

## GOD'S GLORY IN SINGLENESS

### *ONE Conference notes*

In *The Rich Single Life*, (available [online](#) as pdf) Andrew Farmer, referencing 1 Cor 7:29-35, says,

This “undivided devotion to the Lord” is the essence of biblical identity for the single adult. It is rooted in the sovereignty of a God who places people in appropriate situations for the best possible reasons. It is steeped in the love of a God who uses even the most difficult of situations for the greatest possible benefit. It is sustained by the wisdom of a God whose timing is perfect and whose guidance is sure. You may not live under the present threat of inevitable persecution for your faith. (Or maybe you do.) Nevertheless, we all live in “times that are short.” If you are a Christian, don’t despise the state to which you have been called. Live in the gift of your singleness for as long as you have the gift. And whether or not God ever ordains the prospect of marriage for your life, bring faith for the present and hope for the future, because there is much to be done. Who better to set a hand to the task than you?

#### Personal

- *How is one to perceive/understand singleness?*
- *How does this affect the way they manage their singleness?*

#### STATISTICS regarding SINGLENESS

- **44% of adults (18 & older) are single**
- **Of those 44%**
  - **23% have never married**
  - **9.8% have been divorced**
  - **6.8% widowed**
  - **6.3% separated**

**The number of singles in our country (and others) is on the rise**

- **As of the 2000 census**
  - **Avg median age for males to marry – 26.8**
  - **Avg median age for females to marry – 25.1**
- **In 1990 census the avg age was 26.1 (male) – 23.9 (female)**
- **In 1980 census the avg age was 24.7 (male) – 22.0 (female)**
- **In 1970 census the avg age was 23.2 (male) – 20.8 (female)**
- **In 1960 census the avg age was 22.8 (male) – 20.3 (female)**

❖ **Singleness is a huge part of our society**

**What the Bible has to say about marriage/singleness is one of the most misunderstood doctrines in the church. Yes there is a doctrine**

- **The Bible provides a theology centered on the topic of singleness**

**Unfortunately we've made marriage/singleness what Hollywood has made it to be or what a novel has made it out to be.**

**We have read well-intentioned books on dating/relationships, courtship – that are a little more than romantic novels—full of stories, tears, antidotes**

- ❖ **The RESULT:**
  - **People do not know how to perceive their singleness**
  - **People do not know how to use their singleness for God's glory**

**FOR Example:**

- **While single adults constitute an increasing percentage of our population a recent study by George Barna suggests they are significantly under-represented in nearly every facet of church life.**
  - **51% of married adult Americans attend regular church services,**
    - Only 35% of single adult Americans similarly attend
  - **23% of married adults additionally attend a Sunday School class**
    - Only 15% of single adults attend

Although singles would expect to have more leisure time

- **Only 18% regularly volunteer at their church vs. 29% of married people**
- Single adults are less financially committed to their respective churches giving
- **65% less in financial contributions than their married counterparts**
  - **Singles were 50% less likely to be serving in leadership capacities within the church**

The trend is same in every category

- **Single people are 30-50% less involved in the life of the church than their married counterparts**

**People are not understanding singleness rightly**

**VARYING VIEWs on SINGLENESs:**

**There are varying positions of how to perceive/understand singleness**

1. **The Mandate view**
  - a. The view that all are called to marry
2. **The Gift of Celibacy view**
  - a. A sub group within this group would not necessarily agree wholeheartedly with the mandate view but their closely tied together – *the Gift of Celibacy* view
    - i. Both the mandate view and gift of celibacy view turn to 1 Cor 7 and the gift of v.7

- ii. The gift of celibacy (*what is celibacy—define?*) views v.7 as referring to the gift of celibacy.
- b. **Downfall of this position** – many are claiming to have the gift of celibacy when they do not.

*The question is what do you do with the “gift” of v. 7 in 1 Corinthians 7?*

### 3. The Gift of Singleness View

- a. This interpretation is used to make the application that those who desire marriage should still view their singleness as a good gift from God to be used for his service, while also recognizing marriage as another good gift, that God may later give.
- b. **The NT description of singleness as a calling or charisma affirms a message of hope and inclusion of those who are single. The message in no way denigrates marriage, but rather, affirms that life together in the body of Christ needs and benefits from both single and married people.**
- c.
- d. Deliberate extended singleness is expected to be particularly used in service for God.
- e. **Downfall of this position** –
  - i. **Passivity** – it is OK for men/women to passive about remaining single, waiting until God brings about the gift of marriage.
- f.

## Singleness is a gift from God to be used for His glory

### ❖ In order to see this one has to look at the entire story line of God

The concept of being single changes throughout the course of Scripture

- And when you see why and how it really is a beautiful thing
  - It changes the way you understand your own singleness
  - It changes the way you manage/use your singleness
- From the very beginning in Genesis—marriage/physical union was an “all-necessary” institution
  - Marriage and procreation was the link to God’s blessing
    - Procreation was everything (Gen 1 & 9– with animals and man)
      - To bear child was to receive God’s blessing (Gen 12)
    - Passing on your inheritance was everything
    - Passing on your legacy or name was everything
      - If you were not able to do these things you were outside the people of God as well as outside of God’s covenantal blessing

- This is what was central to Abraham in Gen 12 & 13 (offspring, name, land)
  - To the extent that Abraham’s offspring survived or perish is likewise to the extent his blessing was realized or lost.
- OT covenants (Sinai, Davidic)

### **Deuteronomy 7:12-14**

<sup>12(A)</sup> "And because you listen to these rules and keep and do them, the LORD your God will keep with you<sup>(B)</sup> the covenant and the steadfast love that he swore to your fathers. <sup>13</sup>He will<sup>(C)</sup> love you, bless you, and multiply you.<sup>(D)</sup> He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, your grain and your wine and your oil, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock, in the land that he swore to your fathers to give you. <sup>14</sup>You shall be blessed above all peoples.<sup>(E)</sup> There shall not be male or female barren among you or among your livestock.

### **2 Samuel 7:12-13**

<sup>12(A)</sup> When your days are fulfilled and<sup>(B)</sup> you lie down with your fathers,<sup>(C)</sup> I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. <sup>13(D)</sup> He shall build a house for my name, and<sup>(E)</sup> I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

- Offspring, land, and name were central to Israelite society

Attest to the severity of this in Scripture

- **Passing of one’s NAME**
  - Deut 25:6 – dying childless risk the consequence of having one’s name “*blotted out of Israel*”—implying a loss of memory within the living memory of the nation
    - Thus the provision of surrogate heirs
  - 1 Sam 24:21 – Saul begs David to swear that he will not cut off his offspring after him, thereby destroying his name from his father’s house
    -
- **Passing of one’s INHERITANCE**
  - Inheritance often referred to one’s land—which represented that portion of God’s provision of blessing and sustenance
  - Your ancestors were buried there
  - To die without offspring to pass it to meant you lost your inheritance—it was distributed back among the clan
- One’s name was also tied to their inheritance
- Numbers 27 – the daughters of Zelophehad raise a concern that their father’s name will disappear from his clan if his inheritance is forfeited
  - The year of Jubilee was a corrective mechanism to sustain the tie between’s one’s name and one’s inheritance over generations
- 1 Kgs 21:21 – God “cut off” from Ahab every male in Israel because of his stealing of Naboth’s vineyard—thus his house and identity were extinguished
- Psalm 127:3 – describes one’s children as an “inheritance” (*nahala*)
- Book of Ruth – Naomi experiences bitterness stems from reality of having to forfeit their land because she had lost her husband and sons
  - Her name and covenantal blessing would be forever lost.

- Which makes Boaz's redemptive act all the sweeter
- Ruth 4:9-10 Boaz takes Ruth as his wife *"to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brothers..."*

For an Israelite , the potential tragedy of dying single, without offspring (a eunuch or virgin) was **EXTREME!**

- Judges 11:37 – Jephthah's daughter appears to weep more on account of her dying single (virgin) than on account of her sacrificial death.
- Jeremiah 16:1-4 – Jeremiah who was a prophet and called to be single, laments more at the prospect of being killed and having his name longer remembered
- Jeremiah 22:30 – Jeremiah condemns Coniah, the son of king Jehoiakim saying
  - *"Write this man down as childless, a man who shall not succeed in his days, for none of his offspring shall succeed in sitting on the throne of David"*

- **Then a shift – Isaiah and the Major Prophets**

- The **New Covenant** beings to be spoken of—and of course carried forth and delivered in the NT with the coming of Jesus Christ and the provision of the Holy Spirit
- With this New Covenant—God literally turns Israel's concept of singleness on its head—*it would serve us well to notice this shift because it effects our own perception of singleness*
  - Examine what occurs in the prophets
  - Examine what occurs and what is emphasized in Christ's teaching
  - Examine the consistency of this teaching in the NT with Paul's instructions

***What Occurs in the Prophets***

- Isaiah 9 – a virgin is to give birth to a child – a new offspring – that will multiply the nations and increase its joy
- Isaiah 54 – right on the heels of the suffering Servant (Isa 53) – is a picture of a barren woman singing a new song—*her children will be more than the children of her who is married!*

***What is happening here?***

- **The Church, the Lord's people are created by supernatural birth not physical birth**
- **This is a great comfort to those who are single or childless within the church**

- **In the paradigm of the NEW COVENANT God's people are no longer defined by whether or not they are married or have children**

- **Those not experiencing the joy of physical children are still able to experience profound joy and satisfaction at the prospect of producing spiritual children through evangelism and service to the kingdom**

- **Isaiah 56:1-8** – two chapters later – another picture of the NEW Covenant’s power of hope and restoration
  - **The eunuch and the foreigner—once in danger of being separated from God’s covenantal blessing (Deut 23--eunuch) can rejoice**
  - The basis of a relationship with God is no longer based on procreation, but on a new non-physical process—the new birth.
    - They can now join themselves to the Lord (56:3,6)
    - Be His servants (56:6)
    - Have direct access to the temple (56:7)
- **Reminder to the single,**
  - **Don’t let your identity be wrapped in your relational status**
    - Think of the legacy you now have as a member of God’s eternal household.
    - God Himself is our portion and inheritance (Lam 3:24; Ezek 44:28)

### *What Occurs in the NT?*

- The New Covenant is carried further—into present reality
  - Our name is that which God our Savior gives us – Rev 3:5 one that will not be blotted out from His book
  - Our inheritance is not land but salvation and eternal life

#### **1 Peter 1:3-4**

<sup>3(A)</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!<sup>(B)</sup> According to his great mercy,<sup>(C)</sup> he has caused us to be born again to a living hope<sup>(D)</sup> through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup>to<sup>(E)</sup> an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and<sup>(F)</sup> unfading,<sup>(G)</sup> kept in heaven for you,

- **This inheritance is perfect, eternal and unchanging.**

### **The Teachings of Christ**

- John 3 – it is the Spirit’s regenerating work rather than the human physical procreation work which serves as the vehicle by which God is building his people in the New Testament.
- See Luke 14:26; Matt 12:46-50; Mark 10:28-31

#### **Luke 14:26**

<sup>26(A)</sup> "If anyone comes to me and<sup>(B)</sup> does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters,<sup>(C)</sup> yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

#### **Matthew 12:46-50**

<sup>46</sup>While he was still speaking to the people, behold,<sup>(A)</sup> his mother and his<sup>(B)</sup> brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him.<sup>[a]</sup>  
<sup>48</sup>But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" <sup>49</sup>And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! <sup>50</sup>For<sup>(C)</sup> whoever<sup>(D)</sup> does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

#### **Mark 10:28-31**

<sup>28</sup>Peter began to say to him, "See,<sup>(A)</sup> we have left everything and followed you." <sup>29</sup>Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you,<sup>(B)</sup> there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and<sup>(C)</sup> for the gospel, <sup>30</sup>who will not receive a hundredfold<sup>(D)</sup> now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands,<sup>(E)</sup> with persecutions, and in<sup>(F)</sup> the age to come eternal life. <sup>31</sup>But<sup>(G)</sup> many who are first will be last, and the last first."

- **Luke 20 -- Christ is confronted by the Sadducees on marriage in the resurrection**
- **Here is Christ's answer**

### **Luke 20:34-36**

<sup>34</sup>And Jesus said to them, <sup>(A)</sup> "The sons of this age<sup>(B)</sup> marry and are given in marriage, <sup>35</sup>but those who are<sup>(C)</sup> considered worthy to attain to<sup>(D)</sup> that age and to the resurrection from the dead<sup>(E)</sup> neither marry nor are given in marriage, <sup>36</sup>for<sup>(F)</sup> they cannot die anymore, because they are<sup>(G)</sup> equal to angels and<sup>(H)</sup> are<sup>(I)</sup> sons of God, being<sup>(J)</sup> sons<sup>[a]</sup> of the resurrection.

- **This rebuttal communicates volumes**
  - 1. Marriage is a temporary institution**
    - a. Meant for this age not the resurrection
  - 2. Marriage is no longer required to achieve the intimacy and companionship that once required a marital relationship**
  - 3. Marriage is not the all-important relationship**
- **Matthew 19:10 – Jesus offers surprising teaching regarding marriage and singleness when the disciples ask Him about divorce (19:1-12)**
  - Disciples – “if such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry (Matt 19:10)
  - Instead of refuting their absurd idea, Jesus commends it and reiterates it

<sup>10</sup>The disciples said to him, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry." <sup>11</sup>But he said to them, <sup>(N)</sup> "Not everyone can receive this saying, but only<sup>(O)</sup> those to<sup>(P)</sup> whom it is given. <sup>12</sup>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<sup>(Q)</sup> for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it."

- **Jesus' use of the term eunuch was surprising considering their disdain in Jewish culture**
  - But on another level it provides in fact a vivid model of the point He makes.
    - For the ancient world, a eunuch was one who had set aside sexual activity for the sake of devoted and loyal service to the king
    - Without a wife and family—he had more time for dedicated service
      - Daniel was an example of this
  - **Jesus suggests that there should be some who renounce marriage and procreation for the sake of devoted service to the kingdom of God**

**But Jesus gives two clarifications:**

- 1. V.11 – lifelong singleness is not for everyone, but only to those to whom it is given**
  - a. **Jesus still affirms marriage for some**
- 2. V. 12 – He gives the command, whoever is able, to do it**
  - a. *:Let the one who is able to receive this (teaching) receive it"*

### **Paul's Teaching on Singleness**

- **1 Corinthians 7** goes hand in hand with Christ's teaching
  - Single persons are “free from anxieties” and “anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord (7:32)
    - Paul as well states that singleness is not for everyone.

- ❖ *How does singleness fit in with the glory of God? →*
- ❖ *How do the Scriptures change our Perspective of Singleness?*

### **1. Singleness is a Reflection of the New Covenant**

- a. The presence of singles within the church is a reminder that, through Christ, God has instituted a new system by which his people receive divine blessing
  - i. Through the New Covenant, God's blessing does not discriminate between Jew or Gentile, male or female, slave or free, *or even married or single.*

### **2. Singles Remind the Church of the Sufficiency of Christ**

- a. Christ is now the sole means (not marriage and procreation) through which God is now at work building the people of God—a people who will last for eternity.

### **3. Singles Remind the Church of its Mandate**

- a. Our mission is to “Go and make disciples” (Matthew 28)
  - i. “*Be Fruitful and Multiply*” is never reiterated in the NT, the Gospel mandate is to “*Make disciples of all nations*”

### **4. Singles Remind the Church of its Eternal Agenda**

- a. Singles are a visible reminder that the kingdom of God points to a reality which stands beyond worldly pre-occupations of marriage, family and career.
  - i. To be single is a reminder that the gospel message of the Kingdom of God stands for and represents something greater than all the blessings and satisfactions which this present world has to offer.

### **5. Singleness is a Valuable Asset to the Church**

- a. Singleness provides a wealth of ministry opportunities—
  - i. Undistracted devotion to God and service to His church
- b. Examples:
  - i. The eunuch-servant motif in Scripture
  - ii. 1 Corinthians 7

## Practical Suggestions

### 1. Think Biblically Regarding Your Singleness

### 2. Be Content in Your Singleness

- a. *“If you are a Christian, don’t despise the state to which you have been called. Live in the gift of your singleness for as long as you have the gift.”*
- i. *How much of your time is spent thinking about the prospect of that next relationship?*
  - ii. *How much of your time is spent pursuing the prospect of that next relationship?*
  - iii. *Do you consider your singleness a gift or a curse?*
  - iv. *Do you give thanks to God for your present gift of singleness?*
  - v. *Is your identity in Christ or is it wrapped up in the latest person you are in a relationship with?*

### 3. Manage Your Singleness for the Glory of God – (“manage” – you are a steward)

- a. *“And whether or not God ever ordains the prospect of marriage for your life, bring faith for the present and hope for the future, because there is much to be done. Who better to set a hand to the task than you?”*
- i. *Is your singleness a blessing to your local church—with your time and resources being used for the benefit of God’s people?*
  - ii. *Would people describe you as being “free from (worldly) anxieties” and “anxious about the things of the Lord” (1 Cor 7:32)?*
  - iii. *Is your present singleness being utilized as a concentrated time to develop “personal” spiritual maturity in Christ? – Use this time to work on yourself—becoming a “marriageable” person*
  - iv. *Enjoy the gift of singleness in the present, and let God bring the gift of marriage as He so chooses! → His timing, His choice, His way!*

### 4.