



Singleness

MORE THAN BEING UNMARRIED

ALAN CORRY

(Matthew 19:12)

Single adults are in good company when they realize that the Lord Jesus Christ lived out His earthly ministry as a single adult. Christian single people find their identity in Christ, not in their marital status. Whether singleness is for a season or a lifetime, the issue is not to focus on singleness. Instead, single people should allow God to use them to make an impact on this world for His kingdom. No one should be ashamed of being single.

COMING TO TERMS

More adults are waiting longer to get married, meaning that more adults are staying single longer. Single people must not let family or friends put undue pressure on them to get married. If they feel like they have to be in a relationship in order to be accepted by others, then they are susceptible to being used and hurt by others, or they will use and hurt others in order to be in a relationship of convenience.

Single people must come to terms with being single—knowing that they are complete and whole as individuals in their relationship with Christ. If they feel that they cannot be whole people until they are married, then they are not ready for marriage. Marriage is not about finding someone to complete and make a person whole. Healthy marriages have as their foundation two individuals who are secure in their own identity—coming together in a state of holy matrimony. As the two of them work together as marriage partners, they will complement each other. The oneness in marriage is a spiritual oneness, but if some never marry and experience that oneness, it does not mean that they are lacking or incomplete as human beings.

Single people must also come to terms with the fact that not all adults marry. Singleness is not to be looked at as an infe-

rior quality of life. According to Paul, "But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am" (1 Cor. 7:8). Paul's intent was not to put marriage down, but rather to elevate the status of being single. Being married and remaining single are both honorable lifestyles. Too many single adults sit on the sidelines waiting to be married before they feel like they will be a viable part of the community. God wants them to be active in the ministry to others *now*.

Pastors and friends of single people should empower them to live life to its fullest as they seek to find God's purpose and direction for their lives. In their singleness, they should seek God in all that they do. They ought never rush to get married. If they marry, they want to be involved in a healthy, growing, and dynamic marriage. In the meantime, however, they should be content in their singleness.

FINDING ONE'S PLACE

Being alone and being lonely are two different things. Being alone is a physical state; being lonely is an emotional state. People can be alone and be perfectly content as they walk, pray, read, watch TV, or just sit and daydream. They can also be in a crowd, but feel very lonely.

Single adults must connect with oth-

ers. God created people to be social beings. After all, His heart's desire is for us to be in a personal relationship with Him through His Son Jesus Christ. Single people need to have a community of friends whom they can trust and with whom they can share activities and interests. They need to have a balance of male and female friends. Obvious places to start will be at a local church where they feel accepted and can be growing in their relationship with God as they also make new friends. Other places to seek out friendships will be in areas of personal interest as they pursue hobbies or participate in service organizations.

Single adults also need a small circle of close friends, good friends who are trustworthy. They can hold each other accountable if one of them is making unhealthy lifestyle choices. As they develop this inner circle of friends, they will deal with the loneliness issue less and less.

Another issue of concern for single adults is their sexuality. People are not only created as social beings, but as sexual beings as well. We are created male and female. The issue of celibacy and singleness causes concern for many singles. Celibacy is a gift and would be for those who choose to remain single for the express purpose of serving God in their singleness.

What about those who are single for a longer season, but yet desire to be married someday? To be celibate can be defined as the spiritual ability to have complete control of one's sexual desires. Although these people may not have the *gift* of celibacy, they still have a biblical mandate to live a chaste lifestyle until they are married. Remaining chaste involves more than refraining from sexual activity; it also means bringing all sexual desires under submission to God. This is not easy, but if single adults wish to honor God with their lives, they must allow God to be at the center,

helping them handle their fears, desires, hopes, and dreams.

FURTHER MEDITATION:

Other passages to study about the issue of singleness include:

- 1 Corinthians 7
- Philippians 4:11
- Hebrews 13:5

To Learn More: Turn to the key passage note on singleness at 1 Corinthians 7:26-35 on page 1503. See also the personality profile of Paul on page 1502.

she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. ¹³And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. ¹⁴For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. ¹⁵But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. ¹⁶For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?

LIVE AS YOU ARE CALLED

¹⁷But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches. ¹⁸Was any

one called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. ¹⁹Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters. ²⁰Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called. ²¹Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it. ²²For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave. ²³You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. ²⁴Brethren, let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called.

TO THE UNMARRIED AND WIDOWS

²⁵Now concerning virgins: I have no commandment from the Lord; yet I give judgment

SOUL NOTE



Don't Go (7:10-16) Divorce was not a part of God's plan but was allowed as a concession to people's sinfulness (Matt. 19:8, 9). When one spouse becomes a Christian and the other doesn't, the believing spouse should stay in the marriage.

Paul explained that the marriage bond is so strong that a believer should not willingly break it. Through that union, the unbeliever may become a Christian. In any event, the believer can have a positive influence on their spouse and children.

Topic: Divorce/Separation

KEY PASSAGE



Singleness

SINGLED OUT

(7:26-35)

Some have understood this passage to mean that all single people should remain that way. But Paul's words must be balanced against both the cultural context

and his mission. Paul, as a single man, understood the need for people to be able to do whatever it took to share the gospel with unbelievers. He knew that persecution could come at any time. His words reveal his total commitment to his call. He encouraged single people not to apologize for their singleness. They should not seek to be married as if that were all that mattered. God has an important calling for single people, since they can "serve the Lord without distraction" (7:35). A married person has many responsibilities, while a single person can be freer to work for the gospel. Neither state is better than the other; different circumstances create different opportunities. Single people can rejoice in their singleness, knowing that God can do great things through them.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about singleness on pages 1262, 1263. See also the personality profile of Paul on page 1502.

a commandment. ⁷For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that.

⁸But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am; ⁹but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

KEEP YOUR MARRIAGE VOWS

¹⁰Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. ¹¹But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife.

¹²But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and



SOUL NOTE

Enjoy (7:2-5) Because of the immorality in Corinth, many believers may have thought that all sex was evil, so they began to refrain from sex even in their marriages. Paul explained that God created sex for the enjoyment of a man and woman in marriage and for procreation. Sex in marriage binds a husband and wife together. A healthy sex life also helps the couple to withstand any outside temptations. Sex in marriage should be fulfilling, intimate, and sensual. A believer can and should enjoy the sexual relationship of marriage and the bond it brings them and their spouse.

Topic: Sex in Marriage



Singleness

PERSONALITY PROFILE

PAUL: SINGLE AND NOT ALONE

(1 COR. 7:8)

Paul was one of the greatest missionaries who ever lived—tirelessly traveling the known world with the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. He told the Corinthian believers, in the context of their questions about marriage, “I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am,” meaning single. Why such advice? And what’s wrong with marriage?

Nothing is wrong with marriage. In fact, throughout this section, Paul also told the married people to stay married, even if they were married to unbelievers. The situation in Corinth needed to be handled carefully. The rampant immorality of the city meant that believers needed to learn how God would have them live pure lives. The specter of persecution from the Roman Empire meant that Paul felt an urgency to share the gospel with as few hindrances as possible. Paul advised those already single to remain that way—not seeking to get married as if getting married was to be their goal. Their focus should first be on God; then, if marriage presented itself as a possibility, they could certainly marry.

Paul also explained, realistically, how a married person’s priorities are different. A single believer has different service opportunities than a married believer. Paul, passionate for the gospel to spread, simply wished that more people were like him.

Singleness can be used for God’s glory. Whether a person has never been married or has become single by way of divorce or bereavement, single people are not set aside by God. He has great things for single people to accomplish for His kingdom. Single people must get their own priorities straight—seeking God and His will above all. Single believers are never alone, because God is always with them.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about singleness on pages 1262, 1263. See also the key passage note at 1 Corinthians 7:26–35 on page 1503.

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comparable to him." ¹⁹Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him.

²¹And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. ²²Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.

²³And Adam said:

"This is now bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh;
She shall be called Woman,
Because she was taken out of Man."

²⁴Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

²⁵And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

THE TEMPTATION AND FALL OF MAN

3 Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'"

²And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; ³but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'"

⁴Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. ⁵For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

⁶So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. ⁷Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.

⁸And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from

SOUL NOTE



Make Your Choice (2:16, 17) God provided an entire garden of fruit trees to satisfy Adam's hunger as well as his taste buds. Adam, and soon Eve, were allowed to eat freely of every tree. But then God put one forbidden tree in the garden—just one—and told Adam, "You shall not eat" from that tree. In order for there to be loving obedience, there had to be the option for disobedience. Adam was given a clear boundary and a clear choice with clear consequences for disobedience. We also face choices every day. When we observe God's boundaries, we show our love for Him.

Topic: Boundaries

SOUL NOTE



Alone? (2:18) God's provision of a "helper" for Adam was not a condescending comment on singleness but an approval of marriage. God was concerned for Adam's loneliness, for He created people to have relationships—with Him and with others. Single adults include never-marrieds as well as separated, divorced, and widowed persons. Though issues may differ, each one faces the potential problems of aloneness, such as isolation, insecurity, and feelings of rejection. Being "unattached" can foster destructive responses, or it can encourage the development of a deeper relationship with God. There's nothing wrong with being single—just don't go it alone!

Topic: Singleness

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My father's God, and I will exalt Him.
 The LORD is a man of war;
 The LORD is His name.
 Pharaoh's chariots and his army He has
 cast into the sea;
 His chosen captains also are drowned in
 the Red Sea.
 The depths have covered them;
 They sank to the bottom like a stone.

"Your right hand, O LORD, has become
 glorious in power;
 Your right hand, O LORD, has dashed the
 enemy in pieces.
 And in the greatness of Your excellence
 You have overthrown those who rose
 against You;
 You sent forth Your wrath;
 It consumed them like stubble.
 And with the blast of Your nostrils
 The waters were gathered together;
 The floods stood upright like a heap;
 The depths congealed in the heart of the
 sea.
 The enemy said, 'I will pursue,
 I will overtake,
 I will divide the spoil;
 My desire shall be satisfied on them.
 I will draw my sword,
 My hand shall destroy them.'
 You blew with Your wind,
 The sea covered them;
 They sank like lead in the mighty waters.

"Who is like You, O LORD, among the
 gods?
 Who is like You, glorious in holiness,
 Fearful in praises, doing wonders?
 You stretched out Your right hand;
 The earth swallowed them.
 You in Your mercy have led forth
 The people whom You have redeemed;

You have guided *them* in Your strength
 To Your holy habitation.

- ¹⁴ "The people will hear *and* be afraid;
 Sorrow will take hold of the inhabitants
 of Philistia.
¹⁵ Then the chiefs of Edom will be
 dismayed;
 The mighty men of Moab,
 Trembling will take hold of them;
 All the inhabitants of Canaan will melt
 away.
¹⁶ Fear and dread will fall on them;
 By the greatness of Your arm
 They will be *as* still as a stone,
 Till Your people pass over, O LORD,
 Till the people pass over
 Whom You have purchased.
¹⁷ You will bring them in and plant them
 In the mountain of Your inheritance,
 In the place, O LORD, *which* You have
 made
 For Your own dwelling,
 The sanctuary, O LORD, *which* Your
 hands have established.

¹⁸ "The LORD shall reign forever and ever."

¹⁹For the horses of Pharaoh went with his
 chariots and his horsemen into the sea, and
 the LORD brought back the waters of the sea
 upon them. But the children of Israel went on
 dry *land* in the midst of the sea.

THE SONG OF MIRIAM

²⁰Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of
 Aaron, took the timbrel in her hand; and all the
 women went out after her with timbrels and
 with dances. ²¹And Miriam answered them:

"Sing to the LORD,
 For He has triumphed gloriously!

SOUL NOTE



The Single Life (15:20) Is being single better than being married? Or is it the other way around? It is true that single people have freedom to serve God in any capacity, without concern over spouses or children (1 Cor. 7). Miriam, most likely a single woman, played a significant role in the spiritual life of Israel, and she is the first woman to be called a "prophetess." Singleness never denotes inferiority—God has special work for all of His people whether they are single or married. **Topic: Singleness**

³³And Joseph and His mother^a marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. ³⁴Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this *Child* is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against ³⁵(yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

ANNA BEARS WITNESS TO THE REDEEMER

³⁶Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; ³⁷and this woman *was* a widow of about eighty-four years,^a who did not depart from the temple, but served *God* with fastings and prayers night and day. ³⁸And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord,^a and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

THE FAMILY RETURNS TO NAZARETH

³⁹So when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their *own* city, Nazareth. ⁴⁰And the Child grew and became strong in spirit,^a

filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.

THE BOY JESUS AMAZES THE SCHOLARS

⁴¹His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. ⁴²And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast. ⁴³When they had finished the days, as they returned, the Boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem. And Joseph and His mother^a did not know *it*; ⁴⁴but supposing Him to have been in the company, they went a day's journey, and sought Him among *their* relatives and acquaintances. ⁴⁵So when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him. ⁴⁶Now so it was *that* after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. ⁴⁸So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You done this to us?"

2:33 ^aNU-Text reads *And His father and mother*.

2:37 ^aNU-Text reads *a widow until she was eighty-*

four. 2:38 ^aNU-Text reads *to God*. 2:40 ^aNU-Text omits *in spirit*. 2:43 ^aNU-Text reads *And His parents*.



SOUL NOTE

Being Content (2:36) Anna was very young when her husband died, and she had been a widow for 84 years. Anna remained single, choosing to give her life to serving God through fasting and prayer. People are single for a number of reasons, and they respond to singleness in different ways. Some single people, like Anna, seek to serve God without concern about marriage; others dearly long for a spouse. It is important to remember that the key to a fulfilled single life is contentment in God. He has places of service for all people—married or single. **Topic: Singleness**



SOUL NOTE

Coming of Age (2:41, 42) He was God incarnate, but the twelve-year-old Jesus did have His time of adolescent development—taking on more responsibility, seeking independence, and wanting answers to His questions. And Mary reacted as any parent would—worrying, being surprised, and becoming upset. Adolescent development and parental reactions are basically the same today. As children grow and mature, they are learning to become independent of their parents and more dependent on God through a personal relationship with Him. Parents must learn to allow their children to find God's direction in their lives. **Topic: Adolescent Development**

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