

NEXT: The Gospel and the Next Generation

Singleness and the Next Generation

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Singleness and the Next Generation 1 Corinthians 7:1-40

If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, I invite you to open with me to 1 Corinthians 7. Over the last few weeks we have gone from Psalm 78, where we are commanded from God to be intentional about passing the gospel unto the next generation, to consider how we do that as biblical men, biblical women, biblical marriages, biblical parenting—how all of these things affect the way we pass the gospel unto the next generation, now leading today to singleness in the next generation.

I come to this topic with so many different thoughts in my mind that I'm wrestling in and have been praying through. I know that there is a temptation for some to tune me out this morning. There's a temptation for some who are single to tune me out, look at me and say, "When were you married?" I was 21 when Heather invaded my singleness for good and so there's temptation for some to say, "Well, you don't know much about singleness." I know that there are all kinds of people around this room that I don't know and I don't presume to know circumstances where you find yourself in.

I know there are singles in their 20's and singles in their 70's who have never been married, and everywhere in between. I know there are numerous people who are divorced; many who are single parents. I know there are a variety of folks who are widowed who have experienced a husband or a wife passing away. I don't presume in any way to know each of the different circumstances that might be represented around this room. My only hope is to know the Word and to speak not based on my experience, which is never a foundation for... If that were the foundation ever, then you would be coming to listen to my opinions and my thoughts and you would be wasting your time week by week. The Word alone is good so I want to be faithful to this Word. I want to share this Word, communicate this Word and pray that God, by His Spirit, would take His Word and apply it appropriately all across this room.

And I know there's a temptation for those who are married to tune me out—to think, "Oh, that was kind of him to address singleness. Gave me a week off that particular Sunday." Not the case because as you're going to see, we're going to talk about marriage some as well, though our focus is obviously on singleness. And marriage... Those of us who are married, we need a far better understanding on what Scripture says about singleness and how this all correlates together with even how we who are married and even we who are married and have kids are to be passing the gospel on to the next generation because God has designed this whole picture of marriage and singleness both to portray His gospel and demonstrate His glory—be a part of passing the gospel on to the next generation and all nations. We have this tendency to think, "Well, parents are the ones who are responsible for passing the gospel on to the next generation." That's not what Scripture's teaching. I want to show you that singleness has everything to do with passing the gospel on to the next generation and to all nations for that matter.

So I want us together then to come to the Word. And we're going to see Paul just go right in the face of our culture in 1 Corinthians 7. We're going to see Paul say some things that

sound outlandish. And let's just be honest from the beginning. If Paul were here today, we would think he was a bit odd. I mean, this leader in the church, single? Why is he single? Is it his looks? Is he just not very smart? Socially struggling? Or are his standards a little too high? There's got to be a reason why he's not found a wife.

And that kind of thinking is problematic. It shows that we reflect in our minds far more... We reflect what the world says about singleness and marriage and what the Word says about singleness and marriage. So I want us to listen to Paul. Paul is actually going to advocate singleness across the board. So I want us to receive that and consider that in light of the whole of Scripture.

So we're about to read all of 1 Corinthians 7 which in some cases feels like a bit of a mistake. Because, as we read through this chapter, there are so many different questions that are going to arise in your mind because this chapter addresses so many different things and many things that we're not going to have time to address this morning. And so at the risk of creating more questions than not, I want us to read 1 Corinthians 7 and I want us to think specifically then about this issue—singleness.

We come to 1 Corinthians 7. What's happening here is Paul's writing a letter. Coming in the middle of that letter to the church at Corinth, a young church and a very pagan culture. A culture—Corinth—filled with sexual immorality and perversion, prostitution. And so Paul is addressing this young church. Now the thing is when we read a letter from Paul, we're only really getting one side of the conversation. And Paul is addressing questions that are being asked, issues that need to be addressed. But we don't always know exactly the questions that he's answering when he's writing. It's kind of like listening to a phone conversation from one side; you don't know what's being said on the other side. All you're hearing is one side of the conversation. That's what's happening when we read a letter from Paul like this.

And so we've got some challenges. Part of it's what Bible study is. It's getting into the Word as best as we can to understand the context, considering how the Word is applying to them and then considering how it applies to us by the power of God's Spirit. So with that aim in mind, let's read this chapter and think about singleness and the next generation.

Verse 1. *"Now concerning the matters about which you wrote..."* So this is already obviously referencing something that had been written.

It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

Now as a concession, not a command, I say this. I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.

To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.

To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) [meaning he's not quoting from Jesus like he was just a second ago] that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches. Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God. Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called. Were you a bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) For he who was called in the Lord as a bondservant is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a bondservant of Christ. You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants of men. So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.

Now concerning the betrothed, I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. I think that in view of the present distress it is good for a person to remain as he is. Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you do marry, you have not sinned, and if a betrothed woman marries, she has not sinned. Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that. This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.

I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, 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. I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.

If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed, if his passions are strong, and it has to be, let him do as he wishes: let them marry—it is no sin. But whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity but having his desire under control, and has determined this in his heart, to keep her as his betrothed, he will do well. So then he who marries his betrothed does well, and he who refrains from marriage will do even better.

A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. Yet in my judgment she is happier if she remains as she is. And I think that I too have the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 7).

Let's pray. God, there's a lot we just read in your Word that brings about all different kinds of thoughts and questions so we express our total dependence on your Spirit to teach us this morning. We pray that over the next few moments in each of our lives as many who are single, as many who are married, that you would help us to understand specifically what you would show us in your Word about singleness and that you would by your Spirit apply that to our hearts and our lives today for the spread of the gospel to the next generation and all nations. We trust you by your Spirit to bring clarity to our minds and hearts and specifically to each situation represented around this room. Help us. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

Four Foundations for Biblical Singleness...

Okay. Four foundations for biblical singleness, and this is where we're going to camp out most of our time and we're going to let that springboard into just flying through reasons to delight in singleness. But these foundations are, well, they're just that—they're foundational.

Both Singleness and Marriage are Good

Number one. Both singleness and marriage are good. This is key. Both singleness and marriage are good. Seems like a simple statement. That's certainly what Paul is saying when he says in chapter 7:8, when he says, "*To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am.*" He's talking about marriage as a concession and he's advocating singleness as good.

Now, that seems simple but on the pages of Scripture, this kind of picture is huge when you put it all together...when you put all together everything that we have read. You remember, and we don't have time to turn to all these places, but you remember a few weeks ago when we were in Genesis 1, 2 and 3. We were talking about biblical manhood and biblical womanhood. And we saw in Genesis 1:27-28, "*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them... [And then verse 28 says] And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.'*"

Now how do you do that? Well, you get to Genesis 2:24 and it says, "*Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.*" That's the answer on how you multiply and fill the earth in the context of a marriage relationship between a man and a woman—that you'll multiply and fill the earth. And this is the picture of God's blessing. He blessed Adam and Eve for that purpose. He blessed them and gave them this command. "*Be fruitful and multiply.*" And as you go throughout the rest of Genesis you see the same thing.

You fast forward to Genesis 12:1-3 and God blesses Abraham. He says, "I'm going to bless you and your offspring." How is God's blessing going to be evident in Abraham's life? Certainly in the land—He promised to give him land but also in descendants. God said, "I'm going to give you descendants." He gave the promise to Abraham, then Isaac in Genesis 26:4, Jacob in Genesis 28:14. And God says, "Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, I'm going to bless you and that blessing's going to be evident in descendants like the stars in the sky. Descendants everywhere." And the points of tension in the Book of Genesis, do you remember? Points of tension oftentimes revolve around barrenness and questions about an heir. Descendant coming. The whole issue with Abraham and Sarah. Sarah was barren and it was a miracle that God provided them with a child in very old age. And the whole picture was God saying, "I'm going to bless you in this way."

The same thing happened with Rachel. You look in the Old Testament and you'll see key points where barrenness is an issue because barrenness was considered a curse. You get to Genesis 49; I know we don't have time to turn to all these places but actually Genesis 48:16 says that your name would be cut off from the earth if you don't have children. Deuteronomy 25:6, "Your name will be blotted out of Israel if you have no children." And the picture then is God's people—don't miss it, follow this—the people of God, the people of Israel in the Old Testament, would multiply through what? Through physical procreation—through making babies; multiplying people. This is how the people of God were growing.

And so now turn with me to the Old Testament. I know we've got plenty to deal with in 1 Corinthians 7 but I want you to see this. Isaiah 53. Isaiah 53. So in the Old Testament, marriage was seen as the avenue through which the people of God were to multiply through physical procreation. Therefore singleness in the Old Testament for the most part was highly undesirable. You did not want to be single in the Old Testament. You look at the categories of singleness in the Old Testament: You have eunuchs whose physical capacity, sexual capacity, was taken from them. You have widows who were encouraged to remarry as soon as they could. Singles, you had people who had diseases like leprosy who were single, you had rare instances of divorce.

All of these categories, for the most part, undesirable. The picture was, "Marry as soon as possible. You don't want to be single." Especially since barrenness was a curse—to not have heirs that would come after you. You want to be in a family where heirs and descendants are being produced. That was the whole picture, which is interesting.

When you get to Isaiah 53 and you see the prophecy of Jesus... This is Isaiah pointing forward to Christ coming and listen to what he says. This is Isaiah 53. Let's start in verse 8. *"By oppression and judgment [it's talking about Christ]..." "By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt..."* (Is. 53:8-10).

Now see this. Before we read this next phrase, verse 8 just said, *"As for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living."* The Suffering Servant who would die on the cross would have no physical descendants. But look at the very next phrase. *"...when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities"* (Is. 53:10-11).

What we're seeing here is a picture that's not about physical offspring but spiritual offspring, right? Jesus: no physical descendants coming from Him in an economy of Old Covenant. That's cursed, barren, name cut off. But His name is most definitely not cut off. "He should see His offspring." And many, many, many will be accounted righteous through Him.

Which would set the stage for a whole new picture. This is prophecy that coming in Christ in the New Covenant, advancement of the Kingdom, multiplication of the people of God, not going to happen—follow this—not going to happen through physical procreation but through spiritual regeneration. You were not physically born into the people of God. You were spiritually reborn—born again. This is how we are children of God; not because we were born into a certain physical family. We're children of God by faith in Christ. We are His offspring, which is why you get to the very next chapter. Look at chapter 54:1, "*Sing, O barren one, who did not bear.*" Barrenness, a curse but no! Not curse, Sing! "*Break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in labor! [Barren woman, sing!] For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her who is married,' says the LORD.*" There's coming a day when those who are barren physically sing because their offspring will be all the greater.

You keep going—chapter 56. Remember we talked about eunuchs—sexual capacity taken from them physically. You get to chapter 56:3. And listen to what this prophecy says about the Eunuch. "*Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD say, 'The LORD will surely separate me from his people'; and let not the eunuch say, 'Behold, I am a dry tree.'* For thus says the LORD: '*To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off*'" (Is. 56:3-5).

To the Eunuch who is not able to physically reproduce, "I will give them an everlasting name. A monument in a name better than sons and daughters." And so with that background, now go to one place in the New Testament. Matthew 19. Matthew 19. You see the picture here? And just as a side note, we were obviously talking about singleness here but hear this. Women, married women in this room who struggle to have children, be encouraged. Sing—that there is a monument in a name that is better than sons and daughters. That there is a picture of reproduction in your life that far supersedes even that which could happen physically—that which is spiritual—that lasts forever and ever and ever. Be encouraged with that.

Now, that leads... Eunuchs a monument and a name better than sons and daughters. You get to Matthew 19:10 and the disciples and Jesus are talking about divorce and marriage, and the disciples said to Jesus in verse 10, "*The disciples said to him, 'If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.'* But he said to them, '*Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it*'" (Matt. 19:10-12).

What Jesus is saying here... The disciple's come to Him and say after their conversation about divorce and marriage, "Well, maybe it's just better for somebody not to marry." And Jesus basically shocks them and looks back at them and says, "Well, yeah. Maybe." Because there are some obviously who are not reproducing—eunuchs, this picture, because it's been taken from them—but there are some who choose to basically remain single without physical reproduction. Obviously the picture here is marriage under God is the divine designed way for physical reproduction to happen; that there are some who choose to be

single for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. So Jesus is basically turning this picture in a sense on its side. He's not in any way degrading marriage. In fact, earlier in this chapter He talks about the value of marriage—marriage is good. But, what He's saying is singleness is also good. It's good for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven, for some who are able to receive this to remain single.

And then, I told you just one place. Let me show you just one more—Matthew 22:30. This is where I just want to remind you that Jesus teaches that physical marriage in this life is a temporary institution. Marriage here is temporary. Matthew 22:30. *"For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven."* And the picture is we have this... We get to the picture in heaven, Revelation 19. Marriage here is a shadow, a temporary shadow, of an eternal reality to come. Marriage here is intended (we talked about this a couple of weeks ago, we'll mention in a second) is intended to point to an eternal marriage to Christ. But marriage here is temporary for all of us. Temporary. Even 60 years of marriage. Temporary. A mist. Eternal marriage is to Christ.

And so, you put all of this together, this progression in Scripture into the New Covenant, and now with Paul talking about singleness, "I wish you'd all remain single as I am." You put it together and here's what you see. Both singleness and marriage are clearly good. Biblically marriage is expected. Now what I mean by that, I mean it's not in the New Testament says, "Marriage is abnormal now." You've still got a normal picture of marriage. Even Paul... You get over to 1 Timothy 5:14. Paul himself advocates marriage at different points. He tells married women, "It's good for you to marry." So he's not just like downing marriage altogether. Marriage is still expected.

John Stott, who is one of my favorite biblical theologians who has literally been a part of advancing the Kingdom in many different contexts around the world, who for 70-plus years has remained single, he said, "God's general will for His human creation is marriage. We single people must not resist this truth. Marriage is the norm. Singleness is the abnorm."

So, marriage is expected but biblically, singleness is exceptional. Meaning, and I mean that word, I choose that word intentionally on two levels. One, it is unusual, not the norm. We don't see anything in Scripture that says, "Okay, marriage on the earth is abnormal." Marriage is expected but singleness exceptional in the sense that it is not always the norm; but also it is an extremely extraordinarily good thing. That when you get to the New Testament, you see what's prophesied and you get to the New Testament, you see singleness lifted up as a very good thing. You see it all over that people who are single think of the prominent people in the New Testament who were not married. John the Baptist. Now it may have had something to do with camel's hair and eating wild locusts and honey. But okay. Go beyond him.

Obviously Jesus—single. And this is key because there's this temptation, there's this tendency, for us to begin to think, "Well, if I'm not married as a man or a woman then I'm not fully expressing manhood or womanhood in my life. There's something incomplete in me apart from marriage." Not true. Jesus was the most complete man. Never married. Not lacking anything in His manhood. Not lacking anything. Human, created in the image of God. So Jesus obviously trumps that. He shows us the most perfectly complete human that's ever been—single.

Then you look at the rest of the pages of the New Testament and you see Paul and Silas and Luke and Titus and Apollos and Lydia and Phoebe and Phillip's four unmarried daughters. All of them single, thriving for the Kingdom in that sense.

So what we see: marriage good; singleness good. Both very good. To exalt one over the other would be unbiblical. It would be unbiblical. You look in the history of the church and you'll see times where the church has said, "Well, it's more holy to be single." We've probably swung that the other way and more prevalent, "It's more holy to be married." There's some kind of deficiency at some point that people have seen in marriage. Some kind of deficiency some people have seen in singleness in the church. We need to see them both as good.

Both Singleness and Marriage Portray the Gospel

Second foundation. We've got to pick up the pace here. Both singleness and marriage portray the gospel, okay? We've already seen this in Ephesians 5 when it comes to marriage but I've put this here as a reminder. Marriage portrays the gospel. Marriage portrays Christ's sacrificial love for the church, seeing the husband and the husband's love for his wife. And marriage portrays the church's submissive obedience to Christ. A wife's respect for her husband. So we've already seen that.

Now the thing is some of you, when we saw that in Ephesians 5, if you're single, some of you saw that and said, "Well, I want to portray the gospel that way. I don't want to miss out on an opportunity to portray the gospel." This is where I want you to see that singleness is also designed by God to portray the gospel in a different way but in a very powerful, potent way.

Singleness portrays (two things I want to point out.) One—singleness portrays the Christian's ultimate identity in Christ. The world would say that you need a husband or you need a wife to complete you. But the gospel reminds us this is not true. That in Christ, regardless of marital status, we are fully complete in Christ. That there is satisfaction and sufficiency in Christ that far supersedes what any man or woman could ever bring to the table. And in singleness, there is a picture that is being said to the world, in singleness in the church being said to the world, "Husband, wife—not necessary. Christ is the only one who's necessary for satisfaction, sustenance, sufficiency. And in Him I have everything I want and everything I need." In a way that marriage, though good, does not display or portray as well. You see how it's different? Both very powerful but different. God's design in singleness is obviously different than His design in marriage here.

And then on a church level, singleness portrays the Christian's eternal identification with the church. You say, "Well, what about Genesis 2:18? It says, 'It's not good for man to be alone.'" And that's absolutely true that it's not good for man to be alone but the whole picture that God has designed for the church is to show that no man or no woman is alone. That we are a family together, surrounded by brothers and sisters that are in an eternal sense... Our relationships with each other, don't miss this, are far more precious and far more permanent than even the physical relationship that happens between a husband and a wife. This is not again to degrade marriage but it is to bring us back to the biblical reality that physical, family relationships here are ultimately temporary. It's what we talked about the first week. It's only spiritual relationships in the church that last forever.

And so you have, for example, an unbelieving husband and a believing wife or vice versa in a marriage—one a Christian, one not a Christian, one having trusted in Christ for salvation, the other not. Have the closest physical marriage but that is only temporary. And the reality is the union between the believer in this scenario and other believers lasts forever in a way that this absolutely does not.

And so the picture here is there is eternal identification with the church. Think about it in light of all we've just even talked about in Old Testament, New Testament redemptive

history. In the past—Old Covenant—singleness was avoided by most. Singleness avoided—undesirable. But then you get to the present—New Covenant, living in now — singleness, according to Jesus and Paul, is advantageous for many. I hesitate to use “many” here. I’m not saying that that becomes the norm necessarily but when Paul says in verse seven, *“I wish that all were as I myself am,”* certainly all these prevalent examples of singleness that we’ve talked about in the New Testament, that this is advantage for the Kingdom. Jesus says that.

And then in the future, new creation, singleness will be applied to all. That married people will only be married in this life and for billions and billions and billions of years, we’re all going to be single—united to Christ. That’s what marriage is picturing. It’s the shadow picturing eternal reality, that we all will not... Matthew 22:30, *“will neither marry nor be given in marriage.”* Marriage here is a physical picture, a shadow of a coming, consummate, spiritual reality in Christ. And singleness points us... Singles in the body point us to that reality in this way—portray the gospel. So both good. Both portraying the gospel.

Both Singleness and Marriage are God’s Gifts

Third foundation. Both singleness and marriage are God’s gifts. God’s gifts. Now we’ve been camping out really around verse six, seven and eight. And it’s verse seven, right at the end of verse seven, where I want to come back to here. *“But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.”* Now what Paul’s talking about here is the gift that is given in singleness.

The reality is this verse has caused all kinds of debate and confusion about the gift of singleness. I remember talking with guys in college and guys would sit around and begin talking about this and begin to wonder, “All right, who’s got the gift? Do you have the gift?” And the way that they talked about it, they talked about it like it’s the gift that nobody wanted. It was like the Christmas gift that you wanted to avoid picking that one. And you start to miss the point that it’s a gift, like a gift that’s evidence of grace from God. And it’s like, “No, no, no, no. I don’t want that.” And then you start thinking, “Well, do I have the gift or not?” And as guys would get through college, five years later, okay, are they not married yet? Well, does that mean they have the gift? How do you know when you’ve got the gift? Is there a certain point where you realize, “Okay, I’ve got the gift”? And you keep... And so it becomes this... And you’ve got some people who delight in the gift. You’ve got some people who are frustrated with the gift. And you’ve got all this confusion about who’s got the gift.

And this is where I want to bring in Stott. Now I think what you’ve got is you’ve got some people who believe... And I want to just kind of put it out there; there’s different schools of thought here on what Scripture’s talking about at this point. There’s some who say there is a specific gift, almost like a spiritual gift in some ways, that is given to some but not very many people. And so everybody else needs to get married because they don’t have the gift. There are others who say well, just like when Paul is talking about gift here, Romans 6:23, *“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* That this is more of an objective gift that is given that when you... Whatever state you’re in in life you know you’ve got the gift. Like, if you’re married, you don’t ask married people, “Hey, do you have the gift of marriage?” “Well, yes. Of course I’ve got the gift of marriage. It’s a gift and I’m married.” And so there are others who would then say, “Well, singleness is similar.” If you’re single, then you’ve been given a gift for that moment. Now will it last for the next ten years? I don’t know. Will it last for the next 20 years, 50 years, who knows?

This is where Stott says, "I have no doubt that there are some people who believe God has called them to be celibate and to commit themselves to celibacy for the rest of their lives. Personally," Stott said, "I have real hesitations about the wisdom of that because I'm not convinced that people know, say in their early 20's, that God has called them to that. I personally believe more in the second alternative, that people discover God's call gradually and as the years pass begin to think that God is probably calling them not to marry."

This is where just... Okay, there's these ideas out there and so this is not me saying, "Hey, this is definitely what the Word is saying here." But I lean toward this picture. I think it's the context of what 1 Corinthians 7 is saying. It's that wherever we find ourselves right now, married or single, at this moment we have a gift in our marriage or our singleness. And it's the whole point of what Paul is talking about when he's saying, "Be content in the gift that you've been given." All over this passage.

Look at 1 Corinthians 7. Let me just show you. Go down to verse 17. Go down to verse 17. And I just want to show you a list of places in this chapter where Paul is over and over again saying, "Be content in where you are." Verse 17, "*Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him...*" You get down to verse 20, he says, "*Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called.*" Verse 24, "*So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.*" Verse 27, "*Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife.*" What he's saying over and over again is "Where you are, delight in where you are." And there's this tendency, I think it's there in marriage, I know that there are people in this room right now who are saying, "Do I need to get out of this marriage?" And I know there are people in this room who are single who have said, "I need to be married." And I'm not saying that, "Okay, in singleness that person will never be married but at this point on this day, there's a gift of singleness that God has given." And certainly it's not always the gift you've asked for.

When I think about those who've lost a husband or a wife, and think...and now in a position of singleness where they were not before... But to know that God is still good; He is still wise. He is still Father who still desires your good and that He desires to turn singleness into a great gift. That He does not want singleness to be a curse for any one of His children. And so to see a level of contentment here that says, "Okay, contentment—what is that?"

Contentment. And I think it's what 1 Corinthians 7 is pointing to. Deep trust in the sovereignty of God. That's the... I think the whole point of 1 Corinthians 7 is not really whether you're married or single but it's whether you're trusting in what God has given you at this moment. And God is saying, "Trust in me."

Margaret Clarkson, a single missionary in her 60's said, "Multitudes of single Christians of every age and circumstance have proved God's sufficiency in singleness. He has promised to meet our needs and He honors His Word. If we seek fulfillment in Him we shall find it. It may not be easy but whoever said the Christian life is easy? The badge of Christ's discipleship was a cross." And she struggled. She honestly wrestled. "Why must I live my life alone? I do not know. But Jesus Christ is the Lord of my life and I believe in the sovereignty of God and I accept my singleness from His hand. He could have ordered my life otherwise but He has not chosen to do so. As His child, I trust His love and wisdom." And not only trust but contentment—deep enjoyment of the grace of God.

The gifts, by definition, are given by God's grace. And what if singleness is evidence of God's grace? That's the whole beauty of the gospel—that singleness is not curse but grace. That in singleness or marriage, these are gifts given by God for enjoyment that leave us no

need to worry or fear, always looking—grass is greener on the other side. Instead to focus on how we can best steward the gift that God has given us at that moment.

Both Singleness and Marriage are for God's Glory

Which leads to the last foundation: Both singleness and marriage are for God's glory. They're both for God's glory. Oh, brothers and sisters, we know, we know all around this room, marriage and singleness both present us with unique challenges and unique opportunities and both have unique rewards. And the ultimate issue is not whether married or single but how we respond to each; how we glorify God in each. And God has a design in marriage and He has a design in singleness. It's not that we're missing out of His design when we're one or the other. For married men shouldn't read 1 Corinthians 7 and think, "Well, I could be more effective for the Lord and His Kingdom if I didn't have family, a spouse, kids." And the design is not for us to read 1 Corinthians 7 or any other parts of Scripture and say, "Well, if I were married then I could have better testimony for the gospel." God has different designs in both. They're both for His glory.

Singleness then, has a purpose that we must be careful not to waste—we must be very careful not to waste. The challenge here is for all of us, married or single alike, but specifically in singleness today. Well, in marriage, don't squander your marriage. And in singleness, don't squander your singleness. God has not. We talked about this with manhood. God has clearly not designed singleness to prolong adolescence into our 20's and 30's. He has not designed singleness for more video games and wandering aimlessly through this life. He's designed singleness for a reason. What are those reasons?

Four Reasons to Delight in Singleness

Because of the Times We're in

Well, four reasons to delight in singleness. This is where I want us to fly through. It's what happens at the very end from verse 25 on. He says... Here's four reasons to delight in singleness. One, because of the times we're in. Because of the times we're in. When you get to verse 26 he says, Paul says, "*I think that in view of the present distress it is good for a person to remain as he is.*" In view of the present distress, the present crisis.

Now what is Paul talking about there? We've got one end of the phone here. The reality is in Corinth, we know this was a time, we know it was a time of persecution. This was not a time when it was easy to be a follower of Christ. I mean, this was a day when Nero was feeding Christians to animals and burning Christians on crosses. It was not easy to have the troubles, stresses, pressures of marriage and family to that—hard. So there was persecution.

There was perversion everywhere in Corinth. When it came to sexual immorality, rampant. So Paul's writing to Christians wondering what to do and he says, "Remain single. If you're single, remain single and know that we are looking forward." This is in your notes; we're looking forward. Consider the times, present distress. Know that we're looking forward to an eternal hope. There's coming a day when this world will pass away. When you get to those words where he says, "*From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning,*" what he's not saying was, "Today if you're married, just act like you don't have a wife." That's not at all what 1 Corinthians 7 is saying. So be encouraged, wives. That's not what he's saying. Instead, what he's saying, the whole point is here: this world, things of this world passing away. Even marriage—passing away. Look at the eternal perspective. Eternal hope. So he's saying

to those who are single, "Know this: marriage exalted in this way or that as better, it's not that it's bad, but just know we're living for something bigger—an eternal hope."

Because of the Mission We're on

Which leads to the next part. Because of the times we're in and because of the mission we're on, delight in singleness. Because of the mission we're on. This is what Jesus said. "Some who can receive this will remain single for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. For the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven." Now the priority of all of our lives, married and single alike... But how can we maximize singleness for the advancement of the Kingdom?

There's no question that Paul, Francis Asbury, Amy Carmichael, Lottie Moon, John Stott... I mean, these are brothers and sisters who have done huge things for the advancement of the Kingdom, not in spite of their singleness, but because of their singleness. That this singleness in their lives has been leveraged for the Kingdom... Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who gave us one of the greatest books on biblical community in *Life Together*—single. "Cost of Discipleship." These gifts that God has given to the church all along the way to remind us, singles, we can delight in singleness as long as the Lord entrusts it to you as a gift. Know that you're living for an eternal heritage that is not dependent on marriage. Yes, Old Covenant, "Be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28)—that's dependent on marriage. Make disciples of all nations—not dependent on marriage. And there's an eternal heritage to be found—even singleness—because of singleness.

I read a couple of quotes. Single missionaries. One in Kenya, a woman name Rena Taylor. "Being single has meant that I am free to take risks that I might not take were I 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."

One male missionary, Trevor Douglas, said, "The first advantage of being single is that it's best adapted to perilous situations: in rugged life, among primitive tribes, in gorilla infested areas, or in disease and famine. The single man has only himself to worry about. Paul claims that being single and male best fits the shortness of the time. Doing God's work is a momentary thing. Advantages and opportunities come and go very quickly, and the single lifestyle enables one to give the most out of the time God gives for His work."

Now, what that doesn't mean, okay, be careful... What that doesn't mean is, "Okay, when it comes to the Baloch, let's sign up all the single folks because they can take risk that... I'm married and so I can't take risks." There's a family in our church that is trumping that with their eight-week-old son. So it's not that this excuses married folks from taking risks in this world but it is a picture of Paul saying, and testimony of church history saying, "There are ways for singleness to be maximized for the advancement of the Kingdom."

And so the exhortation of Scripture is if you're single, how can you maximize it for the Kingdom. That doesn't mean that everybody's supposed to move to Africa who is single. But whether there or here, through spreading the gospel, serving, advancement of the gospel to the next generation here in this community and all nations... How can you have been given a gift, single brothers and sisters in your singleness, that is different from those who are married? We talked about that a couple of weeks ago. But those of you who are single, you've been given a gift. How are you maximizing that for the advancement of the Kingdom of Heaven?

In the same way that married people need to ask the similar question but God's design is probably going to look different. How can you maximize it and live for an eternal heritage

that your offspring...? If the Lord continues to give you the gift of singleness for the rest of your life, to know that your offspring, there's a monument and a name that is better than sons and daughters. Better than sons and daughters. Believe that.

Because we want to be Undistracted in our Affections

Third reason to delight in singleness: because we want to be undistracted in our affections. In verses 32 through 35 Paul talks about how, "*The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife.*" The married guy's got to worry about his wife. Single guys, you don't have to worry about that. You're undistracted in your affections.

Now, that doesn't mean... And so there are things that need to be taken advantage of there in singleness. But it's where I want to pause here for a second. And I think the context of not just 1 Corinthians 7 but the whole book, even the chapter right before this, 1 Corinthians 6. I do want to pastorally just encourage those who are single that there are other distractions that can come your way to watch out for.

I put two here: to guard... I want to encourage you pastorally, I want you to guard against unholy, sexual desires. Part of what Paul's talking about in 1 Corinthians 7 is self-control when it comes to sexual desires. He's just finished in 1 Corinthians 6 talking about it. "Flee sexual immorality." And I just want to remind any and every single person in the room that God has designed sexual expression to be played out in one context and that's marriage. And this world would lead you to justify and rationalize all kinds of sexual expression outside of marriage—with others, even with yourself, looking at a computer. I want to urge you... There's a thought out there that says, "Well, I'm a man or a woman and God's created me. It needs to be expressed somehow." No. Look at Christ. Totally pure in this area and fully man. So, zealously guard your body. It's not your own. 1 Corinthians 6. Your body's not your own. Zealously guard against unholy sexual desires.

And to guard against unholy selfish desires. I'm just going to let John Stott speak here. Stott said, "Apart from sexual temptation, the greatest danger which I think we face as singles is self-centeredness. We may live alone and have total freedom to plan our own schedule with nobody else to modify it or even give us advice. If we are not careful, we may find the whole world revolving around ourselves." And you look at books on singleness and a lot of the focus is on self-esteem, self-fulfillment, self-preservation, and it's not biblical. God-esteem for all of us. We are created to selflessly live our lives for the glory of God and the good of others. So how does that look in singleness? To guard against unholy, selfish desires. This is where Bonhoeffer, single, writing *Life Together*... I mean one of the masterpieces on biblical community.

Because we want to be Undivided in our Devotion

Fourth reason to delight in singleness: because we want to be undivided in our devotion. That's really the crux of it all. When you get to verse 35 Paul says, "*to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.*" Both marriage and singleness, good. But singleness helps you promote undivided devotion to the Lord.

This is where I want to encourage singles across this room. Anyone who is single at this moment, who at this moment under the goodness of a sovereign and holy Father, who desires your best, you're single. I want to encourage you to give yourself wholly to a single desire. Give yourself wholly to one single desire: to use His good gift in singleness, to use His good gift for His great glory in the next generation and among all nations. God has designed singleness as a good gift for great glory in the next generation and among all nations.

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