

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Building Faith at Home Series, Message 3

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A Biblical Vision for Singles

1 Corinthians 7:7-8, 25-35

I. Introduction:

A. It's hard to have a biblical perspective of singleness

Back when I was single, Valentine's Day was one of my least favorite days of the year. For in my teens and early 20s I "celebrated" many a Valentine's Day alone at home, alone, feeling lesser than everyone who had a "special someone." And unfortunately, Valentine's Day is not the only day when singles can be tempted to feel lesser. Think about how many movies we've seen with the message that life is all about finding your one true love. As early as our preschool years, Disney movies are already indoctrinating us with the message that we must get married if we want to live "happily ever after."

And if that's not bad enough, sometimes married people in the church make things worse. I think us married folks want to be helpful, but sometimes we miss the mark. Like when we get a little too focused on playing matchmaker for our single friends. Or when an unbiblical comment slips out of our mouths. Maybe something like, "You can't really be a mature Christian until you've been married some years." Or when we share only about the blessings of our marriage and not about the struggles, giving the mistaken impression that marriage is consistently great. So, on behalf of the married Christians, please accept my apology for when our attempts to help have actually hurt.

B. What is a biblical vision for singles?

Now I hope this morning will be helpful for my single brothers and sisters, as we continue our Building Faith at Home sermon series. This year our series focus is on having a biblical vision for our homes. Pastor Dave started the series by covering a subject that can really hinder us from living out a biblical vision, pornography. Then last week we talked about the biblical vision for marriage. If you missed that message, you can check it out on the church website, nwchurch.org. I think you'll find something in it that will help your marriage.

This morning we will consider the question, “What is a biblical vision for singles?” So if you’ve got a Bible, please turn with me to 1 Corinthians 7. In 1 Corinthians 7 we will see the good gifts that God has given to single Christians.

C. Relevance for married and 1 Corinthians summary

And if you are not single, I hope you’ll stay with us as we discuss biblical singlehood this morning. For you may see something from God’s Word that equips you to speak life to a struggling single friend, and helps you avoid the kind of unhelpful comments I mentioned earlier. And if you have kids, seeing God’s vision for singles will help you to encourage them to have a godly perspective on their singleness.

Further, we will see this morning that God’s Word is so profound that it speaks to the married even as it addresses the singles. And finally, not to be a “Debbie Downer” or anything here on Valentine’s Day, but all of us who are married may be single again one day, and it is good to get equipping from God’s Word for that possibility.

Now before we jump into 1 Corinthians 7, let me share about 1 Corinthians. The letter is written to Christians in the sinful city of Corinth. The church there struggled with immorality and divisions. And so the author Paul, who was single himself, wrote this letter to encourage the Corinthian Christians to holiness and address some issues they had questions about, one of which was the subject of singleness and marriage.

II. God has given you a good gift (7:7-8)

In 1 Corinthians chapter 7 the first thing we’re going to see about single Christians is that God has given you a good gift. Please follow along with me as I read, starting in verse 7. “⁷ I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that. ⁸ Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do.”

Look back at verse 7. Here Paul states that he wishes every believer was single, as he is. But then he goes on to say that each believer has their own gift from God. Notice here that Paul says each has a gift from God, both marrieds and singles. Then in verse 8 Paul again states that it is good for the unmarried to stay single.

If you’re single, have you ever viewed your singleness as a gift from God? That it might even be better than being married? I certainly didn’t have this perspective back when I was single. But God’s Word invites us here to consider singleness a gift. Even if you long to be

married someday, you are invited to view your current state as a gift from God. So how is singleness a gift? Let's jump down to verse 25, where Paul begins to answer this question.

A. Easier to share God's perspective (7:25-31)

We will see there that being single is a gift because it is easier to share God's perspective. Please follow along with me in your Bibles, starting in verse 25.

²⁵ Now about virgins: I have no command from the Lord, but I give a judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. ²⁶ Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for a man to remain as he is. ²⁷ Are you pledged to a woman? Do not seek to be released. Are you free from such a commitment? Do not look for a wife. ²⁸ But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this. ²⁹ What I mean, brothers and sisters, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they do not; ³⁰ 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; ³¹ those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.

In these verses Paul makes it clear that Christians are free to stay single or seek to be married. As verse 28 says, if you marry, you have not sinned. However, Paul also notes in verse 28 that married people face challenges that single Christians do not.

Look now at verse 29. Here Paul begins to explain one of those challenges by reminding us that the time is short. Jesus has already come and died for our sins and rose from the dead. The key to all of history has already happened, and Jesus could return at any time. And so all of us should have a sense of urgency in serving Jesus. We don't know when He will return, when there will be no more time to lead people to Jesus, to disciple others, to earn eternal rewards.

It is so easy for the married to get so focused on one's spouse and kids and the life you're trying to build together that you lose sight of the fact that the time is short. That's why Paul says in verse 29 there is a sense in which those who are married should live as if they are not. To make sure that your focus is not so temporary that you forget the more important eternal perspective.

For as Paul reminds us at the end of verse 31, the world in its present form is passing away. Everything here is temporary, even our spouse and kids. And as a single person, you are freed from the many distractions that come with marriage, one of which is the greater temptation

to place all your focus on the temporary. My single brothers and sisters, you have the gift of more easily sharing the most important perspective, God's.

B. Easier to live for what matters most (7:32-35)

The next gift of singlehood relates to the first. Being single is also a gift because it is easier to live for what matters most. Please follow along with me, starting in verse 32. ³² 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. ³³ But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife—³⁴ and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband. ³⁵ 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.

Look back at verse 32. Paul notes that single believers are free to focus on pleasing Jesus, sharing His concerns. While, as verses 33 and 34 show us, the married person must also think about pleasing their spouse, and so their interests are more divided.

Look now at verse 35. I think it is important for us to notice the heart behind what Paul says. He is not looking to restrict single people or legislate his preference for them. Nor does Paul want to raise a group of emotional martyrs who begrudgingly stay single because they feel a burdensome obligation to serve God.

Rather, as Paul says in verse 35, "I am saying this to you [singles] for your own good." As your single brother in the Lord, Paul invites every believer who is single to join him in enjoying the rich blessings that come with undivided devotion to Jesus.

Now single Christians will at times miss out on some things. Nevertheless, we see that singlehood is a good gift from God because it helps you to avoid missing out on what matters most. And this view of singlehood as a gift is not coming from this married guy up here who doesn't understand all of your challenges and concerns. No, the message comes from the apostle Paul, who lived this reality as a single believer. And most importantly, this message is true because it comes from the very Word of God.

i. Intimacy with God

For single believers, undistracted by marriage, can have greater focus on the most important thing, the Greatest Commandment, loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and

strength. When you are married, it is so easy to make family the focus of life. When things are great with your spouse, you're tempted to have less hunger for our ultimate spouse, Jesus. And if you have kids, it is so easy to place your deepest hopes in how they turn out, rather than placing your deepest hopes in God's kingdom.

And even when marrieds struggle greatly, family can still be our main focus. As we spend all of our time and energy on trying to make the marriage work, or as we experience overwhelming pain that distracts us from loving and serving God.

Without these kinds of concerns and temptations, a single Christian can more easily focus on relationship with God. And if a single person longs for a spouse or kids, God can even use that longing to encourage you towards a deeper relationship with Him. With less distractions and greater longing, single believers are free to seek after the deep things of God. And this priority of relationship with God is so important that Paul considered being single preferable to marriage.

Now I know that some, both inside and outside the church, don't consider intimacy with God all that important. Perhaps you've heard someone express this by saying something like, "Yeah, I believe in God and pray or go to church every once in a while, but what really matters at the end of the day is that you're a good person."

I recently heard a pastor¹ address this perspective by inviting you to imagine a single mom with one son. She works herself to the bone to raise him right and give him a better future. Between the money she scrapes together over the years working extra shifts and the scholarships she helps him to get, he is able to go to college. When he's leaving for college she tells him to take his education and use it to be a good man who works hard and helps others. The son goes to college, studies hard, graduates, and gets a great job. Over the years he builds a career and a life where he tells the truth, works hard, and helps others, just like his mom wanted.

But, he never calls his mom, never goes to see her, doesn't even bother to send her a Christmas card some years. Is that okay? I mean, after all, the son is living the kind of life that his mom wants him to live. Well of course not. It is wrong and offensive for the son to have so little concern for his mom. His mom gave him everything, and so the son owes his mom relationship.

¹ Tim Keller on a Gospel Coalition podcast.

And if that son owes his mom relationship, how much more do we owe God, who gave us absolutely everything we have, a relationship. Living a good life is not an adequate substitute. Relationship with God is absolutely essential.

Not only do you owe it to God, but He designed us for relationship with Him. And so we will not really flourish unless we seek Him. And as a single believer, you enjoy the gift of less distractions and hindrances from seeking intimacy with God. More opportunity to delve into the riches of His Word, to enjoy intimacy in prayer. Following in the way of our Single Savior, you can live a beautiful life as a single person that enjoys deep, rich communion with God. He is so glorious and awesome and He loves you so much. He paid everything so that He could love you, literally dying to love you.

ii. Intimacy with God's people

And not only do you enjoy greater opportunities for intimacy with God, singles also have greater freedom to seek intimacy with God's people. For Jesus died not only so that we can enjoy intimacy with Him, but so that we can enjoy intimacy with each other. In the New Testament, we the church are described as a body. Like the parts of a body, we can enjoy unity with one another and the blessings that come from our differing gifts. And we the church are also described as a family. That we are brothers and sisters who can bear each other's burdens, cheer each other on, and deeply know one another, in love.

And single believers can more easily enjoy the blessings that can come from relationship with Christ's church. As a married man, there are more limitations on how I can serve and get to know my sisters in Christ, and more limitations on how they can bless me. And even my friendships with men are somewhat limited by being married with kids. Not only do I have less time for friends because of my responsibilities at home, but I must consider how it impacts my family before sharing deep things about family life. Further, my responsibilities at home also hinder the time and ways that I can serve all my all Christian brothers and sisters.

As a single believer, you enjoy more freedom to express the inclusive nature of God's love, and more opportunities to seek intimacy with God's people. And God has provided us with the church so that every believer can experience healthy relationships with both genders. If biological brothers and sisters can bless one another, how much more so can spiritual brothers and sisters. In love we can build one another up as we enjoy the blessings that come from being in community with the other gender.

Now I have been married for some years, but not so long that I've forgotten the relational and sexual challenges one faces as a single Christian. So I am not suggesting this is easy. But I am suggesting that when single brothers and sisters come together as a loving community that exercises self-control, it is a beautiful thing. As you and your single brothers and sisters all refuse to indulge your sexual desires in a sinful manner, your actions say to one another, "You are very precious to me, too important for me to try to do something wrong with you. I love you enough to endure hardship on your account."

And so all receive dignity from the godly way that all are treated. And as everyone endures the challenges of unfulfilled desires for sake of God and His people, all become internally stronger in the process, more empowered to love. It's not easy, but this kind of biblical community is a beautiful thing worth pursuing.

And by the way, it is also beautiful when single and married Christians enjoy life-giving relationships with one another. As the body of Christ, we have all been given gifts by the Spirit that can build one another up in the faith. However, if singles stick only with the singles, and if marrieds do the same, our body here at Northwest will miss out. For life in the church is enriched when single and married believers are in the kinds of relationships that allow all of us to benefit from the ways that God's Spirit is at work in each of us.

iii. Intimacy with God's mission

Now the third way it is easier for singles to focus on what matters most is their greater freedom to engage with God's mission. Generally speaking, single believers have more opportunity and flexibility with which to meet needs in Jesus' name, both locally and globally. More opportunities to help the poor, to share the gospel and make disciples, to develop one's spiritual gifts; in short, to invest in things that will outlive the world.

And if you are single, and long to parent, as you continue to pray for a spouse and kids, please know that the church could really use more spiritual fathers and mothers. There are so many kids in this church and community in need of your love and wisdom. There are so many kids and young adults who need discipleship and prayer. There are so many who come from tough family situations and long to experience spiritual mothering or fathering, even people my age.

C. Enjoy your gift

So I hope you take much better advantage of the gifts that come with singleness than I did. I wasted so much time and energy on unimportant things. I missed out on so many opportunities to deepen my intimacy with God, to enjoy rich relationships with God's people, and to involve myself with the greatest mission of all time.

So my encouragement for my single brothers and sisters this morning is to enjoy your gift from God. Jesus came and lived the most glorious life of all time as a single person, and He paved the way for singlehood to be a gift. Paul, the great apostle to the Gentiles, lived this reality. That our ultimate identity is not found in our marital status, but in Jesus. That our ultimate hope is not in a fulfilling marriage or good kids, but in being part of the bride of Christ.

So one perk to being married to a photographer is that I have some great pictures of my wife and kids. And I enjoy looking at the pictures, but I would never center my life around them. Imagine if I made my life all about my pictures. When I get home at night, rather than engaging with my wife and kids, I hole myself up in a room by myself and just look at all my pictures of them. That obviously would be utterly ridiculous. The pictures are nice, but they point to something far more significant, my actual wife and kids.

And as we learned last week, marriage is a good gift, but it points to something far, far, more significant, our intimacy together with Jesus, as the bride of Christ. That's why Paul can suggest that being single is not only a good gift, but can even be preferable to marriage. For as we've seen this morning, singleness makes it easier to focus on what matters most.

And what matters most is not marriage. I've shared this quote from Pastor Kevin DeYoung before, but I believe it bears repeating. He says, "In the Christian vision of heaven, there is no marriage in the blessed life to come (Luke 20:34-35). Marital intimacy is but a shadow of a brighter, more glorious reality, the marriage of Jesus Christ to his bride, the church (Rev 19:6-8). If sexual intimacy is nothing up there, how can we make it to be everything down here?"²

The Bible does start with a call to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, and that call still applies for some of us. But the most important calls, the greatest commandment, the great commission, can not only be done by singles, but as the passage has shown, can be done more

² Quote from <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2015/02/03/putting-sex-in-perspective/>. Originally accessed 2/14/15.

easily by single believers. And so, my single brothers and sisters, please know that you don't need a marriage to fulfill God's design or to reflect God's image.

My single brothers and sisters, your life is not in a metaphorical "holding pattern", waiting to get married so that you can land the plane of your life and start living it. Jesus has things He wants to do in and through you this week, this year. What you have to give is so important to God's kingdom. You don't need to wait around until romantic love comes your way, reach out today in love. You don't need to wait for an engagement, for you are free to engage in what matters the most.

Earlier in the passage, we learned that being a single Christian is a gift from God. It's interesting that the word for "gift" here (*charismata*) is the same word used by Paul later in 1 Corinthians to describe spiritual gifts. In both cases, with the gift of singleness and with our spiritual gifts, God blesses us with something so that we can be a gift to others, so that we can build one another up. And I'm so thankful that we have godly singles in our midst who are using their gift to be a gift, blessing this church family and a dying world with the love of Jesus in so many ways. Single Christians pursuing the full potential of all that God has called you to be.

Conclusion:

A. God has given you a good gift, enjoy it

This morning we've seen that if you are single Christian, God has given you a good gift. So enjoy your gift, and be a gift to others.

B. All things are yours

At times things will be very hard. All of us, whether single or married, experience pain and struggle and unfulfilled longings as we live as broken people in a broken world. So as we close this morning, in addition to the truths we've seen in 1 Corinthians 7, I want to equip you with one more thing from God's Word that can encourage you.

Turn back to chapter 3 with me. As I noted earlier, the Corinthian church was pretty worldly, which included dividing themselves into factions around different church leaders. Some in the church liked Paul best, and formed a clique with the other people in the church who preferred Paul. Others were forming cliques around their preference for Apollos or Cephas. So Paul instructs them to stop focusing on human leaders by reminding them that because we are all Christians, all of the leaders belong equally to all of God's people.

And as Paul motivates the Corinthians to get their eyes off of a specific leader and back on to God, he motivates them with an amazing statement. Look at verse 21 of chapter 3 with me. Paul says, ²¹ So then, no more boasting about human leaders! All things are yours, ²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, ²³ and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.

All things are yours. When you really long for a date, or a marriage, or a child, come back to God’s Word and be encouraged – “All things are yours.” The world and life and death and the present and the future, all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.”

Your heavenly Father loves you and gives good gifts. He invites you to trust Him and seek the blessing that comes from intimacy with Him, His people, and His mission. And when things get difficult, and you’re tempted to despair, listen once again to His Word to you. In the darkness, God lovingly whispers to you, “All things are yours.” Enjoy your gift today, as you look forward to that time when you step into the fullness of your inheritance. All things are yours.

Let’s pray...

Dismissal – “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.”