

The Unmarried & Marriage

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[0:00] Friends, I just want us to go back to COVID-19 era, sorry, and think about what was it that you were watching on Netflix, on Stan or whatever it is.

One of the shows that I kept watching that kept popping up in 2020 were many home and renovation shows. One of my favourites was Tidying Up with Marie Kondo.

What a joy. All the shows like that that I was watching were similar in that singles families were looking at making their home more usable, maybe more aesthetic, more homey, a space for their future grandkids, maybe a guest room.

And Marie Kondo's show was all about tidying and decluttering your place. And one of the episodes was a story of a recent widow who said this.

The kids have moved out, I've lost my husband, and I'm alone now. And so she gets Marie to help her through the grief and the loss of her husband as she navigates making a home for herself, dealing with the belongings of her recently beloved past husband.

[1:14] But is that not the experience that we are all as individuals, as families trying to do? That in different seasons of our life, we have all sensed this need to change and transform our homes, the amount of bedrooms that we need, our plans for the spare bedroom changes, and our homes have this ability to dictate our reality.

Like the newlywed couple that's moved to a three-bed house to expand their family in the future. It's the empty nesters who've downsized their living. For many people, the deepest longing that we have is to make home, to make family.

And for the newly single widow, she was trying to recalibrate who she was and what does that look like to make home for herself now that she was recently widowed.

She's found herself sick again, herself single again. Her husband got sick. She did not expect to be single as a mother or as a grandmother.

And so what did that mean day by day? And what was her home like now? And as we've been speaking about marriage the last few months, we know it would be remiss of us not to talk about singleness.

[2:39] Because did you know roughly 40% of St. Paul's are actually not married? In and beyond the church, there are some singles who are single at a choice.

There are some who are longing to be in a relationship but are not. They've longed and are longing to have children. There are those who've been widowed and those who've had past marriages.

And see, the goal for us in all the seasons of our life here is that wherever you are on that journey, I believe that this passage will help you find home.

Maybe not to literally clear out your home and make room for a new person in your home, but that God actually has a greater and beautiful vision of home than what you imagine your home and your family to be.

And I want us to feel the sense of home in our inner being, regardless if you are single or married. In the past, single people have often been posed as people that must have been something wrong with them.

[3:45] We see it in that terms of spinster or the Simpsons crazy cat lady. There must be something about them which is the reason why they are still single. Yet in today's culture, we're starting to see this resurgence of singleness.

We see the current headlines, singleness has peaked. Single women are thriving in 2025. And this headline that made me chuckle is having a boyfriend embarrassing now.

You know, singleness has almost given this new marketing spiel that to be single is to be free and not held down. And I was talking with another friend of mine who said that they wanted to be single instead of in a relationship so that they didn't need to be involved in all the drama.

But how is singleness viewed in the church? Danny Trawick, author of *Single Ever After*, said of singleness in the modern day church. In today's evangelical church, marriage and parenthood sits on a pedestal.

They are typically held out as the highest good and goal of the Christian life. And this leaves us thinking of singleness as either a season of preparation before real life begins, a very rare exception for some specially empowered few, or just a tragic reality.

[5:07] I remember at a youth group hangout at my old church, all the guys were talking about looking for a partner, wanting to be married one day, and almost all of them, including the male leaders, said that humans were made not to be single.

They never said it word for word, but there was this implied idea that if a Christian was single, they would be unformed, immature in their faithful life. And I said, how about Jesus?

Wasn't Jesus single? And the reason why I'm so glad to unpack this passage is because I remember sharing that very night that this passage shows God's beautiful picture of singleness.

So let's pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you that you yourself are an example of a man who was single, who lived a pure and perfect life. We thank you that you've given us this wonderful passage.

And we ask that we might receive peace, joy, clarity, and understanding as we read this passage. Make it transform us to be more alive and live more truer to how you made us to live than we have ever been before.

[6:20] Amen. The first point I want to talk about is that the idea of this gift of singleness. I've often heard this statement being said in the church, quoting this passage, sounding something like, some have the gift of singleness and some don't.

And they get it from earlier verses that I didn't get John to read. But if you just look at that 10 verses before, in verse 7 to 8, Paul says on the screen as well, I wish that all of you were as I am.

Paul is single. And I agree with the statement that some have the gift of singleness.

I agree to the extent that you who are married in this room do not have the gift of singleness. And all you who are single do have the gift of singleness.

Because the gift of singleness is a gift of the season of singleness, as the gift of marriage is the gift of the season of marriage.

[7:36] The gift that Paul talks about is not a special spiritual gift that the Lord gives to some believers and not others. It's not like he's given some people the ability to sing and others not.

We suddenly make out that the gift of singleness is for those who have this extraordinary power to remain single and celibate, almost like you need some kind of booster shot injection.

And if you don't have that, then the rest of us who don't have it just have to wrestle through it. But you see, the call that Paul makes here is that both married and unmarried, prior to this, is to be self-controlled.

And that doesn't change whether you are single or whether you are married. You see, the season of singleness that you might find yourself in is a gift.

It's not just a training course for the real deal. Singleness in itself, struggling or joyful, is a legitimate, beautiful gift from God.

[8:44] And you might ask, how can singleness be a gift if it draws such deep pain and loneliness?

Because there are dear friends of mine who I know have long to be married and haven't found that day. How is it a gift? I want to share from Elizabeth Elliot, a missionary who was widowed three times, one of whom, her first husband, was a missionary who went to a country and that country killed him.

And she still decided to be a missionary to that country. She talks about this in *Let Me Be a Woman*. After being widowed three times, she says, Having now spent more than 41 years single, I have learnt that it is indeed a gift.

Not one I would choose. Not one many women would choose. But we do not choose our gifts, remember? We are given them by a divine giver who knows the end from the beginning and wants above all else to give us the gift of himself.

In 1 Corinthians 7 verse 17, it says, Nevertheless, each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them.

[10:16] You see, the verb should live here is best translated as retaining or grasping hold of, in other words, embracing the season of life that the Lord has assigned.

And if you were to play reverse on this verse, you might actually say, Don't hurry leaving the situation that the Lord has placed you in.

And when you hear that, you go, Well, it sounds well and good until you reach that rut in your current stage of life. And you start to think that the grass is greener elsewhere, or the past was rosier than today.

You know, some parents will remember how good the baby days were before their kids could speak and talk back. Or some wish their children who have moved out until they realise how they don't like the quiet home anymore.

And it's often in retrospect that we understand what God is and was doing in any season. That God has been doing it for your good and his glory.

[11:24] And so we should always be asking in every season, What is the Lord teaching thee? What is he teaching me through this? How is Jesus showing up to thee in this present crisis?

Because we're called to remember that the Lord has assigned your season of life that you are in. Don't miss out on what God is doing in this season.

Because he is indeed doing something. He is changing you. He is working for your good and his glory. And that's not to say what Paul is saying. He's not saying, If you wish to pursue marriage, if you want to change jobs, if you want to move country, it's the wrong decision.

Paul himself recognises that while he might embrace singleness and what it affords, he does not by any means illegitimise marriage as a God-honouring decision.

Verse 28. But if you do not marry, you have not sinned. But you see, for Paul, there is something that matters much more than your marital, your work, your geographic status, where you live.

[12:32] There is something that is primary beyond your season of life. He's saying to the year 12 student, You are more than just a number. He's saying to the office worker, You are more than a set of KPIs.

There is something that has happened for the Christian in their circumstances that is greater than whether you got married or whether you're not. The gospel is better news for the Christian than what the world has to offer.

In verse 22, do you notice, a Christian is the Lord's freed person. They belong to Christ. That you were bought at a price. You see, for the struggling single person who has had failed date after failed date and rejection after rejection, Do you know there's a God who sees you?

Do you know that Jesus has bought you at the price of his blood? Was he himself that was rejected by you and me and then by his own father as he took on the sin and scorn and shame on the cross and said, Elo, Elo, lama sabachthani, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And he doesn't see you as broken. He holds you with worth and dignity because your primary status is not your marital status, but that you belong to the Lord.

[13:54] Friends, there is this wonderful confession of faith called the Heidelberg Catechism, like our creeds that we say, that begins with the question, what is the only comfort in life and death?

And what's the answer? The answer is that I am not my own, but belong body and soul in life and in death to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

Because I belong to him, Christ by his Holy Spirit assures me of eternal life. Because belonging to Christ, your status in Jesus, secures a future status.

And this is what Paul reiterates himself in verse 29. What I mean, what he really means about his desire for married and unmarried is to remember, brothers and sisters, that the time is short.

The time is short. That life on this earth is soon going to end like the sand reaching the bottom of an hourglass. It will be finished. And so Paul suggests this as his reason to be single.

[15:03] 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.

But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world, how he can please his wife, 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. And then 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.

See, Paul is recognizing an earthly reality that come with having families, having dependents, and that single people have a unique opportunity to be freed from that.

And I know many families and many parents, those who are married, those who have children or not, recognize that there is a reality that there are burdens that have come uniquely because of their deep love for another, whether that is the loss of a spouse, whether that is caring for dependents.

[16:26] And as much as they love that gift, it is also hard. And so Paul is saying that perhaps for someone who is single, that there is something unique in that gift for you to embrace.

And one gift I want you to consider is single friends. Have you ever considered that your very present season of life is a glimpse of eternity that your married friends cannot reflect?

In Matthew 22, verse 30, Jesus says about marriage in heaven, at the resurrection, people will neither marry nor be given in marriage. They will be like angels in heaven.

You see, what we've been pushed by Steve and Nick, is married people can reflect the marriage of the Lord and his church. But you, as a single person, can uniquely show us what it might look like to live in the new creation in a way that married people cannot when our hearts will be fully devoted to the Lord.

married people. And so, you and married people, you are called to live as though you are home with Jesus.

[17:45] Do you guys see it? It's not actually marital status that will determine whether you will be a blessing to the church in God's kingdom. Your devotion to God depends on where you set your gaze.

Where is the home that you are building? Despite what Paul says about single people living for the Lord, you can be unmarried and Christian and live with your personal dreams and ambitions and not have the Lord shape your interests.

But you could also be married with kids and be insular in your own family. It's where you choose to make your own home. Paul's saying, you are not bound by this earth.

Married people. Paul says in verse 28 that your marital status should not trump your future status because you see, the good news of Jesus extends the meaning of your earthly time.

The good news of Jesus says that he's redeeming the parts of your marriage and pushing you and sanctifying you so that on the day that Jesus returns, you will be able to stand at the gaze of the Lord Jesus and say, and hear the words, well done, good and faithful servant, alongside your spouse who you together have spurred one another into living for Jesus.

[19:09] It's for the single person to know their investment in discipling, their investment in caring for people has not gone in vain because they will see their crown and joy in heaven.

Instead, friends, you've got a home with Jesus. He's preparing a home for you. He's making room for you. And so married and unmarried, live as though you are home with Jesus.

But how should we see marriage? You see, Paul does not look down on one or the other that we might do subconsciously. We might read this passage and go, wow, Paul's really amping up singleness.

He must be really anti-marriage. Paul being pro-single does not mean he is anti-marriage. We've literally seen him speak about for the last many weeks in Ephesians 5, both are good.

He says singleness is a gift. He says marriage is a gift. And as Danny has said, often in the church, marriage has been put on this highest order or goal for the Christian that we may subvert in our heads and assume that if one has not been married, that they are not mature as Christians as others.

[20:23] And sometimes it's often because we hear married people often share how God has used marriage to edify and sanctify them to grow them in maturity.

But that doesn't discount the fact that there are many people who are single out of obedience to the Lord. They won't stand for marrying a non-Christian. They want to embrace God's wisdom about marriage and sexuality.

That's a man or woman. You see, that's godly who's mature and faithful. And so in the same way that these are both gifts that grow us for maturity, both have its challenges.

You see, Steve has spoken about the challenges in marriage, but they exist for the single person too in immense but sometimes quiet ways. I had an extroverted friend who lived alone who was envied by their friends and colleagues for being single during COVID and understandably it's because they didn't, like they had to deal with Zoom at school, they didn't have the kids 24-7 while they were working and living but the thing for them is they hated isolation.

They hated it. They didn't get to see their grandkids, they didn't get to hug anyone, they didn't get to have those physical conversations because there was no one at home. They are all challenges, they're just different.

[21:48] And so our vision of singleness and marriage should therefore be like this. It's two sides of the same coin, both with ways that mirror the faithfulness to Christ and both that uniquely show a glimpse of what it is like to be in heaven.

And so, friends, I want to ask you, have you ever considered that side-by-side married and unmarried people can be mutually beneficial for our community?

Not when they are siloed with only married people being friends and the unmarried and childless having another group, but when they love and serve and commit to being the family of God that they have been called to be.

Here are a few things that I've seen in our community or others or things that I'd love to see more of where singleness and marriage together has been such a beautiful thing. Number one, when there's space given to single people to come over when the quiet is too much, inviting single and childless couples to be surrogate aunts and uncles to their kids, not excluding single friends from their multifamily holidays, being a trusted adult when mum and dad become a bit too annoyed.

Friends, to the married and the unmarried, what does living now like you are home with Jesus?

What does it look like? Because isn't that the beautiful thing about the gospel is that it brings family?

[23:22] That other Christians are your brothers and sisters as Paul keeps and reminding the church? And if you're still someone who's searching who Jesus is but you think there's something beautiful and attractive of this radical sense of community, I'd love to chat with you.

Single friends, it's not wrong for you to want to make home on this life, to be married. Your desires are not wrong but remember there is a greater home being prepared for you.

Remember that however long that season of singleness is, you have been uniquely positioned to point others to your home in heaven.

Married friends, if you want to witness to your single friends, embrace them into your lives and have your marriage be a mirror that reflects the love of Christ and the church so visible that your Christian single friends will feel welcome in that love and that they are willing to pursue their cross to bear to.

If you've been longing to be married but have chosen time after time to be faithful to God rather than disobeying his law, thank you for being a witness and standing firm.

[24:45] If you're a same-sex attracted Christian who has decided to walk the narrow path of faithful obedience in seeing God's beautiful picture of marriage and decide to be celibate, hold firm to his promises and know his ever-present help.

But I want to say specifically to those of you in the room who have been married and you have been sitting here in this room, sermon after sermon, and if you loved this beautiful picture of marriage and you wished that your last marriage shared that picture, but maybe you have some regrets on how you entered the relationship, not trusting in God's beautiful picture of what marriage should look like as a Christian, and you found yourself single once again.

I want you to look at John 4. We see Jesus speak to a Samaritan woman. It's a story that many of you know because a Samaritan woman in this case is someone who had multiple marriages and in fact is a prostitute.

And Jesus, despite knowing her, goes with purpose and presence. He, despite knowing all her sins and brokenness, doesn't withhold himself but offers living water.

And the Lord Jesus comes to you with the same purpose and presence and says, I know what you've been through, and he loves you still and has prepared a home for you, that you too can live as though you are home with Jesus.

[26:19] Thank you.