

It's Hard to Have a Good Perspective on Singleness

There are challenges to having a good perspective on being single. Think of all the shows and movies we've seen that say life is all about finding your one true love, that you've got to be married before you can live your "happily ever after."

Unfortunately, sometimes some of us married folks in the church may make things worse. Us married folks may generally mean well, but sometimes we miss the mark. Christian author Jon Acuff describes this with his surviving church as a single scorecard.¹ It awards points to single people who've experienced unfortunate things in the church like having...

- A friend say that creating an online dating profile is a sign that you might not be trusting God enough to find a soul mate. + 1 point
- Or someone pays you the world's most backhanded compliment, which is, "I just don't understand how someone as great as you isn't married yet." + 1 point
- Or perhaps people are constantly volunteering you for things, saying, "you're single, you've got so much free time." + 1 point
- Or someone has told you, "If you stop looking for love, you'll find it." +2 points
- Or upon hearing that you went on just two dates, your married friends at church start telling you, "I'll be praying this is the one!" +3 points
- Or your best friend of 15 years gets married and then suddenly acts like a magical gap has opened up between you and decides that until you get married too that you can't be close again, telling you, "we just don't understand each other anymore." + 3 points
- Or your married friends tip toe around you during February because they think you're too delicate to handle the completely made-up holiday, Valentine's Day. + 1 point

Now this final one from the single scorecard hit a little too close to home for me back when I was single.

¹ <https://stuffchristianslike.net/2012/02/09/surviving-church-as-a-single/> Accessed 8/25/21.

- You are too delicate to handle Valentine’s Day and have been known to describe it with a rich tapestry of words no Christian should even know exist, never mind actually say out loud. + 1 point.

Relevance & Orienting to God’s Word

Single friends, I apologize on behalf of myself and any other married people who have “helped” along the way. It’s already challenging enough in our culture to have a good perspective on being single. Or at least when I was single I struggled with it.

We all, whether single or married, need to hear what God’s Word has to say about singleness. It’s not an easy perspective, it requires eyes of faith to see singleness as God does. So if you’re just checking this church thing out this morning, in person or online, we’re going to the deep end of the pool. This is going to challenge all of us.

But what we’re going to see is ultimately a much better perspective, about things that really matter. A perspective that I hope, by God’s grace, encourages those who are single and also equips those married to learn from and love our single brothers and sisters.

It’s the perspective found in God’s Word in 1 Corinthians chapter 7. So if you’ve got a Bible or Bible app, open to the New Testament book of 1 Corinthians, chapter 7. And if not, no worries, we’ll have the verses on the screen. If you’re new to reading the Bible, the big numbers are chapter numbers and the little numbers are verse numbers.

1 Corinthians is a letter written by Paul, a single man and significant church leader. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians about 20 years after Jesus died and rose from the dead, writing to address some struggles in an ancient church and to answer their questions, including about singleness and marriage. In verse 7 of 1 Corinthians chapter 7 Paul wishes that everyone shared his opportunities as a single person. Verse 7: **(7-8)**

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.”

In verse 7, Paul’s wish is that every follower of Jesus was able to enjoy being single, like him. If you’re not familiar with Paul, he’s not talking about a “playing the field”, keep your options open, sleep with who you want kind of single.

Paul is talking about a life of celibacy, of not sleeping with anyone, while single. So we see right away that what Paul is saying is challenging and counter to our culture. Paul wishes that everyone could share his enjoyment of being single in Jesus, taking advantage of its unique opportunities while living a sexually pure life.

But in the second half of verse 7, Paul acknowledges that each Jesus follower has their own gift from God. Some, like Paul, are gifted to be single. Jesus also talks about this in the gospel of Matthew, chapter 19. There Jesus shares that some of His followers have been gifted with such a heart for His kingdom that they joyfully choose a celibate, single life to be free to invest more in His kingdom with fewer distractions.

But as the end of verse 7 here in 1 Corinthians says, not all have that gift. Some followers of Jesus are gifted to be married. So if you deeply desire to be married and perhaps also have kids, that's a fine, good desire.

But then in verse 8, Paul goes on to say that it is good for those not married to stay single and celibate. So Paul here in these verses has a different perspective than what we're used to. One that requires eyes of faith to see, especially if you're yearning to be married, as I once was. So why does Paul encourage those who are single to be in no rush to change their marital status?

Teaching: Singleness provides opportunities to invest...

In the kingdom outlasting the world – We'll jump down to verse 25 of 1 Corinthians 7, where Paul shares about the opportunities being single provides. Verse 25: **(25-28)**

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.

In these verses Paul makes it clear that Christians are free to stay single or seek marriage. As verse 28 says, if you marry, you have not sinned. However, Paul also notes in verse 28 that married Christians face challenges that single followers of Jesus do not, further explaining in verse 29. **(29-31)**

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.

Paul reminds us here that the time is short. The key event of all of history, Jesus coming in the flesh and dying for our sins and rising from the dead has taken place. And He could return to bring the fullness of His kingdom at any time.

So we must not respond as if nothing has happened, temporary things must no longer be our primary focus. As Paul describes in verses 29-31, we are no longer to be absorbed by things that will not last. Things like marriage, grieving in this world, rejoicing and parties in this world, purchasing and possessing the goods of this world, all of which are passing away.

Now that doesn't mean we're to completely stop engaging in these kinds of things. But the time is short and this world in its present form is passing away, so our main priority is investing in the kingdom outlasting this world. Investing in things like sharing the good news about Jesus, serving the vulnerable and hurting in His name, making disciples of Jesus who help others take next steps with Him, giving generously to His kingdom, and living with Christ-like virtue.

Paul knew that everything that comes with marriage may distract us from serving Jesus' kingdom first. It's so easy for the married, like me, to get so focused on one's spouse and kids and the life that you're trying to build together, and then later on get so focused on grandkids and family legacy that we can lose sight of the fact that those concerns, while important, are to take a backseat to the kingdom outlasting this world.

That's why Paul says in verse 29 that there's a sense in which those who are married should live as if they are not. In other words, making sure our focus is not so engrossed in the temporary that we fail to invest our lives in Christ's kingdom.

This is why Paul encourages those who are single to consider remaining as he is, because they are free from the many distractions that come with marriage, having more opportunity and flexibility to serve the kingdom that will outlast this world.

Service like Rochelle Meyer from our church family did as a single woman. Rochelle helping vulnerable children and sharing the good news of Jesus in oppressive, dangerous

places among people desperate for the good news that Jesus provides. Rochelle taking advantage of her opportunity and flexibility as a single woman to be all in for Jesus, even as she risked her life in service to His kingdom.

In the Gospel of Matthew chapter 13, Jesus compares His kingdom to treasure hidden in a field that's so valuable that it's worth selling everything one owns to go and buy the field with that treasure. Meaning it's a kingdom of such value that it's worthy of any sacrifice, selling everything one owns, serving in a dangerous place, or choosing to forego marriage.

Now all this wasn't my perspective back when I was single. I still today need to grow more into this perspective, so you can pray for me. Thankfully God is gracious, He will meet you wherever you're at this morning, and help you to grow more into sharing His perspective on what matters most.

This was Paul's perspective as a single man. And valuing the kingdom over marriage is also the perspective of Jesus, the most wise and loving man of all time, so there must be something important here.

In community outliving the world – Important opportunities not only to invest in this glorious, coming kingdom, but also to invest in community outliving this world.

Now marriage is a good gift from God and it includes some blessings that singleness does not. But verse 29 includes marriage among the list of earthly things that are passing away.

As Jesus teaches in the Gospel of Mark chapter 12, in His kingdom we will neither marry each other nor be given in marriage, we'll instead be like the angels. In glory we will all be single brothers and sisters together. My relationship with my wife Stephanie will look different then than it does now.

So you do not need to be married to reflect God's design. Godly singles are actually the ones reflecting what followers of Jesus will together experience in glory as single brothers and sisters in God's family.

And single people today have more opportunities to invest in this community outliving the world. Opportunities today in God's family to bear one another's burdens, to

help one another to grow in Jesus, to celebrate with one another, really knowing one another, in love.

As a married man, there are more limitations on how I can serve and spend time with my sisters in Christ. Even my ability to serve and get to know my brothers in Jesus is more limited. Not only do I have less time because of my home life, but I must also consider how it impacts my family before sharing deep family things.

While single followers of Jesus have more freedom to express the inclusive nature of God's love in all their relationships. And also more freedom to seek intimacy with the only community outliving the world.

So let's together invest in that community, our church family, both single and married, all taking advantage of whatever opportunities we have to invest in these eternal relationships today. To be enriched by our brothers and sisters here, especially our single brothers and sisters who show us what our relationships in eternity will be like.

Now even with our shared relational blessings, Paul is not saying in these verses that being single is easy, or that it doesn't come with unique challenges, for some, deep, unmet longings.

What Paul is saying is that being single also comes with opportunities to invest in the kingdom outlasting this world, and in the community outliving this world, and also in devotion pleasing to Lord Jesus, which we see in verse 32.

Please Jesus with undivided devotion – There Paul says: **(32-34)**

³²I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs—how he can please the Lord. ³³But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife—³⁴and 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.

In verse 32 Paul observes that it's easier for a single person to focus on pleasing Jesus with undivided devotion. While a married person, as verses 33 and 34 say, also thinks about pleasing their spouse, and also kids if they come into the picture, and so their interests are more easily divided.

Now Paul is not against marriage and he's not against husbands and wives fulfilling their marital responsibilities. He's just stating the fact that it's harder for those married to have an undivided devotion to Jesus because of the commitments that come with marriage.

In contrast, being single makes it easier to put first things first by pleasing Jesus with undivided devotion. In verse 35, we see Paul's heart in all this, so let's look there now. **(35)**

³⁵I 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.

Paul is not looking to restrict single people or legislate his preference for them. Nor does Paul want people to 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 for your own good."

Paul wants his fellow single Christians to join him in seeing that their relationship with Jesus is what matters most. With less distractions and hinderances, single followers of Jesus are freer to seek a deep relationship with Him.

A deeper relationship with the One Who has a glory and beauty beyond what we can even begin to conceive. A deeper relationship with the One Who wants to give you more hope and faith and meaning and growth and love in your life. The One Who can redeem even the unique challenges His single followers face. And the One Who, before calling you to devotion, showed you His single-minded devotion as He gave it all for you on the cross.

So despite the real challenges that come with being single, for Paul, avoiding the concerns and distractions that married people face is worth it to be freer to know Jesus deeply and please Him with undivided devotion.

Next Step

Whatever your and my marital status this morning or in the future, we're all invited to invest in the kingdom, in community, and in devotion pleasing to Lord Jesus.

So that's the next step for all of us, whatever your marital status, to take advantage of our opportunities to invest in what's going to last.

Being single includes unique challenges. And may we all together support our single brothers and sisters in those challenges. And being single also provides opportunities to

invest in the kingdom outlasting this world, and in the community outliving this world, and in devotion pleasing to Lord Jesus.

The time is short, Jesus has already provided forgiveness of our sins and defeated death in resurrection power and is preparing to bring His kingdom's fullness, so we must not respond as if nothing has happened!

So I'm thankful for the many single people in our church family investing in what's going to last. What you give is so important as you live in the way of Paul and our single Savior, it matters.

- Every time you minister to a child or teen here or in our community matters,
- every time you share about Jesus' love matters,
- every bag of food you pack here matters,
- every time you pray for people matters,
- every time you serve here with your technical or administrative gifts matters,
- every time you speak edifying words on social media matters,
- every time you reach out and ease someone else's loneliness matters,
- every outreach and missions effort you're involved in matters,
- every time you serve others through your work matters,
- every time you help someone with an addiction matters,
- every time you give financially matters,
- every time you say no to sexual temptation matters,
- every time you seek God in His Word and prayer matters,
- every time you bring a meal to someone recovering from surgery matters,
- every time you study or work with Christ-like integrity matters,
- every time you lead out in worship matters,
- every time you mentor, disciple, or serve as a spiritual mother or father matters,
- every time you show hospitality to your brothers and sisters here matters,
- every time you sit down with the lonely teen in the lunchroom matters,
- every time you help a family member in need matters,
- every time you seek justice for and serve the vulnerable matters,

- every time you trust Jesus with your unmet longings matters,
- every Bible study, ESL, or citizenship class you teach matters!

As you cultivate and exercise your spiritual gift and all that God placed in you in all kinds of service to His kingdom, it matters!

Rochelle Meyer, who I mentioned earlier, married Jonathan a few years ago. But because of her experience with the challenges and blessings of serving Jesus as a single person, I've invited her to pray for everyone who is single. Thanks Rochelle, for ministering through prayer to close us.