians 7:7-9, 32-35

Welcome...

A special thank you to Pastor Jesse for preaching a great sermon on biblical womanhood in the church. We are so blessed to have Jesse who is gifted not just in his musical abilities but in his teaching and in his heart for discipleship in the local church.

This morning we continue our series on biblical manhood and womanhood by looking at singleness. In a church that has a strong marriage culture, there's a temptation to define singleness as someone who is not married and consequently someone who is viewed as a second-class Christian. But our church culture is not the only culprit. Some of you have pressure from your parents because you know one of their greatest desires is for you to get married. Or perhaps you struggle with the feeling of being left behind because you are older and you've watched many of your close friends get married. Even Webster's Dictionary defines "single" as "unmarried." To define something according to what it is not doesn't give you a great sense of what it really is.

Thankfully the Bible gives us a richer definition of singleness.

Let's look at 1 Corinthians 7:7-9, 32-35....

Paul explains that being single provides the opportunity and freedom to use your gifts in undivided commitment to Christ. Instead of being discontent and complaining about things that God has not given us, we need to find satisfaction in what God has clearly given us. Singleness for a short time or a lifetime should be viewed as a God provided time to grow as a child of God and servant of His kingdom.

There are three main points to my message on singleness:

First, your spirituality is not determined by your marital status.

Second: singleness has its challenges. We will look at three of them: temptation, idolatry, and loneliness.

Third: singleness has its blessings. Three blessings: devotion to Christ, discipleship, and service.

And we will look at how the church family can be a great blessing to singles by opening our homes and hearts to them.

My prayer is that we all gain God's perspective on the blessing and see that singleness is a noble estate, defended by Jesus and Paul.

I. Spirituality is Not Determined by Marital Status

In 1 Corinthians 7:7 Paul wished that all believers "could be unmarried, even as I myself am." He said that in light of the great freedom and independence he had as a single person to serve Christ. But he did not expect all believers to be unmarried. He did not expect all who were then single to stay single. And for those who were already married it would be wrong to live as if they were single, to become celibate while married.

But one of Paul's main points is that salvation and faithfulness to Christ defines the value of life; not your marital status. The ultimate destination for your singleness is heaven, not marriage.

Jesus (who like Paul was also single) makes clear that His people — the true people of God — will be produced not by physical procreation but by spiritual regeneration. So Jesus says to Nicodemus, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” John 3:3.

And Paul says to the Jews and Gentiles alike in Galatians 3:7, “Therefore, be sure that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.” . . . and in 3:26, “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.” In other words, it is not physical descent from Abraham that makes you part of the covenant people of God but faith in Christ.

And Peter says that our inheritance comes not through marriage and producing offspring but through the work of Christ and the new birth. Peter writes in 1 Peter 1:3-4, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.”

So, Jesus and Paul and Peter all say: Children are born into God’s family and receive their inheritance not by marriage and procreation but by faith and regeneration. Which means that single people in Christ have zero disadvantage in bearing spiritual children for God, and may in some ways have a great advantage.

The apostle Paul was single, and he said of his spiritual converts in 1 Corinthians 4:15, “You may have countless tutors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.” Paul was never married but he was a great spiritual father.

And let him speak for single women in Christ in 1 Thessalonians 2:7: “We were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.” So, it will be said of many single women in Christ: she was a great spiritual mother and never married.

I think of Rachel Saint served as a single missionary among the Auca Indians of Ecuador for many years without companionship. She poured out her life and her love to the Indians and found great blessing and fulfillment. Or Amy Carmichael in India who became deeply involved in children's work, most specifically in rescuing girls from temple prostitution. She established a home and school for these children. Her staff and converts became like family to her.

One of the questions we need to tackle today is “What is the gift of singleness?” Because again in verse 7 Paul says, “I wish that all were even as I myself am. However each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that.”

Paul wishes that *all* were single, as he was. He clearly sees there is some benefit to singleness, such that he wishes everyone could experience it. We’ll talk about the benefits more in just a minute as we look at verses 32-35. But he clearly recognizes that singleness is for some, and not others. This is implied by that first sentence “I wish...”. But it is more directly stated in that second sentence – “each has his own gift.” Think of the word “gift” as something that is given and in this case, it is something that is given by God. Paul is saying that only some have this gift of singleness. Others have different gifts given to them by God (like the gift of administration, or hospitality, or teaching, but not singleness).

What is the gift of singleness? It’s not is some super-spiritual, mystical, or magical ability to resist sexual relations and reject marriage. It’s not some higher, super-spiritual ascetic state where you can deny the flesh and focus more on spiritual issues. That’s what monks and nuns pursue as they cut themselves off from society and put themselves in secluded monasteries and convents. If this were what Paul was describing, then God has created a two-tier system for singleness: the super-spiritually ascetic singles, and the rest of you – uncontrolled, burning, “must-get-married” singles.

So what is the gift of singleness? It's a recognition that God has given some the gift of celibacy for a season, or even for a lifetime. A person with this gift is spiritually motivated to be single, is able to live a self-controlled life, and is content in their singleness.

Whether you have the gift of singleness or not, every single person needs to be content in the current season of life and put off improper attitudes. If you are single, put off wrong thinking:

1. Frustration - I'm behind schedule.
2. Self-Pity - I'm undesirable.
3. Selfishness - I'm single and life revolves around me. I am not going to serve anyone else.

But the Lord also speaks to His church about improper attitudes toward singles.

1. Criticism - singleness is wrong.
2. Contempt - singleness is unworthy.
3. Suspicion - singleness is strange and unnatural. If people ask you, "Why are you still single?" or "You want to be married, right?", you are actually implying that marriage is a better state.
4. Fear - singleness is mysterious.

Yet, what we learn from Paul in this chapter is that singleness and marriage are both valuable; one is not superior to the other.

The question is: Do you think like Paul? Do you see your singleness as *valuable*? Or do you have such a strong yearning for marriage and to change your singleness that you don't place any value on your singleness? In fact, do you devalue it and always think the grass is greener on the other side of marriage? I encourage you to see that your spirituality and your identity are not determined by marital status. Seize this season of singleness to grow in your faith.

II. Singleness Has Its Challenges

A. Temptation

In verse 9, Paul exhorts singles to get married rather than burn with sexual desire....

Paula is a good pastor and he recognizes that many singles are going struggle with sexual desires. Rather than falling into sexual temptation, it's good for you to enjoy sexual relations in the context of marriage. God created sex to be enjoyed only in in marriage (verse 4 the rights of a spouse to give their bodies over to the other and to enjoy physical relations with their spouse).

Sexual desire of course is not the only reason why someone should get married, but it's a good reason to pursue marriage. There is one caveat to this. If you struggle with sexual purity as a single person, then getting married does not magically make the lust go away. You can find great satisfaction in your sexual relationship with your wife, but it's not a magical prescription to make your sexual struggles go away.

If you struggle with sexual sin now is the time to deal with it. I encourage you, to not fight this battle alone. A Christian man needs to get counsel and accountability from a godly man, likewise a Christian woman from another godly woman.

B. Idolatry

The apostle Paul writes in Romans 1:25, “They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen” One of the most twisted parts of our sinful nature is our tendency to make idols.

In our sin, we worship, serve, and build our lives around these false God *instead of* the true God. What you worship is shown in how you live your life—what you think, how you spend your time, what gets priority in your life. What are you worshipping? What are you building your life around? Is it God, or is it something else? Every Christian is capable of replacing the Creator with the things of this world. No one is beyond idolatry. Are you building your life around what matters eternally?

You must recognize the lies that turns a good thing into an idol. For example, there are lots of lies you can believe that take a good gift like marriage and turn it into an enormous idol: “I am incomplete if I am not married.” “I am of second importance if I remain single.” “I’ll never be happy if I don’t get married.” “When I get married, I won’t struggle with lust anymore—I’ll be satisfied.” “When I have a spouse, I’ll be more fruitful in ministry.” Etc., etc.

Do any of these lies sound familiar to you? And if so, what are you doing about them? If you haven’t thought much about your idols, a simple way to start is to write them out on paper. You might be surprised at how much more real they become when you find words to describe your idolatry.

Leave your future and your hope about marriage in the Lord’s hands. And use your time of singleness to learn how to know Christ and make Him known. God expects you to be faithful with what He has given your right now, not with what you hope He gives in the future. Matthew 6:33...

C. Loneliness

One the hardest parts about being single is loneliness. As a Christian, how do you deal with your loneliness? What are some of the lies about loneliness in the single life?

- “There must be something wrong with me if I am still alone” –The truth is loneliness is not an indicator of your merit or worth. It is how you feel, but the truth is you are not a victim but a victor in Jesus Christ.
- “God is far away OR God must not care for me if he has left me alone “– It’s tempting to think loneliness is the equivalent of God having abandoned you. But often times, we turn a blind eye to the many ways that God is caring for us. If this characterizes you, one thing you can do is to write out evidences of God’s grace in your life, and then stare at them for a while. Loneliness, not being married, being by yourself—these things should not be blinders to the good things that God is doing in your life.
- “No one understands how I feel nor cares to understand OR Nobody else seems to feel alone” - Really? In a church of over 400 people, do you really think you are the only one going through this? As a pastor who is on the front line of people’s problems, let me assure you that you are not the only one struggling with this. This church is your family. We shouldn’t be lonely, especially in a big family. God cares that you are struggling with your singleness. Asaph prayed in Psalm 73:25...
- “I will always be alone” – You don’t know your future. Only God does. He is completely sovereign, infinitely wise and perfect in His love for you. Don’t try to take the future out of God’s hands.
- “If I had a husband or a wife then I wouldn’t feel alone, because I have someone share my life and burdens” – The false assumption here is that only single people experience loneliness. But lots of married people struggle with loneliness, too. So don’t assume you’ve got a unique lock on loneliness.
- “Being alone is always a bad thing” – As an extrovert, I used to hate being by myself. No surprise, I read very little and spent all of my free time with people. But God has given me times where I alone (like when

I was writing this sermon alone in my office. Across from my desk is a big sign on my wall that says, “Be still, and know that I am God” Psalm 46:10.

Reading, praying reflecting on God and His Word, being silent before Him—these are all hard things to do in a crowd. Even as an extrovert, the Lord uses times of being alone to strengthen my relationship with Him. Is that the case for you? Are you ever okay with being alone, or is it always a bad thing for you?

Think about our Savior. We are told in Luke 5:16 that Jesus would retreat to quiet places by Himself in order to pray to His Father. How can you use your time alone for redemptive purposes?

And how does God speak to us about our loneliness? In Isaiah 41:1 the Lord says, “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.”

Psalm 46:1 “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Ps 46:1). The psalmist confesses that he must turn to the Lord in the midst of his trouble. God is his refuge – a place to hide and find solace in the midst of difficulty.

In speaking to His disciples, our Lord Jesus says in John 14:18, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”

Hebrews 13:5 reminds us, “Keep your life free from the love of money, and be content with what you have, for the Lord has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’.”

Singleness has its challenges, but:

III. Singleness Has Its Blessings

Let me share three blessings with you.

A. Devotion

1 Corinthians 7:32-34...

When you are married, apart from pleasing the Lord, one of your greatest priorities is pleasing and serving your spouse. A good marriage takes a lot of work, just like any good relationship. It requires vulnerability, transparency, self-sacrificial love, servant-heartedness, communication, kindness, time, and lots of energy. There is a level of intensity that comes along with “pleasing” a spouse that is very different than pleasing any of your friends. As a single adult, you’re free from the hard, daily work of building a good marriage.

The one relationship you need now is with Jesus Christ. In Matthew 13:44 Jesus gave a one sentence parable. He says, “The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”

Jesus tells us that story not to pity the man who sold everything, but to envy him because of what the man gained. Jesus is a treasure chest of eternal holy joy that never ends or expires.

In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul uses these three phrases to describe the freedom you have as a single adult to dedicate your life to God with singular purpose. As a single person, you have freedom to be concerned “about the things

of the Lord, how to please the Lord” (v. 32). Your aim is “to be holy in body and spirit” (v. 34) and to live with “undivided devotion to the Lord” (v. 35). The first blessing is devotion to Christ, the second is:

B. Discipleship

As a single person, you’ve got a freedom to invest in your spiritual growth in a way that will be harder when you are married. When I was single, I lived in the basement of a Christian family and watched how a Christ center home operated. As a single you can go on missions trips, read good Christian books, be active in evangelism and pour into discipleship relationships in a way that I can’t as a married adult. Don’t take this season for granted. Take advantage of it, especially for the sake of growing closer to Christ.

As a single person, recognize the benefit of discipleship – of being under the mentoring of others as well as investing in the lives of others.

In Hebrews 13:17, God commands us, “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”

If you are a single Christian man you have the freedom to act on your own initiative and ask a Christian woman out on a date. But the issue is not freedom; the issue is wisdom. For example, would it be wise for a college man to enter into a dating relationship without first seeking counsel from those watching over their souls? I think not.

However, this is not something most college men have ever been taught, especially those who didn’t grow up in a healthy local church. The only way they know how to date is as lone rangers.

I am not suggesting every dating relationship has to be “approved” by church leaders, or that every interaction between two college students needs to be chaperoned. But discipleship means it does mean that college men should welcome accountability and practical help to “walk in the light” as they date their sisters-in-Christ (1 John 1:7). It means that college men or women shouldn’t allow their relationships to lead them to neglect gathering with the local church for worship and service (Hebrews 10:25).

If we believe that involvement in a healthy local church is God’s primary plan for discipleship, then we must encourage life on life relationships where an older married couple can be involved in mentoring the younger couple before and during the dating process. The blessing of devotion, discipleship, and third:

C. Service

In Mark 10:42-45 Jesus said, “Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many.”

You’ve got a freedom to love and serve God by investing in our church community in ways that married adults often can’t. When Paul talks about gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, he says the point of our gifts is not personal gain, but for building up the body (1 Cor 12:7). Is that the way you think about your gift of singleness? Do you enjoy being single just simply for your personal gain, or do you see your singleness as a means to building up the body of Christ? You have the freedom to serve.

Let me close with a word to married couples and Christian families here. Open your home and your hearts to singles. Pray and look for opportunities to serve those who miss their family or who have no family to miss in the first place. Be intentional and plan ahead and invite one of two singles or a whole group to your place for a

meal and fellowship. We are all members of the same family, God's family. We will spend eternity in heaven around the same dinner table (Rev. 19:9). We don't have to wait until then. We can live out the eternal realities of the gospel here in the present. For those of you who are single, you are not alone. Know that Christ is with you and for you, and you know that we your church family love you and value you and are here for you.

Let's pray...