

Class #9: Singleness to the Glory of God

Sunday, March 10, 2019 | Geoffrey R. Kirkland

The Bible makes it clear that our singleness – even temporary singleness – is a gift from our Heavenly Father to secure a deep and undivided devotion to him (Marshall Segal)

“Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as you can.” (John Wesley)

“One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord ... 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” (1 Corinthians 7:32, 35).

Marriage is *not* the ultimate prize for singles. Neither is power, prestige or comfort. The ultimate prize for singles is *Jesus Christ the Lord*.

“Undivided devotion to Christ is, by far, the best deal of the single season.” (Carolyn Mahaney)

Introduction

A recent study conducted by the health insurance company *Cigna* surveyed twenty thousand people and found that 54% of respondents said that they always or sometimes feel like no one really knows them well. And 40% of respondents felt like they “lacked companionship” and their “relationships aren’t meaningful.”

It’s true, our face-to-face relationships continue to be on the decline, with the institution of marriage being a less popular institution today than it was in the past (today about 50% of adults are married, a decline from 72% in 1960). The average household is growing smaller as well. More than 25% of the population now lives alone, compared to 13% in 1960.

We are isolating more and more and, consequently, loneliness is prevalent in our culture, and it’s prevalent in our churches too.

Some common struggles of singles:

1. Discouragement
2. Expectations
3. Isolationism
There's no unchecked life like the single life. It can be very easy to live wildly and unwisely when we live in isolation. Our flesh wants us to eat more of this, drink more of that, buy more of this, and watch more of that.
4. Time-wasting (lack of accountability)
5. Idolatry (work/schedule/self; a 'workaholic' mentality)
6. Fear
Our anxiety tells God we're not happily content to have him and his fatherly plan (and timing) for our lives.
7. Loneliness
Unwanted singleness can be very lonely, and loneliness can be very miserable. In those moments, the really compelling lie is that marriage will be the most satisfying solution. Sadly, looking to marriage and a spouse to fill the hole only God can fill will only leave you more depressed and hurt. God graciously gives us another answer for joy. Nothing and no one and no work and no hobby can fill the *joy* that Christ alone can provide!

Advantages to Singleness

Singleness is a GIFT from God & a GRACE from God (it's divinely given, graced, endowed).

1. Matthew 19:10-12 — Jesus teaches on eunuchs (singles).

Three points to remember:

1. Born that way from the mother's womb (unable to get married & procreate)
 - a. Undeveloped sexual capacity
2. Those who became eunuchs by men
 - a. Male harem guards of the day -- in some ANE religions, to castrate a man was a way of pleasing/serving a pagan deity. Even parents had their kids castrated for that purpose

3. Those who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven
 - a. This is the person who enjoys singleness because the gift of God has been given to them.
 - b. Jesus said in Matt 19:12 - whoever can accept it, let him accept it.
 - c. The idea of “accept” means to completely embrace an idea or principle with the heart and mind so that it becomes part of your very nature. In other words, this is the opposite of the person who is bitter, angry, resentful.

Celibate singleness is a kind of spiritual gift (1 Cor 7.7) **and only those to whom it has been given can survive & find happiness in this life** as they serve Christ with undistracted devotion (1 Cor 7:35).

2. 1 Corinthians 7 — Counsel to the unmarried

- Paul, a single man, wishes that all were as he was, but each has his own *gift* from God, one in this manner and another in that.
- The word for “gift” from God [*charisma*; χάρισμα ἐκ Θεοῦ]. This highlights the *unmerited, undeserved, *gracious* spiritual gift from God to His people.*
 - Same word for spiritual gifts in Rom 12:6; 1 Cor 12:4, 31; 1 Pet 4:10
 - This is the only place in the Bible where singleness is called a *gift* — and a *good* gift — which may be surprising to some (1 Cor 7:7, 8).
 - 1 Peter 4:10 — It says, “As each has received a gift [*charisma*; same word as 1 Cor 7:7], use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.” The NIV translates this passage as “faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.”
 - Singleness is a gift for the common good of others.
- Verse 32 - Paul wants the Corinthian believers to be “free from concern” (free from worry/anxiety).
- If you are unmarried, Paul assumes you are concerned about the things of the LORD, how he may please the Lord (1 Cor 7:32).
- Verse 34 - the unmarried person is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be *holy both in body and spirit.*
 - There’s a vigilant pursuit of holiness both *spiritually* (in soul) and *physically* (in service)
- Verse 35 - Paul’s desire for singles is to devote themselves *fully* to God!
 - Here, Paul is not *commanding* being single, since he recognizes the single state as a gift which God only gives to some (7:7-9); but he is strongly *commending* it, since it was a gift he himself had, and since it provides a number of advantages for serving the Lord that being married precludes. (Steven Cole)

Verse 35b in English translations:

NASB: “to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord”

NIV: “undivided devotion to the Lord

NLT: “with as few distractions as possible”

GNT: "without any reservation"

NET: "notable and constant service to the Lord"

3. Luke 2:36-39 — Anna, the prophetess and single woman devoted to God *without reservation*

- We know nothing of her family (other than her tribe, of Asher, daughter of Phanuel)
- An older woman, married 7 years, now a widow to the age of 84! (v.37)
- What did she **do** -- how did she spend her **time**?
 - Never left the temple (constant, habitual worshiper with God's people) (v.37)
 - Served night and day in the temple (performed religious work, service to the Lord)
 - Fasted and prayed (v.37)
 - She openly was giving thanks/praise (an emphatic, rare verb meaning: to openly sing loudly, to openly/publicly/loudly give thanks) to God (v.38)
 - She was speaking concerning God to all those waiting for Jerusalem's redemption (v. 38)

Singleness has some practical advantages...

- It allows much greater freedom in where and how a person serves the Lord.
- He is freer to move around and to set his own hours/schedule.
- He is not as distracted with the cares of this world as a married person is.
- He can uniquely minister to marrieds and families in ways that are thoughtful, creative and specifically helpful.

Singleness has fewer hindrances and more advantages to serving the Lord. It is easier for a single person to be singleminded in the things of the Lord. The married Christian has no choice. His interests must be divided. He cannot be faithful to the Lord if he is unfaithful to his family (John MacArthur).

"Singleness is not a calling to extend irresponsible adolescence into your thirties. It is a calling to do what only single men and women in Christ can do in this world, namely, to display by the Christ-exalting devotion of your singleness the truths about Christ and his kingdom that shine more clearly through singleness than through marriage." (John Piper)

Some questions for the single man to ask himself:

1. how can I devote my time to serve my church?
2. how can I grow in undistracted devotion to the Lord?
3. how can I utilize my time for Christ and for His glory?
4. how can I minister in ways that other folks may not be able to?
5. how can I disciple spiritual children in the faith?
6. how can I intercede for others prayerfully and thoughtfully?

The single person **can** be the most *devoted* person to the local church.

Biblical Counsel to Singles

Singles must remember this! Your identity is *not* being single; but being *saved*. Your real identity is *not* that you're single, not-yet-married, widowed, or divorced. If God has saved you, your identity is this: *you are In Christ!*

How should every Christian single (regardless of age) live their life?

4 pastoral counsels.

1. Trust God's Providence Fully

- Rest in the Lord's kind power, goodness & timing.
- We tend to wrongly interpret why we feel as we do. We think we need ____ (fill in the blank) for the ache to go away, but all of these _____ (s) are shadows of the reality. Friends and other companions may be a wonderful blessing, but they are neither ultimate nor adequate for a heart made for God. Loneliness acts like a divine sticky note that says, "Don't forget for whom you were made." (Steve DeWitt).
- DeWitt continues: "I may not have a wife, but I have Christ. You may not have a husband, but you have Christ. You may be separated from family, but you have Christ. You may be a widow, but you have Christ. You may be rejected by a spouse, but you have Christ. And since you and I are made for him, to have him is to have his Spirit as a guarantee that someday I won't ever feel lonely again.

2. Ingest God's Word Relentlessly

- Consume ; Ingest (swallow); Devour ; Swallow the Word; Crave it, consume it, consider it, do it.
- "Take heed to thyself. Your own soul is your first and greatest care. You know a sound body alone can work with power; much more a healthy soul. Keep a clear conscience through the blood of the Lamb. Keep up close communion with God. Study likeness to Him in all things. Read the Bible for your own growth first, then for your people.

Expound much; it is through the truth that souls are to be sanctified, not through essays upon the truth. Be easy of access, apt to teach, and the Lord teach you and bless you in all you do and say. You will not find many companions. Be the more with God. My dear people are anxiously waiting for you. The prayerful are praying for you. Be of good courage; there remaineth much of the land to be possessed. Be not dismayed, for Christ shall be with thee to deliver thee. Study Isa vi, and Jer i, and the sending of Moses, and Ps li 12, 13, and John xv 26, 27 and the connection in Luke 1. 15,16. . . .
" [Robert Murray M'Cheyne, a letter dated March 22, 1839, to Rev W.C. Burns]

3. Storm God's Throne Tirelessly

- The time in the morning, at night, on weekends, to pray to God!
 - Individually, corporately, at the prayer meeting, with others, serve families.
- Consider the single man who never married, Robert Murray M'Cheyne:
 - "I ought to pray before seeing any one. Often when I sleep long, or meet with others early, it is eleven or twelve o'clock before I begin secret prayer. This is a wretched system. It is unscriptural. Christ arose before day and went into a solitary place. David says: 'Early will I seek thee'; 'Thou shalt early hear my voice.' Family prayer loses much of its power and sweetness, and I can do no good to those who come to seek from me. The conscience feels guilty, the soul unfed, the lamp not trimmed. Then when in secret prayer the soul is often out of tune, I feel it is far better to begin with God—to see his face first, to get my soul near him before it is near another."
 - "Rose early to seek God and found Him whom my soul loveth. Who would not rise early to meet such company?" [Journal: 23 February 1834]
 - Again, "Devoted chief part of Friday to fasting. Humbled and refreshed." (Journal: Sept 27)
 - During his first years in Dundee, he often rode out in an afternoon to the ruined church of Invergowrie, to enjoy an hour's perfect solitude; for he felt meditation and prayer to be the very sinews of his work.
 - "April 16—Sabbath Evening.—Much prayer and peace. Reading the Bible only."

4. Live God's Glory Undistractedly

- Sacrificially ; without distraction; without impediment.
 - Like Anna (Luke 2:36-38) -- full, total, constant, joyful, spoken devotion to God!
- From an elder Christian giving advice to singles:
 - My counsel to those of you who are single is to invest your time and your resources to serve Christ. Listen. If you are single, you ought to be the ones in the

church who are burning it at both ends. You ought to be the ones who are giving your time and your energy and your effort to serve Christ, because that is why right now you are single. It is a time for you to grow and mature and develop. It is a time for you to pour yourself into the ministry and the service of Christ. You single men who waste your evenings playing video games, and you single women who hole up in your house or apartment reading, are missing out on a huge opportunity. You are not single so that you can prolong your adolescence and postpone becoming a man or a woman. You are single so that you can serve Christ. You are single so that you can devote yourself to please and honor and glorify Him. So rather than caring for the things of the Lord, how the Lord can be pleased, often today what we see is singleness is an excuse to care for the things of self—how people can please themselves.

Some memorable & thoughtful principles for singles:

- ✓**LOOK UP** - to God
- ✓**TAKE IN** - the Scripture
- ✓**GO OUT** - serve others
- ✓**BOW DOWN** - in prayer
- ✓**PRESS FORWARD** - live God's glory undistractedly

Encouragements for Singles

1. Don't waste your singleness with trivial 'time-wasters'.
2. Take advantage of spontaneity and look for ways to serve in uncommon ways!
When the spouse doesn't exist, you can't hurt them with your selfless, impulsive decisions. Be willing to say Yes! and bless others, even when you don't always feel like it.
3. Do your work well and consume your precious time wisely.
4. Spend time for the Lord with others -- Don't be single & live in solitude (that is, *absent* from your local church family).
Think about it, though he was never married, Paul did most of his ministry with someone. Find the trusted, gifted, and mission-minded friends in your life and be accountable to one another to make your not-yet married life matter for the kingdom. Following Christ was never meant to be done alone, even when you're single.
5. Satisfy your soul with Jesus & find your identity in union *with Him*.

-- Marshall Segal

ALL MEN — married and single — *MUST PURSUE SEXUAL PURITY* [with holy violence!]

5 SERIOUS WARNINGS! —

1. beware lest you fall (1 Pet 5.8)
2. Lust is a serious sin (Matt 5.27-28)
3. The Lord is the avenger (1 Thess 4.3-7)
4. sexual sins destroy its victims (Prov 5.3-5; Prov 5.20-23; Prov 6.32-33; Prov 7.22-27)
5. Moral perversion degrades and enslaves (Rom 1.18-32)

5 ACTION STEPS! (what to do) —

1. admit your sin and take FULL responsibility (Ps 51:4; 1 Cor 10:13)
2. acknowledge that lust is a lie (false promises of sin, Satan)
3. alter your lifestyle to avoid temptation (Phil 4.8)
4. Anchor your heart in the Word of God (Eph 6:17; Col 3:16)
5. Ask others to hold you accountable (Gal 6.1)

Give yourself to Christ and His people in your local church:

Hear the counsel from Pastor Spurgeon:

Give yourself to the Church! You that are members of the Church have not found it perfect and I hope that you feel almost glad that you have not. If I had never joined a Church till I had found one that was perfect, I would never have joined one at all! And the moment I did join it, if I had found one, I should have spoiled it, for it would not have been a perfect Church after I had become a member of it. Still, imperfect as it is, it is the dearest place on earth to us...

All who have first given themselves to the Lord, should, as speedily as possible, also give themselves to the Lord's people. How else is there to be a Church on the earth? If it is right for anyone to refrain from membership in the Church, it is right for everyone, and then the testimony for God would be lost to the world!

As I have already said, the Church is faulty, but that is no excuse for your not joining it, if you are the Lord's. Nor need your own faults keep you back, for the Church is not an institution for perfect people, but a sanctuary for sinners saved by Grace, who, though they are saved, are still sinners and need all the help they can derive from the sympathy and guidance of their fellow Believers.

The Church is the nursery for God's weak children where they are nourished and grow strong. It is the fold for Christ's sheep—the home for Christ's family.”

Mark it, all men -- including marrieds and singles:

1. Real men love the church in spite of its flaws.
2. Real men know the Church is the Bride of Christ.
3. Real men hunger for the Word preached in the Church.
4. Real men serve without expecting repayment [or recognition].
5. Real men love the saints with brotherly and undying affection.

In whatever church we are in, we must be **CHURCHMEN** — men who are zealous to see the local body grow in Christlikeness and bring glory to God.

Spurgeon continued on this:

If you have given yourself to the Lord, give yourself, next, to his people, that you may, with them, bear witness for Christ. Here is a certain number of people who, with all their faults, are the true followers of Christ. Join them and say, “I TOO am a follower of Christ. That is what membership with the Church means. It is as if you should say: “IF the world is divided into two camps, I am on the side of King Jesus, and under HIS banner I will fight as one of those who bear witness to the Truths of God that He has revealed.”

Final admonition & plea to singles:

- ➔ **Set** your souls upon this Christ!
- ➔ **Live** your life for this Christ!
- ➔ **Devote** your energy to this Christ!
- ➔ **Invest** your self to the Body of Christ!
- ➔ **Comfort** your soul in the promises of this Christ!

John Flavel pastorally reminds us of *Christ*, our ultimate lover & bridegroom:

“Christ is the very essence of all delights and pleasures, the very soul and substance of them. As all the rivers are gathered into the ocean, which is the meeting-place of all the waters in the world, so Christ is that ocean in which all true delights and pleasures meet.

He is altogether lovely, the every part to be desired. He is lovely when taken together, and in every part; as if she had said, “Look on him in what respect or particular you wish; cast your eye upon this lovely object, and view him any way, turn him in your serious thoughts which way you wish; consider his person, his offices, his works, or any other thing belonging to him; you will find him altogether lovely, There is nothing disagreeable in him, there is nothing lovely without him... And, Christ is altogether lovely, in the relation of a Bridegroom.”

