

FM: Growing a Strong Marriage Creates a Healthy Family 11: “THE SACREDNESS OF SINGLENESS”

“Yes, it is a good to live a celibate life...I wish everyone could get along without marrying, just as I do. But we are not all the same. God gives some the gift of marriage, and to others he gives the gift of singleness.” 1Cor. 7:1 & 7

This morning we are going to discuss the state of being single. It's difficult to even name it as one 'state', because there are so many different types of 'singleness'. There are people who intentionally choose to remain single their entire lives. There are those who are single, but are intending to be married one day. There are some who are single because of a death of a spouse, and there are some who are divorced, which we'll discuss next week; and there are probably other categories.

It's not easy being single in a culture that is so geared and seems so predominated by married couples. We make it difficult sometimes even in our church to be single. We have all these stupid reality shows that are re-defining how a single person gets married in the 21st Century. We speak often of the church as a 'family', and sometimes overlook that part of our family is single! All persons who are single, whether by choice, death, divorce or lack of opportunity, are persons of sacred worth, and possess immeasurable value to the Kingdom of God and the Body of Christ. To those of you who are single and part of FUMC, I salute you, and thank you for choosing to be part of our 'family'. We do love you, treasure you, and appreciate you!

The single population in the US is nearly 10%, and it is increasing every year. The 2000 Census shows more than 27 million Americans live by themselves, about ¼ of all households. There are a number of predominant myths that single people live with, in our society. This list is not exhaustive, but gives you a flavor of some of these 'singleness' myths:

1. **Marriage** is the God-ordained lifestyle...We'll see!
2. The grass is greener on the other side of the **matrimonial** fence...
The grass is greener where you water it! No matter the side of the fence!

3. My life + someone else = **happiness**... We'll also be discussing this in a minute.
4. Singleness produces **loneliness**, while marriage produces **intimacy**...No guarantees either way!

We're going to discover today that in one chapter of the Apostle Paul's writing, he explodes those 4 myths; and some others, where it concerns singleness. Turn in your Bibles to I Corinthians 7, and look with me at Paul's description of the "Sacredness of Singleness."

1. SINGLENES IS A GIFT NOT A DUTY

"Sometimes I wish everyone were single like me - a simpler life in many ways! But celibacy is not for everyone any more than marriage is. God gives the gift of the single life to some, the gift of the married life to others. I do, though, tell the unmarried and widows that singleness might well be the best thing for them, as it has been for me. But if they can't make it, let them marry. It is better to marry than to be grieved by the passions of the world, for the sake of your devotion to God. (The Message) I Corinthians 7:7-9

According to Paul, it is a gift to be single. It also is a gift to be married. Often single persons are treated and feel like second-class citizens in our world, but in Paul's world and the world of Jesus Christ, singleness was not and is not, a subservient or lesser status. In fact, earlier in this chapter, verses 3-4, Paul talks about the 'duties' of a husband and wife when it comes to sharing their bodies with their spouses. There is no such sense of duty with single people. It's a gift. Although; the singleness and married status are both to abide by the same standards; faithfulness to their celibacy for those who are single, and faithfulness to their spouses for all who are married.

Interesting thing about 'spiritual gifts.' Most of us have a difficult time understanding 'someone else's gift'. Those who are gifted to be givers, have a hard time understanding those who fail to give. Those who are gifted to be servants, have a hard time understanding people who hesitate to share the workload. Those with the gift of hospitality have a hard time understanding those who prefer solitude.

Those who are gifted with singleness, and those who are not, sometimes have a hard time understanding each other! It's pretty natural, but we must remember this

principle: Singleness is a gift from God, and we all need to appreciate it as such, and do our level best to learn how to be better, more faithful disciples, from those who possess this gift!

2. SINGLENES IS A CALLING BUT DOES NOT DEFINE YOUR LIFE

“And don't be wishing you were someplace else or with someone else. Where you are right now is God's place for you. Live and obey and love and believe right there. God, not your marital status, defines your life. Don't think I'm being harder on you than on the others. I give this same counsel in all the churches.” (The Message) | Corinthians 7:17

It might be difficult for some of you to hear that God may be calling you to be single. Don't discount this reality, and don't discount that your desire to be married someday may be a diversion fueled by our cultural and unnatural assumptions that every person should want to be married, or that every person could be married if they just tried a little harder! God may be calling you to be single all your life, yet that calling no more defines 'who you are' than the calling to be married. Listen.

More than any other of Paul's principles, this one explodes the myth of: “My life + someone else = Happiness. You don't have to go any further than the supermarket checkout stand to see this myth. Magazine after magazine is filled with article after article on how to find and keep that special someone who can make you happy. Even the bedtime stories we tell our kids communicate this myth. What happens after the handsome prince finds Cinderella? They live happily ever after. Just like that!

And so, some singles are sometimes tempted to believe if they could just get the right someone else in their life, they'd be happy. Unfortunately, some married folks are tempted to believe this myth too! For them that someone else is someone else besides the person to whom they're married. If they had a different someone else, then they'd be happy.

At this point, I have to say that I *have* experienced happiness in my life because of “a someone else” named Susan, who decided to spend the rest of her life with me.

But, when I met Susan, I was already happy. I liked me. I liked my family. I liked what God was doing in my life. I didn't *need* her to make me happy. In fact, she couldn't make me happy, because ... the truth is; contentment does not depend on someone else. It's an internal 'spiritual' quality. So, much so that I can tell you flat out that if you are single and unhappy, and you marry, it's probable that you'll be twice as unhappy. If you are married and discontent, it's probable you'll likely be divorced and discontent or remarried and discontent.

So many people spend so much effort to get what they believe to be the right externals - the right wife with the right body, the right husband with the right salary and wind up miserable. Why? Because they're looking in the wrong place for contentment. So, where is it found? ...

"I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want." I think we could add, "married or unmarried" here. *"I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength"*. Philippians 4:11-13

Paul is saying that contentment comes from knowing that Christ will help you in every situation, whether that situation is married or unmarried. Trusting in him, relying on him, knowing that he has your best interest at heart; that is true contentment. That's where happiness lies!

3. SINGLENES IS DIFFICULT BECAUSE OF THE PRESSURES AND THE TIMES

"Because of the current pressures on us from all sides, I think it would probably be best to stay just as you are. Are you married? Stay married. Are you unmarried? Don't get married. But there's certainly no sin in getting married, whether you're a virgin or not. All I am saying is that when you marry, you take on additional stress in an already stressful time, and I want to spare you if possible. I do want to point out, friends, that time is of the essence. There is no time to waste, so don't complicate your lives unnecessarily. Keep it simple - in marriage, grief, joy, whatever." (The Message) I Corinthians 7:26-30

What were the pressures and what about the 'times' Paul spoke of? Remember he is writing to the church that had been planted in Corinth, a sin sick city! The city

contained a number of 'religions' that practiced temple prostitution, including male and female prostitutes.

Some of the people being converted to Jesus were coming from those former lifestyles. It was a radical departure for them to consider living in a way that was counter or against the culture in which they had been raised. Paul writes to tell them that the pressures of their culture would make it difficult for marriage to survive, so singleness might be a better option, if not forever, at least until they became more mature, until there was more distance from that ever present lifestyle.

What of the pressures upon marriage in our own culture? And what of the pressures we place on single people to conform to the married majority. All Paul was saying was that there are pressures both ways, and giving yourself more time, might not be a bad thing! Growing your relationship with God, will make you more holy, and maybe more "marriable"!

Remember also that the disciples of Jesus, including Paul, were convinced that Jesus' prediction that he would return for them was imminent, was going to happen any day. Paul believed that remaining single would just make it easier and the journey lighter, once Jesus returned. I doubt Paul could fathom Jesus delaying his return now some 2000 years, and maybe he would have penned this differently, I don't know. But remember that 4 times in this chapter he mentions that some of these ideas were his opinion, and not necessarily "Words from the Lord"! Maybe his opinion would change over 2000 years?

4. SINGLENES IS AN ADVANTAGE IN SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

"I want you to live as free of complications as possible. When you're unmarried, you're free to concentrate on simply pleasing the Master. Marriage involves you in all the nuts and bolts of domestic life and in wanting to please your spouse, leading to so many more demands on your attention. The time and energy that married people spend on caring for and nurturing each other, the unmarried can spend in becoming whole and

holy instruments of God. I'm trying to be helpful and make it as easy as possible for you, not make things harder. All I want is for you to be able to develop a way of life in which you can spend plenty of time together with the Master without a lot of distractions.
“ I Corinthians 7: 32-35

This is really the heart of Paul's teaching on the matter of Singleness. He states quite clearly that persons who are unencumbered with caring for a spouse, have more advantage as it pertains to their spiritual development. That might sound like a hard sell, for someone longing to be married, but hear Paul out!

He states rather clearly in these verses that there are 3 specific advantages singleness provides in developing our Spiritual Life:

- can concentrate on simply **pleasing** the Master.
- can spend time becoming **whole** and **holy** instruments of God.
- can spend plenty of time together with the Master without a lot of **distractions**.

As a single person, right now you have the best potential to maximize your spiritual growth and use your freedom in Christ to become what God wants you to be. Go where you want to go, focus in on what you want to focus on, and perfect your attitude in Jesus Christ. Find out how much you can achieve in your singleness. Find out how victorious in Jesus Christ you can be. Don't let anyone cause you to get married out of season for any reason. Your life and your future are too important to make such a colossal mistake. Resolve to stay faithful in the 'sacredness of your singleness', until God leads you in another direction. Your future and the future of the Kingdom of God are at stake.

When you see yourself and your position as God sees you, you'll realize there are no finer 'instruments' in the body of Christ for God to use, than you. Since you've been raised with Christ, strive to know all that Jesus has for you. God is able to provide

for you what you need, when you need it. And if the desire of your heart is to be married, God will give you that desire, and how much better prepared you will be if you don't waste the intervening time fretting/worrying/distrusting, but perfecting the nature of Christ within you. Remember, the purpose God has for marriage is our holiness, not our happiness. May that also be His grand design for singleness? I believe so!

5. MARRIAGE IS GOOD BUT SINGLENES IS BETTER

“On the other hand, if a man is comfortable in his decision for a single life in service to God and it's entirely his own conviction and not imposed on him by others, he ought to stick with it. Marriage is spiritually and morally right and not inferior to singleness in any way, although as I indicated earlier, because of the times we live in, I do have pastoral reasons for encouraging singleness.” (The Message) I Corinthians 7: 38-39

“So the person who marries does well, and the person who doesn't marry does even better.” NLT

As a single person, you have opportunities before you that are unbelievable. Your being single is not just your preparation time to one day get married. Your being single is your time of perfecting who you are as a person chosen and gifted by God to do great things. It's your time to pursue knowing who God is and knowing the things of God. It's your time to pursue your education or your career. Your time to stand alone, do alone, buy alone, and make decisions for your life alone with God.

If you one day choose to get married, or remarried, that's fine, but Paul is wanting to remind you that you will never again have the freedom that you now have to excel in your life whatever area you choose. If you marry, you are vowing before God, that you will put all your pursuits secondary to building up and fulfilling the needs of the person you are about to say “I do”, to.

The reason so many marriages are a showcase of hell, is that people attempt to pursue their goals and objectives for themselves as though they were still single rather than recognizing that saying, “I do”, puts all their interests on the back burner. That's

what submitting to each other in marriage is all about. Saying “no” to my will, and “yes” to yours.

We’ve come to believe the myth that being married is God’s preference, or that God ‘ordains’ the married life over the single one. If that were true, why wouldn’t Jesus have been married? Why wouldn’t Paul be married? I don’t really think that one is better than the other; they are just different, with the same purpose! TO MAKE US HOLY! Can you get your head around that?

My friends who are married, we owe a great debt to the single members of this body, who in many ways put us to shame, and hold the standard of faithfulness high. To those who are single, we love you and thank you, and support you, and treasure your life in our midst. Be faithful, be holy! All of you!

BUILDING A GODLY MARRIAGE 11
“THE SACREDNESS OF SINGLENESS”

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Myths:

1. _____ is the God-ordained lifestyle.
2. The grass is greener on the other side of the _____ fence
3. My life + someone else = _____
4. Singleness produces _____, while marriage produces _____.

1. SINGLENES IS A _____ NOT A _____
“God gives the gift of the single life to some, the gift of the married life to others.” 7

2. SINGLENES IS _____ BUT DOES NOT _____ YOUR LIFE
“God, not your marital status, defines your life.” 17

3. SINGLENES IS _____ BECAUSE OF THE _____ AND THE _____
“Because of the current pressures on us from all sides, I think it would probably be best to stay just as you are... I do want to point out, friends, that time is of the essence. There is no time to waste, so don't complicate your lives unnecessarily.” 26-30

4. SINGLENES IS AN _____ IN SPIRITUAL _____
“The time and energy that married people spend on caring for and nurturing each other, the unmarried can spend in becoming whole and holy instruments of God.” 32-35

- can concentrate on simply _____ the Master.
- can spend time becoming _____ and _____ instruments of God.
- can spend plenty of time together with the Master without a lot of _____.

5. MARRIAGE IS _____ BUT SINGLENES IS _____
“Marriage is spiritually and morally right and not inferior to singleness in any way, although as I indicated earlier, because of the times we live in, I do have pastoral reasons for encouraging singleness.” 38-39

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Study Guide

1. Discuss the 4 myths of singleness. Can you name others that exist in our culture?
2. Have you ever thought of singleness as a gift? We stereotypically think of ‘priests and nuns’ as the only ones ‘called’ to singleness, but is that accurate? Share examples of single people you know who are fulfilling this calling in their lives.
3. Over the past weeks you’ve probably spent some time discussing the pressures on ‘marriages’ in our current culture. But how many other pressures are there for single people? And how do you think our church might better honor those who are single in our family?
4. What might you learn and how might you benefit from considering the principle that singleness gives an advantage to single people to nurture their relationship with God?
5. How do you think Paul would write this chapter differently today, knowing that Christ’s return hasn’t happened for 2000 years?
6. Following this message and your discussion of it; what might you as an individual do to encourage those you know who are single?