



Single and Satisfied

How Singles Can Live Victoriously

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THE URBAN ALTERNATIVE

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Introduction

A pastor who happens to be married is always on dangerous ground when he approaches the issue of singleness. Invariably he hears the accusation, “Preacher, you just don’t understand. You’ve been married since you were 20 years old. By the time you knew what singleness meant, you weren’t single any longer!” It’s natural for people to feel that you cannot relate to them because you haven’t experienced what they are experiencing.

However, the truth of the Word transcends our experience. I have never been an alcoholic or a prostitute, but I can tell you what the Bible has to say about those conditions. I can speak because God has spoken.

Nevertheless, I understand the need of many of my readers to hear from someone who knows first-hand what the single lifestyle is really like. Therefore, I will borrow heavily in this e-Book from the words of someone who was single for a very long time, even though there is a possibility that he was married at some point in his life. I’m talking about the Apostle Paul.

The Apostle Paul understood the single lifestyle far better than the social commentators of our day. His inspired words in the New Testament present us with a challenge that cuts across the grain of our society:

Being single is more desirable for a Christian than being married.

There’s a good deal of controversy surrounding that concept, even though it is every bit as biblical as John 3:16. Make no mistake about what Paul is saying. **If you are single, you are in the best possible position.**



The Challenge Of Singleness



Let's examine this key passage of scripture verse by verse so that we can better understand Paul's reasoning.

Now concerning virgins, I have no command of the Lord but I give a judgment as one who by mercy of the Lord is trustworthy (1 Corinthians 7:25)

Already we can hear some people saying, "Wait a minute. Paul is just offering an opinion. He didn't get this idea from the Lord." Be careful about making comments like this! When Paul says that he has no command of the Lord, he simply means that when Jesus was on the earth, He never addressed this particular subject. That doesn't mean He did not want it dealt with. Jesus saved that job for trustworthy servants like Paul. The apostle's observations carry the full weight of Scripture.

Many of you have Bibles that highlight the words of Christ in red. There is nothing wrong with this as long as you understand that when it comes to the authority of scripture, every word in the Bible is the inspired word of God, it doesn't really matter whether James, John, Peter or Paul penned the words. Scripture is scripture.

Paul opens the passage with the words, "concerning virgins..." Biblically speaking, you qualify as a virgin in one of two ways. Those in category #1 have never had intercourse. Those in category #2 have never had intercourse since being reborn in Christ. Remember, whoever is in Christ...

is a new creature. "The old things have passed away; behold, new things have come." II Corinthians 5:17

The Bible assumes that if you are single, you ought to be a virgin, wither physically or by virtue of your relationship with Jesus Christ. Obviously, the world has a different perspective on sexuality among singles. In fact, the stereotypical "swinging single" epitomizes sexual freedom without accountability. You can be with whomever you choose (in fact, the more "whomevers" you choose, the better) as often as you want to be with them. After all, you're not married. And it's your body. Even Christian singles often buy into this mixed-up mentality. "Don't tell me what to do with my body!" they cry. Yet, the Bible is very clear about what you should (and shouldn't) do with your body. Flee immorality. That's what it says in I Corinthians 6:18. "Flee" does not mean "hang around and see how close you can get to the edge of the pit without falling in."

Too many well-meaning singles skate on thin ice hoping it won't crack. Of course, it invariably does. In case any doubt remains, to "flee" means to run quickly and deliberately in the opposite direction.

Do you remember the story of Joseph? When he was young, his jealous brothers sold him into slavery. He wound up in Egypt where he was purchased by Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's personal guard. Joseph was a faithful servant and as God watched over him and blessed his work, his master prospered. Eventually, Joseph became Potiphar's "Main man." He was overseer of the house and custodian of everything Potiphar owned. It was at this point that he captured the attention of Potiphar's wife. She didn't give a thought to Joseph when he was brought into the house as a ragged, dirty slave. But now he was clean, well built and handsome. So, with the class and charm typical of Egyptian women in that day, she walked up to Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me." Of course, Joseph refused. But he offered a pointed explanation:

"With me in charge, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. NO one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" Genesis 39:8-9

Joseph's resistance became an obstacle that Potiphar's wife was determined to overcome. She spoke to Joseph day after day, but couldn't wear down his resolve. It was time to engineer a more aggressive plan.

One day, Joseph entered the house to find it empty. Hardly by coincidence, the household servants were gone. Potiphar's wife grabbed Joseph by his cloak and said, "come to bed with me!" But the Bible tells us that Joseph left the cloak in her hand and ran out of the house. "Flee immorality." That's what Joseph did. And that's what we must do, too. Why? That takes us back to I Corinthians 6:18.

"All other sins that a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body."

Translation: **sexual sin is self-destructive.** It's like a fire. A fire in the fireplace can do you a lot of good. A fire in the living room will mess up your whole house! And that's precisely the case with our sexuality. It is a fire to be kindled only within the fireplace of marriage. Outside of that safe enclosure, it can do all kinds of emotional and physical damage.

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?" I Corinthians 6:19

If we truly believe that Christ dwells within us, then He participates in whatever we do. That's why earlier in our text, Paul says,

“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never!” I Corinthians 6:15

If you have any doubt about whether your behavior—sexual or otherwise—is appropriate, just remember that you take Jesus with you wherever you go. Will you be able to look up to Jesus with you wherever you go.

Will you be able to look up to Jesus after doing whatever you are contemplating and say, “Jesus, did you enjoy yourself?” If not, leave your coat and run for the door. That last reason Paul gives to flee immorality is especially bothersome to the “do your own thing” crowd:

“You are not your own. You have been bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.” I Corinthians 6:20

If you are in Christ, you are now the personal property of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. On the receipt, the price is clearly marked: “Paid in full by the blood of the Lamb.” The Church today needs a group of holy singles that will honor God with their bodies. We need young ladies who can say “no.” We need to teach our daughters to say, “I’m saving myself for that man God has chosen for me, whenever he comes into my life.”

Please do not misunderstand me. I am not saying that sexual desire is inappropriate. You should not be praying that God would remove your sexual drive. Instead, pray that He will enable you to control that energy until the time is right to unleash it. There are good reactions—theological, ethical, and medical – for remaining sexually pure. But the truth is, it isn't easy. The world places a high value on conformity, and those who don't measure up to the image of the “liberated single” experience pressure.

Virginity is held in disregard today, much the same as promiscuity once was. Ridicule and perhaps even persecution can be expected. In fact, even Joseph, who remained so faithful, was accused of rape by Potiphar's wife and spent 13 years in prison. Our own bodies may even fight against us. After all, our sex drive doesn't shut down just because we decide to keep ourselves pure.



The Benefits Of Singleness

So what's so great about remaining single? Let's continue to explore the words of Paul.

“Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for you to remain as you are. Are you married? Do not seek a divorce. Are you unmarried? Do not look for a wife.” I Corinthians 7:26-27



The “crisis” Paul mentioned was persecution. When this epistle was written, Christians were being killed. Men watched as their children were thrown to lions and their wives were beheaded. All you have to do is read the 11th chapter of Hebrews to learn about the kind of suffering people endured for the cause of Jesus Christ. Paul contends that remaining single helps insulate you from some of this agony. Of course, very few Americans are be-

headed or thrown to lions these days. But married life is full of little “persecutions” of its own. Marriage is loaded with trade-offs. Are there financial goals you want to meet? Educational aspirations? Career ambitions? If you're not prepared to balance them with the demands of maintaining a marriage, “it is good for you to remain as you are,” because each can turn into a nightmare of pressure and persecution. Later in the passage, Paul says,

“Those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this.” I Corinthians 7:28

Can't you just hear the chorus of married people saying, “Amen!” Whatever the circumstances and no matter how strong the bond of love, whenever two sinners start living under the same roof, there's going to be trouble. The same man who holds the door for his adoring sweetheart will someday slam the door as he leaves for work in a huff. The same blushing bride who cried when her man brought her flowers will someday sob in self-pity when he forgets her birthday...again. Even good marriages (as rare as they are) take their toll on your patience.

What if you are already married? “Do not seek to be released.” Don't start filling out divorce papers because you can't handle the heat. If your pace is too fast to maintain, you must revise your agenda in order to make your marriage a priority. Let me

say this as clearly as I can: rough times are no justification for divorce. There's a lot more I could say on the subject of marriage and divorce—in fact, I've written another booklet on that subject—but for now, let's center on Paul's advice to singles. "Do not seek a wife." What a revolutionary concept!

A lot of singles today are emotional basket cases because they can't find anybody. This anxiety accounts for the growing population of singles' bars and (dare we admit it?) Single adult fellowship groups within our churches. The Bible's advice to those who are desperately hunting for a mate is simply, "stop." Instead, invest that same energy in growing close to the Lord. He knows far better where your wife or husband is than you do. Who could have imagined that I would find a wife 3,000 miles away in South America? My agenda was to seek the Lord, walk with the lord, know the Lord and be faithful to the Lord; He took care of the rest. After all, God is the best match-maker in the business. I'm not suggesting that you give up dating or run away from relationships.

But if seeking that certain someone has turned into your life's primary focus, you're setting yourself up for a lot of unnecessary pain and disappointment.

If God intends for you to marry, you will meet your future mate only when the Lord's appointed time arrives. Nothing you can do will make that day come any sooner. So why waste precious time in a futile and demeaning search that leaves you feeling unloved, unwanted, and unsuccessful? Why

not use those days, months or years to deepen your walk with God and grow more mature as an individual? Both of these endeavors will make you more attractive to that future spouse when you eventually meet. And the time in heaven between will be productive and satisfying. Instead of trying to find a mate, seek the Lord.



The Opportunities Of Singleness

Brothers...the time is short. From now on, those who have wives should live as if they had none; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away." I Corinthians 7:29-31

Paul now lays before us a key concept that married people as well as singles must understand. The time is short. The world as we know it is passing away. "Forever" is right around the corner. There are people around the world and around the corner who are dying in their sins. God's work must be done today because we may not have tomorrow. For the unmarried, this truth has far-reaching implications. Suppose God wants you single for a reason. Perhaps you are called to be part of that elite group of servants for whom the priority of ministry outranks marriage. Your singleness, instead of being a handicap, becomes the very thing that equips you to devote the maximum attention and energy to making sure that kingdom business gets done. Single people are uniquely fitted to be kingdom people.

It comes down to this: if you're single don't fight it; use it! Use your freedom to accomplish for God what married people cannot. Channel your sexual energy into evangelistic zeal. Remain as you are because the time is short.

Is Paul demeaning marriage? Of course not. His intent is clearly explained in verse 32 and following:

"I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs—how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of the world—how he can please his wife—and his interests are divided."

According to Paul, a married person's interests are divided. And they aren't supposed to be. A husband or wife cannot be involved in church activities every night of the week. He or she must tend to responsibilities at home as well. One very active woman in my congregation said to me, "I'm so excited about the church and about what God is doing at Oak Cliff. I'm growing so much and learning so much that I just want to be here all the time." I told her to go home, lest her wish come true. She needed to divide her interests before Satan gained the opportunity to divide her marriage.

Once you are married, your life becomes a delicate balancing act. Like all Christians, you should be active and involved in the life of the church. But you must make sure that your attentions are properly distributed between church and home.

When I was single, I was involved in a wide array of ministry activities. I was on the go all the time. Now, I get a phone call from my wife. “It’s late. When are you coming home?” Back then, the hour didn’t matter. Today it must matter. I must cut back and rearrange my priorities. My interests must be divided.

On the other hand if you’re single, you call your own shots. Of course, you have your career and other pursuits. But the time that others devote to family concerns, you can invest in kingdom-building. That is God’s plan of action for the unmarried. Paul goes on to say,

“I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.” I Corinthians 7:35

Undivided devotion to the Lord is the calling of every Christian and the key to being a satisfied single. Remember what Jesus said about our earthly needs.

“The pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But **seek first His kingdom and his righteousness and all these things shall be given to you as well.**” (Matthew 6:32-33, emphasis added.)

As a single, you have three options. First, you can gripe. “I’m 25 going on 50, and if I don’t get married soon I probably never will.” Second, you can grab.

Anything alive, breathing, and unattached qualifies as a potential mate. Finally, you can grow. You can say, “Dear Lord, married or single, my life is yours. I’m gong to walk with you and be available for whatever you bring into my life. If you want me to marry, you catch him (or her) and make the delivery in your own good time. In the meantime, let’s get to work.”



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