

Advantages of Singleness 1 Corinthians 7

There is often pressure put on single adults that is neither balanced or right based on the idea that somehow your single adults are missing out and your life is incomplete unless you are married. While marriage is normal and the more common state of adults, that does not make singleness abnormal. All married adults spent time as single adults and will do so again unless the couple dies at the same time. And while most adults prefer marriage, that does not make being single inferior or incomplete. I hope to show you today that being single can have a lot of advantages if you will make use of them.

I did not get married until I was 29, so I spent about a decade as a single adult. Even after getting married, I specifically ministered in a singles ministry for a couple of years as one of my responsibilities as an associate pastor. As a Senior Pastor, I have also had a lot of interaction with singles, and especially since the college/career Bible study has been meeting in my home. While I am a bit of romantic and advocate marriage, I am also a strong advocate for singles to rejoice in their current situation of life and take full advantage of the greater opportunities that exist for those who are single.

Stating that being single is advantageous almost sounds ludicrous given the strong pressures that can be placed on singles to pair up with someone and get married. Those pressures come from many sources. Here are some of them - not given in any particular order. (Ask what pressures they get from either outside or internal that they should be married)

- A) Friends who are engaged or married that want you to experience the joy they have in being married or at least engaged.
- B) Parents that either do not think you are really mature / an adult until you are married
- C) Parents that want grandchildren and you are the means to that end
- D) Self pressure driven by the desire to have children - a greater pressure on women whose biological clock is ticking
- E) Societal pressure that you should be like the majority of other people. This may be subtle or overt - from movies that portray marriage as the resolution that grants "happy ever after" - to couples only events.
- F) Sexual tension - made worse in a sex saturated society such as ours which promotes the lie that you must be sexually active to be complete / fulfilled / happy.
- G) Internal pressure from feeling left out or rejected - in which marriage would include you in social functions / prove you are worthwhile & accepted.
- H) Internal pressure generated by lies - ranging from "you must be gay" to "what is wrong with you that you are still not married?" to ?
- I) Internal pressure generated by a desire to be married for a variety of good reasons such as companionship, synergistic ministry /work, learning to understand God's love by loving someone else in a similar manner, godly fulfillment of sexual desire, etc.

Related to these kinds of pressures is a lot of poor or bad reasons that people do get married including: (taken from *Before You Say I Do* workbook)

- a. To spite or get back at your parents
- b. Because of a negative self-image - marrying your fiancé will make you feel worthwhile and will give meaning to your life.
- c. To be a therapist or counselor to your fiancé (Rescue / hero syndrome)
- d. Fear of being left out! Being left as a bachelor or an old maid!
- e. Fear of independence
- f. Marrying on the rebound - you were hurt in a former love relationship and to ease your hurt you immediately choose another
- g. Fear of hurting the other person - you're afraid of what will happen to your fiancé if you break up even though you know that marriage is not the answer
- h. To escape an unhappy home
- i. Because you or your fiancé is pregnant
- j. Because you have had sex

A good marriage is an obvious advantage in many areas - a bad marriage is full of many disadvantages in many areas. What usually is not talked about are the advantages of being single. There are many and Paul points out some of those in 1 Corinthians 7.

1 Corinthians is a letter of correction to a very dysfunctional church. They were divided into many factions; intimidated by non-Christians who were wealthy, in positions of power or intellectual; remained spiritually immature and fleshly; judgmental of one another in some areas, while tolerant of even gross immorality in other areas; still practicing aspects of paganism - including going to the temple prostitutes; taking one another to court; and confused about a host of other issues including singleness and marriage - which Paul addresses in chapter 7.

I want read through 1 Corinthians 7, briefly commenting as I go, then go back and highlight some of the verses that distinctly indicate advantages to being single and then relate those to some other passages.

1 Corinthians 7 (NASB95)

1 Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman. (He is referring to sexual intimacy, not shaking hands or giving a platonic hug. This is specific to being single, for his instructions to the married in the next few verses is the opposite)
2 But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband. (See verse 7 - better to mar³ **The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband.** **4 The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.** **5 Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.** **6 But this I say by way of concession, not of command.** (An important section to understand aspects of the sexual component in marriage)

7 Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that. **8 But I say to the unmarried and to widows that**

it is good for them if they remain even as I. (Here and throughout the chapter, Paul advocates the advantages he has found in being single. Note that as a Pharisee, it is most likely that Paul had been married at one time - no mention of his wife in scripture and therefore what may have happened to her - death? Left him? Note as well that he alludes to both being single or married as a gift from God)

(In verses 9-16, Paul address issues in marriage including separation and being unequally yoked)

9 But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn with passion. 10 But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband 11 (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife. 12 But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. 13 And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away. 14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy. 15 Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace. 16 For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?

(In this section, Paul addresses the foundation of contentment - trusting God in whatever situation you are in - circumcised or uncircumcised, slave or free, and by inference in the context, married or unmarried) ***17 Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk. And so I direct in all the churches. 18 Was any man called when he was already circumcised? He is not to become uncircumcised. Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? He is not to be circumcised. 19 Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God.*** (A important statement of a universal truth. Godly people have a primary concern in obeying God instead of pleasing others or even themselves). *20 Each man must remain in that condition in which he was called. 21 Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that. 22 For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave. 23 You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. 24 Brethren, each one is to remain with God in that condition in which he was called.*

(Paul addresses issues related to the unmarried getting married - and again expresses his advocacy the advantages of being single. Some of these advantages are specifically due to a rising persecution they were experiencing - "the present distress") ***25 Now concerning virgins I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy. 26 I think then that this is good in view of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is. 27 Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife. 28 But if you marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you. 29 But this I say, brethren, the time has been shortened, so that from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none; 30 and those who weep, as though they did not weep; and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as though they did not possess; 31 and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form of this world is passing away. 32 But I want you to be free from***

concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; 33 but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, 34 and his interests are divided. The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband. 35 This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is appropriate and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord. 36 But if any man thinks that he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin daughter, if she is past her youth, and if it must be so, let him do what he wishes, he does not sin; let her marry. 37 But he who stands firm in his heart, being under no constraint, but has authority over his own will, and has decided this in his own heart, to keep his own virgin daughter, he will do well. 38 So then both he who gives his own virgin daughter in marriage does well, and he who does not give her in marriage will do better. 39 A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. 40 But in my opinion she is happier if she remains as she is; and I think that I also have the Spirit of God.

Here are advantages of singleness as listed by Paul

vs. 25-32 It is good to be single in times of distress / persecution - But it is not wrong to marry
Why would that be good? He specifically states in verse 28 that it is to spare them from trouble and in verse 32 it is to free them from concern. What trouble & concerns might be included in these ideas? Let them give their ideas:

vs 32-35 The unmarried are free from concerns about:

Pleasing a husband / wife (vs. 33, 34)

The things of this world (vs. 33, 34)

Divided interest (vs. 34)

Being distracted in devotion to the Lord (vs. 35)

The unmarried are free to have greater concern about:

The things of the Lord (vs 32, 34)

Please the Lord (vs. 32)

Pursuit of holiness in body and spirit (vs. 34)

What is appropriate (vs. 35)

Undistracted devotion to the Lord (vs. 35)

vs. 36-40 He does not sin to let his daughter marry (vs. 36)

He does well if he keeps his daughter unmarried (vs. 37)

He does well in giving her in marriage, he does better if he does not (vs. 38)

Widows are free to remarry if she wishes as long as it is in the Lord (vs. 39)

Paul thinks the widow will be happier if she remains unmarried (vs. 40)

What other advantages can you think of in being single?

The “gift” of singleness - Matthew 19:3-12

Vs. 3 Jesus is tested by Pharisees about the issue of divorce - “Is it lawful to divorce for any reason at all?”

Vs. 4-6 Jesus goes back to Genesis that God’s design is for marriage to be for life - *what therefore God has joined together, let no man separate*

vs. 7 They question why then Moses “commanded to give her a certificate of divorce. . .”

Vs. 8-9 Jesus tells them it was because of *your hardness of heart* - that is not God’s design from the beginning. Divorce for a reason other than pornea results in more adultery

vs. 10 The disciples conclude it is better then not to marry (reveals their poor view of marriage)

vs. 11 - 12 *11 But He said to them, “Not all men can accept this statement, **but only those to whom it has been given.** 12 “For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother’s womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to accept this, let him accept it.”*

This has resulted in the idea of the “gift of singleness” - but from 1 Corinthians 7:7, Paul is clear that both marriage and singleness are both gifts from God.

Jesus’ statement, and Paul’s arguments in 1 Cor. 7, are both clear that singleness can be fulfilling and even have advantages “*for the sake of the kingdom of heaven*” in serving the Lord. To state this another way, being single can and should be a blessing, not a curse. However, it is not a gift everyone has for others have a different gift (a husband or wife), and the “gift” of singleness may only be for a season.

It seems the main characteristic in it being a gift is in the greater service and devotion to the Lord that it allows, so a person with this “gift,” should exhibit it in that manner in some way. If that is not true, then either it needs to become true as the advantages of singleness are pursued, or there needs to be a more serious quest to get married - which will require some soul searching some maturing, and some diligence in pursuit of it for it to be fulfilled - I will talk about this more later.

Contentment in being single (or any other condition) is in growing in your knowledge and understanding of God and learning to trust Him - as we saw in the earlier seminar session. If you are discontent, the solution lies in greater knowledge of the attributes of God so that you have greater trust in Him rather than quickly finding a spouse, for until you are content as a single, you will not be content in marriage. Contentment is a godly characteristics that transcends marriage status - and all other circumstances of life.

Example: If you are discontent being single, consider Psalm 84:11–12, ¹¹ *For the LORD God is a sun and shield; The LORD gives grace and glory; No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly.* ¹² *O LORD of hosts, How blessed is the man who trusts in You!*

God does not withhold from those who walk uprightly - if you think marriage would be better for you, then the starting place in pursuing it is personal holiness - and then watch how God brings you what is good. (Of course, as you become more godly, your desperation to be married may also diminish or even disappear).

Use the advantages of your singleness to grow in the Lord and serve Him. That will be a blessing to you and others whether you ever marry or not. Consider that God may even be withholding marriage from you so that you will grow spiritually and not make someone else's life miserable.

Read or listen to the material by Elizabeth Elliot related to singleness. She became more godly as a result of her college and early adulthood experience of the man who wanted to marry her deciding to pursue additional training and ministry instead. Of becoming a young widow on the mission field. Of eventually remarrying thirteen years later, only to quickly become a widow again as her second husband got sick, wasted away and died. (And you thought you had it rough)

To take advantage of being single, you need to embrace life fulling now - do not pine for being married as if your life will not start until then. Do not project into the future in such a way that it hinders you in the present.

Consider the opportunities that you can pursue in the present because you are not married. You have more time and finances are not as much of a concern since your needs are much less.

- *greater time in study of God's word so that you will know Him (I pursued Seminary)
- *greater time in devotion and worship of God increasing your love for Him
- *greater time and focus to service the Lord according to the gifts He has given you - which increases your trust of Him (I was able to work a Summer Camp, explore different area of ministry, take on greater ministry roles, develop leadership skills)
- *What practical areas can you think of in both ministry and personal development??? Education, travel (short term missions trips), reading, learn a new skill / develop current ones (music? Foreign language? Etc.), volunteer for? Don't waste on mourning being single - live 100% for God.

What about the difficulties of being single?

Loneliness - develop your friendships. They are fulfilling in themselves, and if you want to get married, foundational for a good marriage is a good friendship

Consider again the earlier session on friendship

Feel left out of the group? Be a blessing to the group - and develop greater circle of friends

No children - be the adopted aunt / uncle to someone else's kids - many families could use the help, and many kids are in single parent families that could use the direction of another adult.

Resources

Book: *A Single Thought* by Allen Hadidian, 1981

Some used copies still available on Amazon at a reasonable price.

Elizabeth Elliot books / recordings

Passion and Purity (on / off / on courtship with Jim Elliot)

Through the Gates of Splendor (how she became a widow)

Loneliness (dealing with being a widow)

www.elizabethelliott.org

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Introduction

Pressures to Get Married

Poor / Bad Reasons to Get Married

1 Corinthians - Introduction

1 Corinthians 7

Advantages of singleness - 1 Corinthians 7
vs. 25-32

vs 32-35

vs. 36-40

Advantages You Can Think of -

The “Gift” of Singleness - Matthew 19:3-12

Contentment in Being Single

Using the Advantages of Being Single

Difficulties of Singleness

Loneliness

Feeling Left Out of the Group

No Children

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