

**Introduction:** We all love receiving gifts. . . . What is one of your favorite gifts that you have received? A new bike? Some jewelry (lil bling)? A new car? (can I get adopted into your family?)

Have you ever received a gift you weren't too pumped about? Grandmother got me socks one year. I was like, Socks? For real? Baseball cards? Transformers? Computer Games? But Socks?

Today we are going to continue our series on relationships and discuss the gift of singleness. And I'm really hoping that everything we said about the effusive, ebullient, explosive, relentless, overflowing love of God in Christ that makes us friends with God and drives our every human friendship can provide the backdrop for today's message and every message in this five-part series.

Singleness can be a challenging topic. It raises emotions that are difficult to deal with. But I hope you will see that it is also a glorious topic.

A very large percentage of our church are singles. This, of course, reflects the demographics of greater Boston and the changing nature of our society. One hundred years ago, 90 percent of the adult population would have been married. Today about half of the adult population is married and half is single.

I'm married... I was once was single, BUT I want you to know that I carry a burden for singles to think well and live in light of their singleness and I have a burden for the church to think well and live well in the midst of your single friendships...

**“Best Gift Ever”  
1 Corinthians 7**

**The Point: Trust God in your singleness and serve him with single-minded devotion.**

Context: Paul is writing to a group of believers who lived in a pagan culture, in the midst of great sexual immorality. As we see in verse 1 of chapter 7, Paul is answering different questions and misconceptions that arose from the church at Corinth in a letter previously sent to Paul, a letter that we, of course, do not have access to. *Read 1-5* As we can see, Paul does away with that bogus theology (yes, there is a theology of sex, different from what you will read in *Cosmo & Men's Health*) by saying that in the context of marriage sex is to be enjoyed, *and* don't miss this married people: to be enjoyed frequently. Why are all the guys pulling out the highlighters right now? Then he moves on in vv. 6-7 and says . . .

**I. Receive Singleness as a Gift from God (1 Cor. 7:6-7, 17).**

*1 Corinthians 7:6-7*

- “Concession, not a command... I wish that all were as I myself am.” In other words, Paul is not commanding what he is about to say, but *commending it* as wise in light of “the present distress” as he identifies the times in verse 26.
- “But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.” (1 Corinthians 7:7)
- What does Paul call singleness? A gift. The Greek word is *charisma* means “given by grace.”
- Paul is saying, whatever position you find yourself in, single or married, recognize it as a gift of God's grace to you.

*Every gift is from God*

- Now if this surprises you, just know it was astonishing for the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Why?
- “Nearly all ancient religions and cultures made an absolute value of the family and of the bearing of

children. There was no honor without family honor, and there was no real lasting significance or legacy without leaving heirs.” (Keller)

- Most cultures in that day and many in our own day view marriage as the be all, end all goal of life.
- Even a look at church history reveals how people have held up one station of life higher than the other: “If you are really holy, really devoted, really love God and loved by God you will be single.” Then at other times: “No, if you are holy, devoted, and loved, you will be married.”
- But Paul says, “**Marriage is a gift! AND Singleness is a gift!**” One is not inferior to the superiority of the other. Paul elevates both. **Both are elevated in God’s sight!**
- Look down at v. 17: “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?”
- In other words, follow the path that God has assigned you as a gift from his hand.
- Do you see the implications?
  - Let’s forever debunk the myth that singleness is some kind of second-class existence in God’s world or in God’s church.
  - I heard a story of one guy who got asked if he was *still* single so often, that he began to respond: “Are you *still* married?” lol...
  - So if someone approached the Apostle Paul, and said, “Paul, aren’t singles kind of inferior to God.” Paul would shake his head, throw up his hands, and then possibly say: “Who you calling inferior?”
- So I have titled this sermon “The Best Gift Ever.” Though it may seem counterintuitive or counter to your current experience, it is a deeply true because ***the best gift ever is the one God has given you!***

T: Now if this is a gift, one of the next questions has to be . . . *Is this Gift For life?*

- Wait, do I have the gift? Am I locked in to this thing? Ah!!!!!!
- View #1: God gives singleness as a gift and the gift is permanent (Eunuchs, Nuns, priests who take vows of celibacy)
- View #2: God gives singleness as a gift, and the gift is not necessarily permanent.
- I believe the latter view makes greater sense. Let me say this: Are you single? You currently get to enjoy the gift of singleness. Are you married? You are privileged in a different way, to enjoy the gift of marriage.
- Some people enjoy the gift of singleness, then enjoy the gift of marriage, and then God brings them into another season of singleness.
- So whether you are single who has never been married, a single parent, a single person who has experienced the pain of divorce, or even in widowhood, I am speaking to all of you this morning.
- No matter what your experience may be: let me ask you, do you view your singleness as a gift?
- Some of you are thinking: “Yo, I hope this gift comes with a gift receipt, you know what I’m saying. I’d like to trade it in!”
- Listen. God is perfect in his sovereignty, perfect in his wisdom, perfect in his goodness, perfect in his gifts. **“Every good and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” (James 1:17)**

T: Now, as deeply as I know and believe that verse to be truth, freedom-bestowing truth, I also know that singleness can be very, very difficult. Just because singleness is a gift from God does not mean singles are to throw a party every Friday night to celebrate it. “Celebrate good times c’mon, still single, holla at yo single boy, holla at your single girl. Oh wait, Beyonce... all my single ladies, all my single ladies. Ah ooh ah ooh ah oh ah...” It’s not always easy! That is why it is so important to . .

## II. Submit Your Desires for Marriage to the Lord (1 Cor. 7:8-9).

- *Read 8.* I will explain why Paul says he believes it is good for people to remain single in verse 8, in a few moments, but now,
- *Verse 9.* We are creatures of desire. Admittedly, Paul is referring to sexual desire. God has wired sexual desire into our being, and we will address this over the final three weeks of our series (dating, marriage, and sex).
- I want to take Paul's words and help us consider what it looks like to submit our desires to the Lord.

#### *Unmet Desires*

- We long for our hopes to be fulfilled! We all have plans and dreams and longings for how we want our life to turnout. Just ask Marsha. She wanted to marry a doctor, which God fulfilled, but apparently she wasn't specific enough because this Dr. Turl will never be Daddy Warbucks, you heard? Haha...
- Well, pastor, speaking of desire, haven't you read Psalm 37:4? "Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart."
- Does that mean God will give us our every desire? No. What would that make God? You do the math. A personal genie. Someone we can control. That's what. And our God cannot be controlled.
- God does not always fulfill our desires in the ways that we want, and *this can be part of the cost of discipleship* (Luke 9:23). How?
- No Compromise . . . In who you would marry... Believer! In personal purity . . .
- Because you love Jesus, pursuing his best often means waiting on his best, and who loves to wait? Who's signing up for that?
- "Hey, give me a stopwatch, I've got nothing but time here, I'll just wait."

#### *Unmet Desire Leads to Internal Angst*

- **Proverbs 13:12** says, "**Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.**"
- It hurts. It stings. It leads us to ask "why?" At times, we can become so miserable in our unmet desires that we become discouraged to the point of despair.
- When our dreams *appear to have died* the hurt accompanying those deferred hopes can be crippling.

#### *Trust God in your singleness.*

- That's why there has to be a call to trust and walk by faith (2 Cor. 5:7).
- Please let me encourage you today: if you are discouraged over where God has you, *drink deeply of the gospel*. He doesn't love other people more than you because he has gifted them with a spouse.
- And let me provide a warning here: unmet desire of any stripe (not just singleness, okay, when we want: a child, a new job, some respect and recognition) can lead to bitterness not simply at your situation in life, but it can lead to "hard thoughts" of God.
- Trust in the character of God through your disappointment. He is no less glorious today than he would be on your wedding day. God is eternally glorious and eternally worthy of your trust.

Listen to I like what Paige Benton Brown in an article "Singled Out by God for Good:" **"I am not single because I am too spiritually unstable to possibly deserve a husband, nor because I am too spiritually mature to possibly need one. I am single because God is so abundantly good to me, because this is his best for me. . . . But I want to be married. I pray to that end every day. I may meet someone and walk down the aisle in the next couple of years because God is so good to me. I may never have another date . . . because God is so good to me."**

T: Receive singleness as a gift. Submit your desires to the Lord. #3

### **III. Seek God's Kingdom with Undivided Devotion in your Singleness (7:25-35)**

*Read 25-35.* Here is the chief reason Paul points to singleness as a great gift from God. Do not view your time as a single as inconsequential, as if life really begins when you find a spouse. No, life begins when we meet Jesus, and he has a mission for us whether we are single or married.

The question is: how can you maximize this season of your life for the glory of Christ and his mission? Let me give you five pursuits.

#### **1. Pursue single-minded devotion to Christ with urgency.**

- The greatest currency of our day is not \$\$, it's time, and singles naturally have more discretionary time.
- Paul's urgency was heightened for a couple reasons: 1) They were under "present distress." (v. 26). This probably refers to impending persecution. The church was on the verge of the impending persecution from Nero. 2) "Time is very short.." (29) and "the present form of this world is passing away." Not only did Paul believe Christ could return at any moment (which should be our view as well), but also, he understood this age will pass away very soon.
- That is why they should live with urgency!
- How radical are Paul's words in 29-31?
  
- Singles have greater opportunity for undivided interests. Married people should ALWAYS consider the needs and desires of their spouse (and children if applicable).
- If singleness frees you from distractions, so that you can be anxious about the things of God, then don't add a thousand things to your plate that will distract you from his calling on your life.
- Added to that: Say "Yes" to the Spontaneous.
  
- Verse 35 sums it up. "I say this . . .to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord." Grow in godliness as a man. Grow to be like Jesus as a woman.
- Now, single-minded devotion to God should be the desire of every Christian, but Paul's point is that singleness provides a unique season to apply that in unique ways, which leads us to #2 . . .

#### **2. Pursue serving Jesus with all your heart.**

- The unmarried are free from anxiety, anxious about the things of the Lord and "how to please him."
- In singleness, in many ways, there is a blank check of self-determination and decision, which is great, because singleness provides great opportunity for selflessness,
- BUT be careful here, because singleness can also provide great opportunity for selfishness. Who determines your schedule? Sets your agenda? Fulfill your wants? (Modify) You!
- Are you accountable to anyone for how you spend your time? Your money? Your gifts?
  
- Are you utilizing your discretionary time to devote yourself to the things of God?
- Are you utilizing your discretionary time to serve the church and be on mission with God?
- Are you seeking to share the gospel and display the love of God? Why do you think Paul was saying these things after all?
- Our singles assume many key responsibilities in our church. I love that!
- And here's a little advice: as you're serving Jesus, look around for someone else who is doing the same.

### 3. Pursue community through Jesus with both singles & married couples.

- This is part of the beauty of the church. Utilize your spiritual family to find satisfying community in your time of singleness, whether it last for 3 years or 30.
- And singles, don't just hang with other singles. Get to know those who are married. Learn from their life experiences.
- Find ways to serve families. Marsha & I are so blessed to have many of you who have said, "I want to watch your kids so you guys can have some quality time together."
- At the same time, families, this should not be one-sided. We should look to *include* our single friends into the rhythms of our life. Have them over for dinner. *Invite* them to go with you to a ball game. Do life *together*.
- As you build friendships in church, in CGs, seek to bear one another's burdens.
- If this is a burden, bear it along with your single friends. *Pray* for them a spouse. Be a part of that journey. If God leads you to, hook them up with a friend. Match make. :) If you're not good at that, then don't! :)
- But more than praying for them a spouse... pray for their heart, their faith, their trust in their singleness.
- Our relationships should never be one-sided! "through love serve one another" (Gal 5:13)

### 4. Pursue contentment in Jesus above all else.

*Contentment in Christ can save you from the curse of being anxious over tomorrow.*

- Anxiety and fear can be common responses to the heat of singleness, but God can provide peace in your restlessness when peace seems unexplainable to those around you.
- And here's the opportunity: when you are content in your singleness, you can show the world Christ is your everything. He alone provides ultimate satisfaction.

*Contentment in Christ can save you from the curse of comparing your life to those around you.*

- (That's big. Tell yourself that's big.) We are constantly looking around, seeing what others have, which can lead to the responses of envy and bitterness out of our hearts. If the person you respected the most were single, would that modify the view you have of yourself?
- Moreover, it can keep you from comparing yourself to your idealized view of your self (here's what I mean: I would not be single if I only got in better shape, if only my stylist didn't jack up my hair, if only didn't fumble over my words, if only I wasn't so honest with people).
- *Paul says: "Godliness with Contentment is great gain (1 Tim. 6:6)"*

But, I want to be careful here . . .

- But let's do away with the mentality, the misguided, unbiblical counsel that says: "God will not satisfy you with a spouse until you are completely satisfied in him" or "Before you can marry someone wonderful you have to be someone wonderful." (Paige Benton Brown, "Singled Out by God for Good")

### 5. Pursue greater hope in Jesus than the prospect of marriage.

- It is good to desire marriage, but do not allow healthy desires to spiral down into idolatry (where your desires and affections for marriage surpass your desires and affections for God.). Do not find your identity in your singleness. Jesus is your identity. He defines you.
- Hope for a spouse, but do not obsess over it.

T: How will you leverage your life, your singleness so that you can maximize your eternal joy? Finally

#### **IV. Find Great Confidence from the Spirit's presence in your life (1 Cor. 7:40).**

Verse 40 comes across almost in a comical way. It sounds like Paul is clearly being sarcastic.

- Paul was single. He had the gift. In fact, many believe Paul went from the gift of singleness to marriage then became a widower and back to singleness.
- There were others too that stand out in the Bible: John the Baptist, Jeremiah, Daniel, Elijah. But there was someone greater than all of these, greater than the Apostle Paul. Who else possessed the gift of singleness?
- His name was Jesus. Jesus was the perfect man. Therefore, one cannot conclude that being single is some kind of lesser state of existence.

#### **Conclusion**

Singleness is a gift. Marriage is a gift. And realize that in a mystery way, neither singleness nor marriage last forever: Jesus said people will not be given in marriage in the resurrection. So will we all be single? Nope! Listen to Revelation 19:6-9 . . .

**“Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure”—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are the true words of God.”**