

LESSON 13 - SINGLENESS

Are You Called to Glorify God Through Celibacy and Undivided Devotion?

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Our previous lesson was about how marriage is a sacred institution, designed by God, to make us like Jesus. Many Christians believe that getting married and raising a family is the normal and best to do. But did you know that not everyone is called to be married? Or that Jesus and Paul both taught that it’s not even best? There are benefits and challenges to singleness. Whether single for life, or for just a season, you’ll want to embrace these benefits and overcome these challenges.

What is Christian Singleness? All teenagers and young adults are naturally single until they mature and marry. Others include those divorced or widowed, now finding themselves single once again. There are many still-unmarried Christians in long term relationships. However, Christians shouldn’t be in *perpetual* unmarried, monogamous relationships. The purpose of *all* Christian dating is to evaluate potential future spouses with whom to partner and grow together in Christ with. This is whether intentionally pursuing a partner, or simply remaining single and emotionally available to future prospects. I call this “Christian dating” and we’ll explore it in the next lesson. Christian singleness is choosing not to date or to pursue a partner at all. Christian singleness is a sacred way of choosing to do life. It’s intentionally remaining single, celibate, sexually pure, and wholly devoted to God for life.

Marriage Isn’t Necessary To Love. Is it even a *good* thing to remain single? After all, before making Eve in Genesis 2:18, God says, “*It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.*” But we must remember this was the second human *ever* created. Prior to Eve there was only Adam, and there was no way for humans to multiply. Genesis 1:28 says that it’s good that we are fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it. It’s also good for us to have human companionship and relationships. We have ALL been called to this and to cultivate our love for one another. But this doesn’t need to be *romantic* love. In fact, ALL-but-one of our relationships are *not* romantic. They could easily all be like this: intimate, loving, family-like. Jesus’s command in John 13:34 is to, “*Love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.*” 1 Thessalonians 4:9 says, “*you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another.*” Romans 12:10 says, “*Love one another with brotherly affection.*” Jesus taught in Luke 20:34-35 after the resurrection we no longer have marriage. We’re all brothers and sisters with one Father. Remember though, this is *already* true. We CAN be good, *complete*, and *fulfilled*—while single—just as long as we continue to give and receive love in non-romantic ways.

Lifelong Singleness as a Gift and Calling. In Matthew 19 Jesus taught about God’s initial intention

for marriage, His hatred of divorce, and His high standards for divorce. Upon hearing this, the disciples say in verse 10, *“If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.”* Jesus replied, *“Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given.”* Jesus says, *“there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.”* Not everyone can receive this truth but those who are called to it can. Jesus and Paul both remained single. Barnabas and John appear to as well. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 7:6-8 talking about marriage and singleness says, *“as a concession, not a command... I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am.”* But in verse 17 he says, *“let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him.”*

Benefits. The main benefit of singleness is that it enables a greater capacity for undivided devotion to God. With marriage comes the anxieties and obligations related to worldly things such as pleasing and meeting your spouses needs. Paul notes that a married person’s interests are divided. But the unmarried are anxious *only* about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. Paul says repeatedly it’s better, and could lead to greater happiness, to remain single for this reason. It’s easy to get distracted and emotionally-consumed by the visible things of the world. Singleness—when accompanied with an intentionally God-centered lifestyle free of worldly entanglements—can free a person up to pursue the calling of God on their life with undivided, fervent, and whole-hearted devotion.

Challenges. The main challenge of singleness is not having a godly way to embrace sexual desire. This can lead to sexual frustration, lustful thoughts, and increased temptation to sexual immorality due to a lack of self-control. It’s better to marry a Christian spouse, love one another sacrificially, and give each spouse authority over the other’s body than it is to burn with passion, as 1 Corinthians 7:8 says. Another challenge is loneliness and lack of companionship. We can surround ourselves with family-like relationships but romantic intimacy offers something uniquely beautiful and enjoyable: an emotionally deeper form of comfort and security. Of course, we all need to grow in our sanctification. Whether married or single, we need to die to ourselves, crucify the selfish desires (passions and emotions) of our flesh, and be led by the Holy Spirit instead. In regards to sex, the single person must do this now, whereas the married person can learn more gradually. So it’s both a benefit and a challenge to grow in.

When considering this option, don’t remain single because of your own self-centeredness, past emotional wounds, or without prayerful, mindful consideration. Singleness is good but it’s also difficult and without God’s help you won’t be able to walk in the fullness of its potential. Submit the decision to God and obey the promptings He lays on your heart. Success in singleness, with celibacy, sexual purity, peace, and joy without anxiety, loneliness, or sexual frustration, is *only* possible by the calling of God, the gift of God, the grace of God, and the empowering presence and direction of the Holy Spirit.

Let’s pray. Father, help me put You first, always. Help me either be wholly devoted to You in singleness, or to be devoted to you first and foremost while sacrificially loving my spouse. Give me direction, wisdom, and strength. Help me embrace every opportunity to become more like Jesus. Amen.