Pure - Living the Single Life

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[0:00] We're going to look at this together. Before we do, we're going to pray and to ask our prayer. I pray for Tom Campbell, who's up in service today, who's been preaching in the church there today.

Our Father God, we thank you so much for your word. We thank you for its great big story of a God who has come to pursue us, to love us so that we might belong to you. We thank you that you are generous in your love towards us. And we thank you that you are generous in all the gifts that you give to us. And we ask now that you would give to us and pour out your Spirit upon us so that we may hear and understand, be able to apply these truths to our life, whatever status we may find ourselves in. We pray for those who are speaking your word all around this country today. We pray for Tom and Sherlock. We pray for other churches in this city, in this campus. We pray for ourselves now as we listen to your word that you would give to each speaker your spirit, that they may speak clearly, communicate effectively, so that hearts will be challenged, people changed, churches built up and encouraged, that we may go on living the way he has called us to live. So please, Lord, make our time together in encouraging one, challenge us, but also change us. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

So last week we looked at marriage and today we're going to be looking at singleness. So if you do have questions afterwards, please do talk to me. You might agree with everything and you might want to discuss it out and we can do that over-copping or talk to your neighbour about it. I'm sure you've all heard of the comedy film, Bridget Jones Diary. Well, the film starts with Bridget reading from her diary.

This is what it says. It all began on New Year's Day, in my 32nd year of being single. Once again, I found myself on my own and going to my mother's annual turkey curry buffet. Every year she tries to fix me up with some bushy-haired middle-aged four and I feared this year would be no exception. Bridget is single and all her friends are either married or they have partners and she feels left out and deplanious. And with ongoing pressure from her friends and from her mother, she writes in her diary, the story. New Year's resolution one, lose weight, stop smoking, drink less than 14 units of alcohol a week.

New Year's resolution two, always put last night's panties in the washing basket and equally important, we'll find nice sensible boyfriends to go out with. And the rest of the story unfolds, Bridget goes looking for her man.

[3:28] But the film is putting across a message. Being single, we are told, is not an option. If you don't have a partner, or at least someone who you can regularly sleep with, well, there must be something wrong with you.

It's just not acceptable. The pressure is huge for single people to be linked to someone. You must either be in a relationship or pursuing a relationship or ending one because you've fallen for someone else.

And it seems to me that Christian culture has become no different. The pressure that people are put under, single people, to be in a relationship is huge. He's such a great guy. How come he's still single?

There must be something wrong. They'd make a great couple, wouldn't they? We'll have to try and get him to get him. Is she still on her own? Maybe we should pray and actually find something. Somehow we have bought into the world's culture that to be single is to be abnormal. It's almost seen as a curse, as a disease that you're carrying around. If you really want to get on in life, then you need to settle down and get married.

[4:55] Now such thinking is not only wrong, it is sensitive, it's unloving, and above all else it's safe to understand God's use of God's use of being single. Well far from being abnormal, singleness is

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actually a gift from God.

Look at chapter 7 and verse 7. Paul is writing through the church. He says, I wish that all men were as I am. Now let me just pause there. The Apostle Paul, who you will know of, who wrote a good deal of the New Testament, was actually married at one time. Well how do we know that? Well he was a member of the Sanhedrin, and you couldn't be a member of the Sanhedrin without being married.
Now within Jewish culture, it was more than likely that everybody was, but particularly because of his position he would have been married. So somewhere along the line, Paul started as a married man, but now he's on his own. Either his wife has died, or perhaps she left him when he became a Christian.
We don't know. But we do know that right now he is. So he says in verse 7, I wish that all men were as I am. But each person has their own gift from God. One has this gift, and another has that.
So he's saying very simply that some have been given the gift of marriage, and some have been given the gift of singleness. Our status, whether we are married or single, doesn't make us more superior or less inferior.
[6:37] Our status, whatever situation we are in, is a gift from God. So rather than a curse to be put up with, singleness, like marriage, is to be welcomed and accepted as something good from our heavenly father.

In fact, we should be very careful to make sure that our status never defines us. What sense is the greater gift, my relationship to Christ?
This is the greater gift that we could ever have, whether we are married or single. And this is what our true and primary identity is.
The most important thing, regardless of status, is that we are followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that we belong to him. Now, if you are single, you may be struggling with what verse 7 says.
You might be saying, well, I don't very much like that gift. I prefer the gift of marriage. In fact, I feel I ought to be married. I like to be married. I don't like this gift that God has given me.
[7:49] Well, as we will see shortly, our status can, and it does, from time to time, change. But perhaps the reason why people struggle with singleness is because they don't know if you understand the purpose.

Marriage has a purpose that we looked at last week, and so the singleness. We tend to put far too much emphasis on our status, when the real focus is about service.
Not status, but service. So the first thing that we're going to look at is a life of service. Marriage is a picture on the one hand of Christ's love and devotion to the church.
Singleness, on the other hand, is a picture of the church's love and devotion to Christ. Marriage should not be seen as superior to singleness, and singleness should never be viewed as inferior to marriage.
Marriage should not be seen as inferior to the church. Together, they are complementary. On the one hand, or together, they reflect the whole relationship of God with his people. So if people look at the married unit, if they look at the married life, they should see a picture of God's loving service, as the way the husband sacrificially serves and cares for his wife.
[9:13] And if people look at the single life, they should see a picture of our loving service and dedication to God. As people give themselves wholeheartedly to serve and love God.

So singleness is actually full of purpose. It's all about service. Well, where do you get that from, say? Well, let's have a look at the passage here, and we'll see how it's worked out.
First of all, stay as you are. Verse 17. Nevertheless, he's just been talking about marriage and the various situations people may find in their marriage.
He says, nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigns them, unto which God has called them. Now, because of all the sexual immorality that there was in common, and that was seeping into the church, in attempt to be different, the Christians were coming around and saying, look, we have to change our status.
We have to be so different to everybody else. So married people were acting as if they were single, and single people were kind of hiding away completely from everybody else, and they were all changing their status.
[10:29] But what he's saying here is, whatever situation you were in, when you became a Christian, stay as you are. For example, verse 18.

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He asks the question, was a man already circumcised when he was called, when he became a Christian? Well, he should not become uncircumcised. Was a man uncircumcised when he became a Christian?
Well, he should not be circumcised. Now, just as you don't change your cultural identity when you become a Christian, so you don't seek to change your status when you become a Christian.
There was no sign that you came in the door that said, when you become a Christian, you must become a Protestant, or you must become a Baptist. In the same way, there isn't a sign up there that says, when you become a Christian, you must get married.
First, verse 19. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's command is what counts.
[11:36] So, marriage by itself is not going to make any difference to your life in terms of purity or your relationship with God. And singleness by itself is not going to make you any better or more pure by itself.

Obeying God is what ultimately counts. So, verse 20. Each one, each person, should remain in the situation which he would be when God called him.
When he became a Christian. Now, there's a big question there, isn't there? You're probably looking at me and saying, Charlie, when did you become a Christian? Well, I was single when I became a Christian.
But I'm married now. Am I being disobedient? Well, we'll come back to that in a minute. You see, being a Christian does not mean a change in status, but a change in service.
We have been now set free to serve God. Look at verse 21. Were you a slave when you became a Christian or when you were taught?
[12:47] Well, don't let it trouble you. Although, if you can, gain your freedom. Or, if you can, gain your freedom to do so. Now, slavery was a real issue in the first century and it still is in many parts of the world today.

And many who had become Christians were actually slaves. So, in this instance, he is not encouraging slaves to stay as they are.
But, as it says at the end of verse 21, don't let it trouble you. In other words, if you're in a situation and you can put up with being a slave, you've got a good master who actually does take care of you and does provide you with a place to live and does give you food for your work.
If you can put up with it, put up with it. Although, if you can gain your freedom, do so. So, why is he introducing this whole issue of slavery?
Well, he's introducing it to illustrate a freedom that we all have. Look at verse 22. For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord, that phrase called by the Lord is simply when he became a Christian, is the Lord's freedom.
[14:02] Now, physically, obviously, he is not free. He's still tied to his earthly master under his control. He has to do what he says. But, through Christ, the slave, when he becomes a Christian, has been set free spiritually.

He's been released from the power and the consequences of sin. He's been set free from a more risk of the devil. He is now a freed man.
Verse 22. Well, the rest of verse 22, similarly, he who was a free man, who wasn't a slave, when he became a Christian, is now Christ's slave.
So, physically, this person who wasn't a slave, obviously, when he becomes a Christian, doesn't have changed by Langdon and he's not kicked out for work. No, he maintains his freedom.
But, through Christ, when he becomes a Christian, he now becomes a slave to Christ. In one sense, he has lost his freedom. And now, he has become a slave to serve Christ.
[15:11] Not to a ruthless dictator, but to a loving and caring king. And that's simply what it is for each one of us, if we are Christians. We have been set free from serving ourselves, so that now, we become slaves of Christ.

And in the context here, he is saying, if you are single, if you are unmarried, you have been set free from sin, so that you can now become a servant of Christ.
It's not about your status, it's all about service. Verse 23, you were bought at a price. Do not become slaves of men.
Christ died for you. He owns you. He is your true master. You belong to him. Just as we read at the beginning in Ezekiel, we have this one who pursued us, this lover who came to find us.

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And when he finds us, he says, you now belong to me. And he's simply saying, here, you were bought at a price. Do not become slaves of men.
[16:25] Don't use your singleness, don't use your freedom to indulge in sexual immorality and behave however you want. Don't be using your singleness to be constantly looking around for that perfect relationship.

Instead, use your singleness to serve God, to give your life to him. verse 24, brothers and sisters, each person as responsible to God should remain in the situation God called us.
We are to be slaves to Christ. Look down at verse 32. I would like you to be free from concern.
He says that because if you look at the end of verse 28, it says, those who marry will face many troubles in this life and I want to spare you this. And he continues verse 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's affairs. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this woman, looking after his wife, after her needs and his interests are divided.
[17:53] And he balances up as he talks about the women. 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 plead her husband. Now, it's all very crystal clear, isn't it? It's saying a single person will do far more for the Lord than a married person.
It's not saying that the single person is better as in superior, but practically speaking, single people will be able to serve God far more than married people.
I think it says a bit more. You can see it in those who are married. Perhaps even those who are married through this morning. They're always tired, aren't they? Why are they always tired?
They never have much time. Dad is rushing back from work to look after the wife who hasn't been well through the day. Mum is having to rush out early to bring the kids to the flesh on the way to somewhere else.
[19:03] Mum can't go out tonight because the kids are being put to bed. Now, none of these things are wrong. They're all necessary and they're valuable, but the reality is that's what they're all tied up with, these very practical things, and they don't have time, and they're tired.

The single person, on the other hand, while they have work and everything else like married people, they actually do have lots of time on their hands. They have no first things to organise, no nappies to be changing if there's children in the married life.
You have no spouse to look after. There's no school runs to be done, no big meals to prepare, no big shots to be done. There's no big decision-making process to have with your spouse that usually ends up in a big mad argument.
You can go whenever you like and you can come home whenever you like. You can go off for a whole week and nobody's going to say anything. Single people are free to serve.
Now my challenge to single people is this. We spoke a lot of challenges to the married people last week. Single people, wake up, whatever age you are.
[20:19] Hmm? Are you using your singleness well? Am I preoccupied with wanting sex or am I willing to be a slave to Christ?

Ask yourself, what do you spend your time thinking about? Pursuing that relationship? Running after that boy? Running after that girl? Or am I pursuing the kingdom of God?
Am I more interested in spending time with my girlfriend, boyfriend, than actually serving the church? Sorry, I can't do anything. I've got to go to the cinema tonight. Verse 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.
In my preparation, I came across this quote. Singleness glorifies God by communicating the message that love and devotion to Christ is primal.
[21:29] It says to a watching world, God is enough. God is sufficient. God is better than anyone else or any singer. God is worth all the pain of serving Jesus.

So, he's very practical. He's very clear. And he's saying that the single life, yes, it's a gift from God, and his primary purpose is to be a life dedicated, undivided devotion to serving God and not chasing things of this world.

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But he goes on also to talk about a life of sexual purity. And we go back to the question that we raised earlier. You say, Johnny, I was a single when I became a Christian.
Does that mean that I have to stay as I am? That I should remain in the situation that God told me to? Can I never get married? What if I don't feel gifted to be changed?
Well, whatever your gift is, this passage is very clear to say that our gift may change. But the emphasis, if our gift is changing, the emphasis must be on sexual purity.
[22:50] Look at verse 8, chapter 7. Now, to the unmarried and to the widows, I say this. It is good for them to stay unmarried as I am, for the very reasons that we've just looked at.

They are free from concern and able to give their life completely to the Lord. But, he's practical, he's real. But, if they cannot control themselves, they should marry.
for it is pressure to marry, then to burn, which is passion. Now, the pressures for single people are absolutely huge.
It is big at this time and it is big today. I think there are two major pressures that single people have to live with. There is the passion pressure, as I call it here in verse 9, which comes from the inside. If our normal and natural biological development that when boys see girl and girls see boy, there's something going on inside. There's the passion pressure.
[23:55] Then there's the peer pressure, which comes from the outside, which says, if you want to be normal, if you're going to fit in with the rest of the society, you have to be in a sexual relationship.

And these are the pressures that are crowding in on young people, on single people. And Christians, within that context, it's important, he's saying, that you conduct yourself rightly, that you live with impurity.
And it seems to me that there are simply two options for those who are single. The first is get married.
Look at verse 36. If anyone thinks they are acting improperly towards the virgin, he is engaged to. And if she is getting on in years, meaning beyond the years of childbirth, if she's getting on in years and feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants.
[24:57] He's not sinning. They should get married. Now I think you know by now that I'm not in favour of long-term relationships.

she can come back to me on all of this afterwards. But I don't think it's a good thing and here's the reason why. Verse 36 is a good reason. In fact, I don't think that you should be starting any relationship with anybody unless you think you're going to be marrying that person.
I think we have all around the wrong way. People just join their relationships like a union. It's just not healthy. It's not good for them. Let me divert a minute.
Keep your finger there in 1 Corinthians 7 and go to 1 Timothy chapter 5. 1 Timothy chapter 5. 1 Timothy chapter 5. 1 Timothy chapter 5.
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[26:12] 1 Timothy chapter 5. 1 Timothy chapter 5. 1 Timothy chapter 5. 1 Timothy chapter 5.

1 Timothy chapter 5. So this is older Paul talking to young man single man Timothy. 1 Timothy 1 Timothy 1 Timothy We'll pick it up at verse 1 of chapter 5.
1 Timothy do not rebuke an older man an older man harshly but exhort him as if he were your father 1 Timothy 2 Timothy treat younger men as your own brother 1 Timothy 3 Timothy treat older women as you would your own mother 2 Timothy And Timothy, treat younger women as your sister with absolute purity.
Now I think this is an excellent verse for telling us how single people should behave in a relationship and how they should treat each other.
Let's just think about it. If you are single man or single darling and you have somebody who you are attracted to, are you going to start that relationship?
[27:45] How are you going to behave in that relationship? Well here's your guideline. You treat them as your sister. Would you sleep with your sister? Hmm? I'm not being rude, I'm being very practical and rude.

Would you French kiss your sister? You wouldn't would you? Treat younger women as sisters. The relationship that you are in, treat them with absolute purity. And the reverse is also true for those who are women. If you are attracted to a guy.
How are you going to treat them? How are you going to behave with them? Are you going to, would you flirt with your brother? Would you dress provocatively for your brother?

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Well you wouldn't. Well then don't do it to other young men. Treat them with absolute purity.
[28:57] And I think that's the message that Paul is seeking to communicate in 1 Corinthians 7. From verse 36. If you are acting improperly, there shouldn't be any improper behaviour in a relationship.

There is a place for sexual expression. There is a place for what we have just talked about. But it is only within the context of marriage. And if you cannot control yourself and if you can't live your relationship properly, would you hurry up and get married and live properly?
And if you do choose to get married, let me say this. Here are three C's that I think will be helpful. It's not here in the passage, but I think nonetheless it's helpful.
Make sure that the person you marry is a Christian. In fact, actually, if you do look at chapter 7 verse 39. A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives, but if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes.
But he must be long to the Lord. So make sure the person that you are going to marry is a Christian. Don't entertain the whole idea of, well I'll just get engaged with them, I'll just go out with them, and then hopefully they'll become a father of Jesus in time and everything will work out fine.
[30:27] Don't do it. You're heading down the road of destruction and a time of great difficulty. Sometimes it does happen. And for some, for other reasons, you may find that you are in a relationship and you are the only Christian within the relationship, within the marriage.

Well, God is gracious in those times. He does know. Look at verse 12. Chapter 7 verse 12.
And to the rest I say this, I, not the Lord. If any brother has a wife who is not a believer, and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her.
Verse 16. How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?
So if you are in a married relationship and one is not a believer, God is gracious and through that marriage, the other one may become a Christian. But the answer here is, make sure the person you marry is a Christian.
[31:37] But not only should they be a Christian, make sure that they are also Christ-centred. Many people are Christians but they are lacking in their desire to serve God.

Perhaps they are brand new Christians, maybe they are just immature. Maybe they just enjoy playing on the play station at the time. Don't lower your standards.
Raise your standards. Marry those who have an undivided devotion to the Lord. Those who you are going to work with, where you can be in a church together, and serve the Lord wholeheartedly together.
Don't lower your standards. And it's not just about spiritual matters. It's also to be very practical. There's no point in marrying somebody who just doesn't get on with. They've got to be compatible, haven't they? Get on with them. Similar likes to their own friends. Being able to talk to each other, relate and so on.
[32:43] But I think those GCs are a good guide in when we are seeking to get married. So if marriage is for you, and you find yourself single at this time, God is not going to make it hard for you.

He doesn't aim to make life complicated. He is the giver of all gifts. And he will do exactly the same if he is going to provide you. He will do it in your time.
So that's option one. Get married. The other option, and it's obvious as it may sound, is in verse 37. Remain single. Verse 37.
But the man who has settled the matter in his own mind, who is under no compulsion, but has control over his own will.
In other words, he's not struggling with the issues of verse 9. He's under control. Who is under no compulsion, but has control over his own will.
[33:52] And who has made up his mind not to marry the virgin, this man also does the right thing. Self-control is the calling of every Christian, and self-control is required if we are to remain single.

Being single doesn't give us license to indulge in sexual promiscuity and be with whoever we want. And as we've said, singleness isn't for everyone, and nor is marriage.
But if God has called you to a single life, he will equip you, and he will enable you to live a pure life. And if you've given yourself to the Lord in undivided devotion, he will see to it that he will care for you, that he will provide for you, and that he will keep you.

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So two options. But let's remember that our status can, and very often will, change. If you are single today, maybe, you will be married next to you.
If you are married today, maybe, you will be single next year. None of us knows what the year lies ahead. But whatever our status is, God's gift is always right and always good, and we should celebrate it, and we should live wholeheartedly within that status, until time changes us, or until God should choose something different.
[35:31] Verse 38. So then, he who's married the virgin does right, but he who does not marry her does even better, simply because they can give their life wholeheartedly to the Lord.

But I want to finish with this, and that is family support. The church is described as a family. We talked about marriage last week, singleness, simply.
It's a family. Where everybody's status is different. Some people are married within the church family, some are unmarried. Some have children, some can't have children, some would love to have children, and that's going to be hard.
Some may have children. Some may have a Christian spouse, some might not. Some are single by choice, others are single because it just doesn't happen.
Some may be separated, some their spouse may be done. They can't do things. But if they need to be taken care of them, they're in a church family. They can't do things. The point is that within the church family we're all at different stages and we all need to take responsibility to care, support, and love each other.
[36:46] And so I want to throw this out to the married people, to the families who are here. It's going to be great to go home today, isn't it? To your house, have a nice lunch together.

Why want to include others into your family life? Invite people for meals? What about holidays? What about trip-bites?
Families, extend your boundaries and support those who are not nice. Now I'm not saying this because it doesn't happen within the life of this church. It does happen.
So I just want to encourage them to keep on doing it and to do so more and more. Single people, as we said, are under huge pressure in this life.
So they need a place to develop good, healthy and pure relationships within the context of a church family. Where people are caring for and looking after.
[37:50] So if you're single, it's God's gift. Will it last forever? I don't know. But if you are single, give your life in service to God and live your life with sexual purity.

And church family, support one another every day. Let's pray. Amen. Our Father God, we thank you so much for your word to us.
We thank you for the greatest gift of all that we belong to you. And that you love us and care for us and provide for us. Thank you for the greatest gift of all that we are in the world.
Thank you for the greatest gift of all that we are in the world. Thank you that one day we are going to be in the new creation where we will have that eternal marriage. We will be with Christ forever and forever.
Help us to keep our focus on what is good and right and pure. We pray for every single person represented here. That you would protect them in their lives, keep them pure.
[38:57] Help them to conduct their relationships wisely. Help them to live rightly. For those who are considering marriage, give them your wisdom.

Provide the right spot that they may serve the Lord with undivided devotion. We pray that you will watch over each and every one of us.
That we may care of you. To watch. In the name of Jesus. Amen. Well, I do encourage you to talk through any of the questions and the questions afterwards.
So we can do that over here. We're going to sing one last song. Thank you. Thank you.

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