

Week 2

## **God's Plan for Singleness** (1 Cor 7:7; 32-35)

Last week we started a new series called "Chasing Love" and in this series we're learning how to navigate **Singleness, Dating, Relationships & Sex in a Confused Culture**. We're learning about this because one of the most life-shaping decades of our life is the decade between 13 and 23 years old so we can't afford to get it wrong when it comes to singleness, dating, love and sexual purity.

And if I would have known as a teenager what I'm about to share with you about *singleness*, it could have saved me from a LOT of mistakes, insecurities, and failed relationships.



*How many of you are single? How many are dating someone?*

Did you know: This generation of Americans will remain single longer than any other generation:

- Average American guy won't get married until he is about 30yrs old.
- Average girl won't get married until she's about 28yrs old.
- 1 out of 4 will still be single at 50 years of age.

But, for the first 20 years of our life, we're ALL single (or mostly single). And, in our teen years, we view singles as a curse. We think, "I'm the *nobody* who doesn't have *somebody*."

But the apostle Paul (a single guy) viewed his singleness in an entirely different way. He viewed it as a gift to embrace, not a curse to be avoided.

You see, Paul was a brilliant theologian, evangelist, church-planter, and traveling preacher. Many of the other apostles had wives/families, but Paul was single. And notice what he says about being single...

**1 Corinthians 7:7** "I wish that all were as I myself am [referring to his singleness]. **But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.**"

Paul is making the point that marriage is a good “gift from God,” but singleness is also a good “gift from God.” And he makes a surprising statement at the beginning of the verse: “I wish that ALL of you were single like me.”

Why would Paul want you to be single like him? He’ll tell us why in just a minute but first, we need to recognize that our culture is obsessed with two *conflicting* views about singleness...

ON ONE HAND, we live in a culture that is obsessed with marriage...

- “Are you seeing/dating anyone? Why not?”
- “If so, when are ya’ll going to get married?”
- “Now that you’re married, when are ya’ll going to have kids?”

Yes, marriage is a beautiful gift from God, but we treat married people like they’re the Varsity team, and if you don’t get married, something must be wrong with you so you’re stuck on the JV squad. And so, a lot of times in culture (even within the church), single people often feel like they are “lesser than.” You can hear it in the way we “console” single people: “*Oh, don’t worry, you’ll get married someday.*”

**Illustration:** I read about a Pastor who was single into his 30’s. He got so tired of hearing old ladies at weddings tell him, “Don’t worry, honey. You’re next,” that he started saying it back to them...*at funerals*. He’d look at the old ladies and say, “Don’t worry...you’re next!” Maybe that was a bit blunt, but his point is well taken. It’s exhausting to constantly receive pity for being single. So, on one hand our culture is obsessed with marriage.

BUT AT THE SAME TIME, our culture is obsessed with singleness. Not a *biblical* singleness, which means saving yourself for your future spouse. NO, our culture pushes a no-commitment singleness where you can have sex whenever and however it’s convenient for you with no strings attached.

So ya’ll are growing up with these two *conflicting* messages...

- 1) Get in a dating relationship NOW or something must be wrong with you, because a dating relationship will fix your emptiness and loneliness. And get married soon after you graduate because your spouse will “complete” you and bring ultimate fulfillment to your life.
- 2) Stay single and enjoy sex whenever and however it’s convenient

for you with no strings attached, because an unhindered sex-life will fix your emptiness and loneliness.

But God uses Paul (a single guy) to tell us that *biblical*/singleness AND marriage are both good gifts from God. But, while you're single (even if it's only a *season* of singleness), Paul says there are two benefits that you need to take full advantage of...

### **1. Singleness provides undistracted time to focus on your relationship with God.**

Look at verse 35... ***"I say this...not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord."***

You see, the biggest reason that God gives *EVERYONE* a season of singleness is because it allows **undivided devotion to the Lord**. As great as relationships/marriage are, they can distract us from an "undivided devotion to the Lord."

You may be thinking, "Can't I be devoted to the Lord and still be in a relationship with someone?" Paul is not slamming relationships or marriage; he's simply saying that relationships/marriage come with certain distractions while singleness allows you to have "undivided devotion to the Lord."

**Illustration:** Imagine all the times you've attended a worship service like this with other teenagers. For some of you, while the band leads worship, you read the words and sing along. As God's Word is read, you follow along, listening carefully and think about the meaning. And as I preach/teach, you analyze and apply what I'm saying.

But then there's others of us who attend the same service and you sit down by someone who is cute, or they at least have potential. And the entire time the band led worship, you were thinking, "I wonder how I look right now? Should I close my eyes? Raise my hands? Am I singing too loud? Wait, did our arms just touch? Did they do it on purpose? What could it mean?"

And as I'm preaching/teaching you're debating in your mind, "Should I hold my Bible for both of us to read? Would it be weird?"

And when you bow your heads to pray, you take a peek and think, "His shoes are really cool, and he smells SO good!" And throughout the entire service, you are completely distracted.

Now let me be clear, this doesn't mean that single people are more spiritual than those who are in a relationship or married. Paul is simply saying that while you're single, take full advantage of the fact that you can serve the Lord unhindered from all distractions that come with being in a relationship or marriage, which leads us to Paul's next point...

## **2. Singleness provides unique freedom to serve God.**

Paul explains in verses 32-34...

***1 Corinthians 7:32–34 "I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord.<sup>33</sup> But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife,<sup>34</sup> 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."***

The key word that Paul uses is "free." Free from what? Free from the obligations and responsibilities that come with relationships and marriage like: your job, bills, raising children, nurturing the relationship with your spouse, etc.

But, at this stage in your life (teen years), you don't have to worry about those things. You're free to focus on God and serve Him with total freedom, IF you take full advantage of your singleness. For example, single people are...

- **Free to GO whenever and wherever God leads.**
  - **Ethan Jones** (our recent summer intern) is single and free to go and serve the Lord ANYWHERE. He wants to be married (because it's a good gift) but while he is single he's focused on undistracted devotion to the Lord (Auburn, overseas, seminary in Kentucky, etc.)
- **Free to GIVE sacrificially to God.**
  - The poor widow in Mark 12:44 (who was single) gave all her money to God because she wanted to contribute to

the Kingdom of God. She didn't have all the obligations that come with a family so she could commit her undistracted time, talents, and resources to the Lord.

- **Free from causing unnecessary GRIEF**

- One reason Paul enjoyed being single was because he didn't want a wife and family to suffer because of him. You see, Paul was constantly traveling, preaching, and establishing churches. And he was constantly persecuted...
  - Beaten to the point of death 5 different times.
  - Stoned with large rocks and left for dead.
  - Shipwrecked and adrift at sea for days.
  - Betrayed and abused by so-called friends.
  - Often without food and shelter (2 Cor 11:24-28).

You see, constant traveling, speaking, and suffering is hard enough on a single person, but it's MUCH harder when you know you're leaving a family behind and causing them pain.

So, when this confused culture bombards you with two conflicting messages...

- 1) Get in a relationship NOW because dating/marriage will fix all of your loneliness and emptiness.
- 2) Stay single and enjoy sex *whenever* and *however* you want because unhindered sex will fulfill you!

REMEMBER, singleness and marriage within God's boundaries are good gifts from God, and they both have their advantages, BUT both are only temporary...

- **Marriage is only temporary** because Jesus said there will be no marriage in heaven (Mark 12:25).

*"Marriage is a temporary institution that finally gives way to the relationship to which it was pointing all along: Christ and the church—at which point marriage fades away. It becomes unnecessary, the way you no longer need a picture of someone when you finally see them face to face." – John Piper*

Marriage is a picture of salvation – the relationship between Christ and His Bride (the Church). And when we see Christ face to face, we no longer need the temporary picture.

- **Singleness is only temporary** because every believer will be part of the Bride of Christ in heaven which means that we will be in an undistracted, completely fulfilling relationship with Jesus for all eternity!
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### **Small Groups**