

1 Corinthians 7:1-9

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[0 : 00] Message this morning will warm you up, get you maybe riled up. I don't know if you've looked ahead and read the passage, but it's Valentine's Day, right?

It's a land of chocolate and red roses and Hallmark schlock, and however you see that, some of your romantics are cringing. I love Valentine's Day and all of the romantic accoutrements that go with it, but I also want to acknowledge that for many, and maybe many of you feel like this, Valentine's Day is a day that no one can win.

Husbands, boyfriends struggle to feel like they can ever do enough to impress. Wives and girlfriends struggle to dampen their rampant idealistic hopes of being swept off their feet while hibernating the secret fears that they are not, in fact, deeply loved and desired.

And singles just wish it would go away. All right? So this is the problem with Valentine's Day, the way our culture construes it. And often at the core of it, if you look deeply, part of what you see is that the problem with Valentine's Day is that it makes everyone miserable because it arouses desires that we aren't sure what to do with.

It makes us to focus more on selfish desires than anything else.

[1 : 32] It drives us to think about things that we can't actually do, and it makes us people who are discontent. And in the sovereignty of God, as we are preaching sequentially through the book of 1 Corinthians, Valentine's Day, we get this passage on sex and singleness, two of the great taboo topics that the church doesn't like to talk about.

So I feel like we're already in the mood, but we're going to keep going with it and see what's going on in this passage. If you have your Bible, you can turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 7.

You know, as you turn there, I want to put a little bit of Valentine's Day in historical context.

What would it have looked like 2,000 plus years ago? If you were in Greek culture, Valentine's Day might be celebrated through this lens, the words of Apollodorus in his speech against Nera.

We have courtesans for pleasure, concubines for the daily tending of the body, and wives in order to beget legitimate children and have a trustworthy guardian of what is at home.

[2 : 48] So this is the Greek culture a couple of centuries before Christ and the way that they viewed relationships and sex. Fast forward a couple of centuries to the first century when 1 Corinthians was written, the Roman picture, and though not quite so baldly crass as Apollodorus, it was a similar perspective.

Wives were for children, not for passion or pleasure. Passion and pleasure would be found in other places, as we saw last week at the temple prostitutes.

Or even within your own home, the master of the house would have the right, the social privilege, of access to any woman in his household. A slave, a servant, someone under his care.

And what you see at the core of this is that how deeply ancient culture was captured by a deeply selfish perspective on sex.

Sex was simply to promulgate your line or for your own pleasure as a man. And women were not even really in the picture. They were being used for one or the other.

[4 : 06] In our culture today, we'd like to think that we've been more liberated. We'd like to think that it's a different situation.

It's not always that way. Might say it's often not that way. But, what I would say is that the selfishness has not changed.

We so easily approach our relationships and when it gets down to it, our sexual relationships with the same selfish desire of what can I get out of it?

How can I be pleased through this? We often give to this relationship and to this act a sense of ultimacy that it was never meant to have and so it gives us meaning, fulfillment, affirmation.

And by giving it all of this, for those of you who are single, you may have felt this, that somehow to be not sexually active is to be somehow less than human.

[5 : 15] Somehow less than fully who you were meant to be. What does God say about this? Paul writes about it. We're going to look at it.

But just to remember what Pastor Nick preached on last week, if you weren't here, you should go back and listen to the sermon online. Chapter 6, verses 12 through 20, talk about Paul's admonition.

Flee sexual immorality. Why? Because your body was not created for selfish things, but for God. God. And as you live out your sexual life, you are meant to conduct yourself in a way that honors and glorifies God, recognizing that God has made your body the temple of the Holy Spirit and that he has purchased your life, body, soul, and all by the very blood of his son lovingly poured out for you.

And so we are meant to stop giving sex more or less than it is due. We are to glorify God with our body.

And from this then, Paul transitions in chapter 7 into a long discussion, a lot about marriage and singleness, and today particularly about sex.

[6 : 37] We're going to be here for four weeks, just so you know. We're going to be in chapter 7 for four weeks. We're doing this this week, we're going to do the next chunk, Greg's going to preach next week, Nick's going to do it again, and then just for those of you who are single, we're going to have a whole sermon in three weeks on singleness and thinking about it biblically.

But we will address it today as well. So let's look at this passage now. 1 Corinthians chapter 7 verses 1 through 9. And the true sign of middle age is right here.

You ready? There you go. This is sexy, right? Okay. Now, concerning the matters about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman, but because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband.

The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does.

Likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time that you may devote yourselves to prayer, but then come together again so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

[8 : 12] Now, as a concession, not a command, I say this. I wish that all were as I myself am, but each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.

To the unmarried and to the widows, I say, it is good for them to remain single as I am, but if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

Let's pray. Lord, help us to understand this passage. Lord, help us to see your design for our lives.

Help us to understand what it is that you have given us in marriage and in singleness, in sex and in celibacy. Lord, I pray you would help me this morning.

Lord, that my words would teach clearly, that you would use my words, Lord, to shape our hearts. Lord, may we glorify you in our bodies, we pray.

[9 : 17] In Jesus' name, amen. What I want you to see this morning, the big idea of this passage as we pull it all together, is that we are called to glorify God by passionate living in the gifts that we have, whether married or single.

The hinge idea as I see it is actually in verse 7, if you see it down there, it says, but each one has its own gift. The question this morning is what is your gift?

How can you glorify God with it? Every gift from God is good. Let's explore how Paul instructs us to live out these callings together.

Firstly, in verses 1 through 6, we see Paul talking about the gift of marital sex. He continues building on what he said at the end of chapter 6 about what's the nature of sexual immorality.

And it seems potentially that he's replying to something that the Corinthians have written to him asking him, hey, you've told us about avoiding sexual immorality. What does that have to do with marriage and with sex within marriage?

[10 : 38] Now, if you have different Bible translations, you may have noticed that there are different ways to translate it. And the ESV along with the NIV and lots of translations have translated it along the lines of, it is good for a man not to have sexual relations with his wife.

If you have a King James or a New American Standard, which tends to be more literal, you will see that all these other translations have taken an idiom and they've tried to give you meaning, which is normal and that's what translators do.

But the idiom itself is, it is good for a man not to touch a woman. Historically, this has often been presented as the Corinthians saying, hey, there's this argument out there that we should actually be celibate in marriage, which is really odd.

But it's, but you understand it as you read this, you think, okay, that kind of makes sense. But I will have to say that I have been convinced by one modern scholar who looked at this phrase, to touch a woman, in different contexts, the way it was used throughout ancient literature.

He summarizes his finding this way. To touch a woman means acting on sexual passions for the sake of pleasure or sexual release, including using it, using the following kinds of people for one's own sexual gratification.

[12 : 15] Slaves, people forced to live in one's own household, defenseless women, virgins placed under one's protective care, a wife during her monthly cycle.

It's also used in predatory male homosexual relationships, unnatural homosexual relationships, incest, rape, adultery, sex with a defiled concubine, or just sex with someone outside of your marriage, someone who is not your wife.

So he argues that what the position being put forward by the Corinthians, that the Corinthians are asking Paul for comment on, is not, should we be celibate in marriage?

That seems like a bit of a stretch. It's more saying, hey, there's a statement out there that might be translated, don't use other people for your own sexual gratification.

Don't use it for selfish passion. The Corinthian church has written to Paul saying, what do we do with this? How do we understand this?

[13 : 24] And Paul is at some of his pastoral best in this. His argument is nuanced. He does not thunder. He does not say, as he did in chapter six, do you not know?

Do you not know that this is true, and this is true, and this is true? Why are you acting that way? He says, well, let's think about this, brothers and sisters. Let's come together and consider this, because these are hard issues, and he has some really practical wisdom, and I'm hoping that it will translate to you and to your lives as we explore it, because his fundamental response is yes, but then he takes it to probably another level that the Corinthians never imagined.

So the question is, how are we meant to live out this calling to not be sexually immoral in marriage? Are we supposed to just use our wives for babies, and everything else we find somewhere else?

That's what the culture tells us. Are we supposed to abstain completely? What are we supposed to do? And Paul says, no, no, no. The sexual union between a man and a wife is a part of the gift and the design of marriage.

It is a beautiful and a wonderful thing. And I call you to not buy into the cultural disdain for the passionate and pleasurable parts of it within marriage.

[14 : 57] This is a good part of the design. Don't think that's dirty or wrong or taking advantage of it. But let me teach you how to think about it in a way that actually is shaped by the gospel.

So that's what he says in verses 2-4. Look with me again, verses 2-4. Let me make a couple of observations. First of all, you see the temptation. Given the cultural context of you only have sex with your wife and you go to a prostitute for release and pleasure, he's saying, no, no, no, no, no, because that sexual temptation is out there, but you ought not to give into it, there is a place for you to spend your energies.

Verse 2, right? Each man should have his own wife. That doesn't mean that he just is married. It means he should have her. Have her in the sense of joining with her sexually.

Right? And there's an emphasis on his own and her own, right? And these are two really important things that Paul is saying here. The only place for you to live out your calling and your sexual desires is within your marriage to your spouse, your own, no one else's.

Wife swapping is just out. Doesn't fit. Right? But it's also the wife to his own, to her own husband and the husband to his own wife.

[16 : 28] wife. Paul begins to lay the foundations of a picture of a mutuality in marriage that was very foreign to that culture. A sense of equality in this role.

And even in the pursuit of the pleasing, passionate part of sex. the husband should give himself to his wife for her conjugal rights and likewise the wife to her husband.

Now look, men, we need to be careful here. Because it's very easy to read this the way we contend to give, say, anniversary gifts. Look, honey, I got you a pneumatic drill. We give gifts that is completely self-centered and only for our benefit.

And we can do that in this context as well. Right? Look, honey, I did all this so that you can please me. That's not what it says.

It says the husband is to give to his wife. to let her be pleased.

[17 : 49] To seek for her to be blessed in the sexual union. It's not you owe me this.

It's an I owe you this. I have not just the privilege but actually the duty to give this to you. He develops this a little bit more in verse 4 where he says, look, the wife doesn't have authority over her own body.

The husband doesn't have authority over his own body. You have in pledging yourself to one another before God and these witnesses in marriage, you have said, I give myself to you, body and soul.

you now have a claim. But notice that Paul never says, you now have a claim that you can cash in on your agenda and your time frame and say, I'm ready to take a withdrawal from my deposit.

Thank you. Paul says, you have this claim and the obligation is not to take it but is to give it to the other.

[19 : 06] So as one commentator says, Paul puts sexual relations within Christian marriage on a much higher ground than one finds in most cultures including the church where sex is often viewed as a husband's privilege and the wife's obligation.

For Paul, the marriage bed is both unitive that is bringing together in a unity and an affirmation that the two belong to one another in total mutuality.

equality. Friends, this is what God has called us to in marriage. Because remember what Pastor Nick said last week?

Marriage and sex, they're the Rick Steve's guide. They're the book that tells you about something that's yet to come. Do you remember that illustration he gave?

That what marriage and sex are given for in this world is to point us to an eternal marriage supper of the Lamb and an intimacy with God and with one another that we can't even imagine and the joy and the fulfillment and the pleasure that we think often sex is the pinnacle of.

[20 : 20] Sex is just a signpost pointing to something better. It's just a taste of the feast that is yet to come. And so we ought now to live enjoying it fully not selfishly for the good of one another.

We don't do this naturally friends. We can only do this for Christ. We can only do it with Christ's help.

I think about how sex is often portrayed. All you have to do is watch some sitcoms or talk to your co-workers. Maybe even thinking about your own life.

How is sex in marriage often used and abused? The range is huge. Marital rape is a real thing where one forces himself usually on the other.

But so is banishment to the couch. We can use sex as a weapon to manipulate one another in our relationships.

[21 : 41] We get caught up in the cultural fairy tales that are put forth whether by pornography or chick lit about what it's going to look like. and we've lost God's vision for us.

I want to be clear here too because historically and typically this passage has been used by Christian men often not always but by Christian men often to coerce saying you owe me this.

it's typically that way although I want to be careful because I don't think the gender stereotypes always fit. I don't know what your marriage is like.

The hard issue is do you pursue this part of your marital life selfishly or in a self-sacrificial giving sense?

are you willing to give yourself to your spouse when you're not up to it for their pleasure?

[22 : 51] Are you willing to conduct yourself with your spouse saying my greatest desire is not my own orgasm but my own but my desire is to please them and that they would know that this is an act of love.

My greatest desire is for their pleasure in it. Healthy marriages have a healthy sex life. We all know that there are seasons.

We all know that there are ups and downs and I'm only 47. Some of you have walked further into what that looks like as you grow older.

But the Bible knows very little of a husband and wife who have no sexual relations. But broadly defined if it is missing if it is completely not there I'm inviting pastoral counseling I'm sure I am.

If it's not there there's a red light on the dashboard saying this marriage might not be all that God wants it to be. It's very likely that the issues are not purely physical they're much deeper and complicated.

[24 : 15] But part of what Paul is saying here is that this is a normal part of a healthy marriage. Now having said that he then says verses 5 and 6 and let's talk about those for a minute.

Because then he says look with me again verse 5 don't deprive one another. That's the basic thing that he's been saying like you're supposed to give yourselves to one another. Don't deprive one another except except and then he has all these qualifications on what it looks like.

Except for a time this shouldn't be a long term commitment but for a time it should be for a purpose and the purpose seems to be in mind here kind of like fasting.

Fasting is seeing something that God has given us that is good and saying I'm not going to partake of that for a period of time for the sake of focusing solely on the Lord because we so easily put our hopes and our dreams and our attention on the things that God gives us instead of God himself.

So it seems like that's the purpose right? Thirdly it's meant to be by agreement. It's a beautiful picture. It actually means in concert or in symphony that this is something that you would do together to say no we're not going to do this together because we as a couple want to pursue the Lord together and again at the end with a plan to come back together.

[25 : 49] So Paul says there is a reason why maybe you wouldn't pursue this normal healthy pattern. Here we go into the weeds.

Pastorally I think there are some other times when it is appropriate for there to be an abstinence for a period of time. I can think of a friend of mine who was sexually abused as a child.

When she got married her husband lovingly and patiently walked through with her a process of healing my guess is it was a long road.

I don't know the details. I certainly won't share them with you. But it was a long road good for them to grow in this area given the hurt and the scars of her past.

If that is true for you there is a need for much grace and much patience. But what I would say is I hope that even if you are someone with those scars you would long for the healing and the growth and the ability to please your spouse in the middle of that.

[27 : 15] That there would be a trajectory not of I can't go there done. End of conversation. But I can't go there right now and I don't know how I can ever get to going there but gosh I want to because I love you.

And that the spouse who is loving that abused spouse would be patient and not demanding. It would be self controlled. Similarly in the aftermath of infidelity I think there's a lot of room for rebuilding of trust.

There is no place for a demand of I know I cheated on you but the Bible says this is my right so you need to give. I think there's again there's a trajectory in the wake of infidelity the hope is that there's a rebuilding of a marriage and of that trust and the trajectory is we're going to get there.

But I also think that there's a lot of room for patience. Certainly there are lots of health reasons why this might happen.

Right after a child is born there's almost always a recovery time for a mother. the vision of marital union and intimacy doesn't overrun some of these realities.

[28 : 51] I came across a story this week about a guy who's suffering from prostate cancer and I want to share it just to give you a sense because I think this guy gets it in some really powerful ways.

And I think his wife does too. Some of these dynamics. This is what he writes about himself. And this is slightly edited because it was a little more graphic than I'm willing to be this morning. So if it's too graphic for you I'm sorry.

Right now I'm not quite what you would call a catch. I wear man pads for intermittent incontinence. I'm a bizarre of scars and I've been unable to perform sexually for several months.

Most nights I'm in bed by ten. The Lupron hormone shots have sent my sex drive lower than the stock market and given me hot flashes so fierce that I sweat outdoors when it's 20 degrees and snowing.

Pretty attractive huh? There's a hunk of guy for you. Even so Deb has taught me that love is in the details. Humid professions of undying love and tear stained sonnets are all well and good but they can't compete with the earthly love of Deb helping me change and drain my catheter pouches every day when I come home from the hospital.

[30 : 05] When I say to Deb I love you I mean it and when she responds I love you more she means it too. We understand that time perhaps is not on our side.

Time we are told will give us our sex life back. As I said the hormone shots have shut down my sex drive and physically I am still in recovery from surgery and from radiation.

But as we wait I tell you this love abides. Yes yes and yes lust is essential but right now sex seems quaint. Old fashioned. Oddly enough it can't compete with the depth and gravity of a light touch or sly glance.

I'm in the mood for the Beatles and I want to hold your hand. Not Grace Jones growling pull up to my bumper baby. Don't get me wrong. I really really like sex but given a choice between the mere biology of lust and the deep soul of love I will take love.

I just thought this is such a beautiful picture of the balance that I think Paul is trying to get and what I pastorly am trying to bring to you this morning. Sex is a good thing.

[31 : 17] It's a normal part of a healthy marriage and it ought to be pursued and desired. And that's what I see. I see in this couple yes we want that. But right now there's a lot of patience and there's a lot of grace and there's a lot of learning that love is actually much deeper and broader than our sex life.

It's an important part of it but it's not the essence or the substance of it. And in fact not only that but they have but they also recognize that in the midst of it all there can be forms of seeking to please one another even physically that don't have to do with acrobatic gymnastics or even the very functional parts of intercourse.

The sexual pleasing of one another can be a very broad category and I think it's really interesting that he nodded to that. He said you know that other stuff like that's fun but but there's another kind of loving one another that happens in these seasons that is different and can be very beautiful.

You singles are like are we done with this yet? This is not helpful. but I hope that you will see that actually it is helpful.

It's helpful for those of you who are married to ask yourselves the questions am I giving myself to my spouse physically? Am I available? Am I depriving them? Am I using sex as a weapon or manipulation in my marriage?

[33 : 06] Am I selfishly forcing myself on my spouse? All right for those of you who are single here's your first application. Golly what does your dating life look like?

Is it selfish or is it selfless? What are the physical boundaries that you've set up to honor the marriage bed by saying there are lots of things that I don't need to do until such a time as God may give me a spouse and I'm not going to jump the line on that.

And when you're looking for someone who's going to walk with you through all the ups and downs of life make sure it's someone who isn't going to push those boundaries because if they're selfish in their dating life they're going to be more selfish in their marriage.

All right so having held up this incredibly high view of marriage and particularly marital sex as a joy and a blessing and as a guard against sexual infidelity even.

Little side note on that. It's very easy to think that that can be used as a weapon too. Hey Paul says like I'm going to go wander if you don't give to me so you know you got to give right?

[34 : 29] And what he's saying is no no no that's the wrong spirit. It is true that a healthy sex life is a good boundary to help us from wander into sexual immorality and infidelity but it can never be used to manipulate or to force like that.

It's contrary to the whole sense of mutuality and seeking one's pleasure that Paul is holding up here. All right Paul goes on. He does not end there.

Verse 6 when it says now this I say this as a concession the ESV has a very unfortunate paragraph break. I think it goes with verse 5 because verse 5 is a concession.

A normal healthy sex life is a normal part of a marriage. Oh but there's one concession I'm going to give to it. Now that's what I say is a concession not as a command. Now let's go back to what I really want to say.

Now having said all of that about how wonderful marriage is and how wonderful sex is I wish you weren't married. I wish you didn't have to be bothered by all that stuff. I wish you were as I am.

[35 : 32] Each one has a gift. A charisma. We'll see this later. Gifts of prophecy and teaching and service and administration and mercy.

Paul uses the same word here. He says you have a gift each one. Some of you have the gift of marriage. Some of you have the gift of singleness. Okay really brief side note culturally drives me crazy.

Some of you young people nowadays use single meaning you're not dating and when you're dating you're not single anymore. The Bible only has two categories married and not married.

When you are not married you are not married and you can't act like married people. It's helpful to fight against that cultural stand.

When you are single be fully single. It doesn't mean you can't be dating or even engaged. There's a good process in that but recognize that until you are married you are not married.

[36 : 33] Sorry that's really simple right? But the language today I've been really concerned because I've heard many people say oh well he's single what does that mean he's not dating anyone that's not that anyway all right come on so what does Paul say Paul says I wish yours why I am why because it's clear that in this context Paul says he was single right now was Paul ever married yeah it's a fun conversation most Pharisees were married it would have been very surprising if he hadn't been married but it seems at this point in his life he clearly isn't married we don't know why we never hear the story she's never referenced in fact there's another place where Paul says you know Peter has the right to get married and he has the privilege and I have the calling to be single and we're both doing this for the glory of God and so we don't know and we will look into in three weeks when we get to verses 32 through 40 we're going to dive into a lot more of

Paul's thoughts about singleness but in this context did Paul really think singleness was better than marriage and the being married is a huge huge burden because you have to care not only for yourself but you have to care for your family and that's right and good and if you are married that's what you were called to but maybe you shouldn't take it on maybe you shouldn't take it on in that season if you have a choice

I think that's what Paul's saying we'll come back to it what I do think Paul is saying is it's better to stay single because singleness is a glorious estate it is a great place to be now I know some of you are thinking here saying yeah right well here's here's a couple things for you to know one Jesus was single Jesus was single his whole human life he was never married he never had sex and you know what he was completely satisfied his life was to the glory of God in every way friends do not believe the lie that our culture or heaven forbid that our church might say that if you're not married you're somehow a second class citizen it's just not true Paul and Jesus are saying this is a great thing Jesus didn't need sex and marriage to be whole remember sex is not the ultimate it's a sign now having said that

I want to talk for a few minutes about the perils of singleness in our culture today because there are some for those of you who don't know I was single until I was 38 and then I got married and I was married for eight years and now I'm single again I have lots to learn about what it looks like in this season of life I know some of you are single as even another decade beyond me and it has its own challenges but I want to talk a little bit about what some of the perils that I have seen in our culture about singleness the first one is what I have already talked about that we believe the lie that you are subhuman if you are not actively engaged in sexual activity our culture screams at us that to be human is to be sexually active and it's just not true for those of you who are in high school let me speak to you directly let me rephrase that for those of you who are in fifth grade and above let me speak to you directly the world out there the culture you are living in the

TV shows that you watch the things that your peers in school may or may not be doing are all based on a lie that you are being deprived of something if you are not sexually active you are being deprived of your worth of your affirmation of your joy of your pleasure and that there's something wrong with you if you are not engaged like they are recognize that this is not true hear from this pulpit that there is a beautiful picture that God has given us for our sexuality but it is for the boundaries of marriage for good reason because the commitment and the covenant relationship of marriage is meant to be the safety whereby that vulnerability can actually be worthwhile you are a person with a soul not just a sex machine waiting to get turned on that's one of the things that's one of the dynamics out there about how we think about sex singleness that I think is challenging secondly

[42 : 27] I think that there can be and I'm speaking probably more to some of you young professionals and students although it could be for any of us are we can pursue singleness in a very selfish way it looks like this I can't be bothered with a relationship it's just way too much time and investment I have things to do I have places to go I have a career to make a name to build I'm going to go change the world and I can't get slowed down by those things now look this is really hard you're going to have to search your heart you're going to have to ask your friends and the wise people in your life to know if this is true or not because there is a proper place of single minded devotion to living your life to the glory of God and all that you do that means you're not paying any attention to your relationship status and desires and your relationship desires as you are fully awake towards pursuing what

God has for you in your life and glorifying God in everything that you do and there is a right way to do that but I was a part of the inaugural chapter of the bachelor of the rapture club at Princeton when I was a student and I thought we were going to be so spiritual and so impressive by forsaking all of that distracting stuff so that we can be serious about pursuing the Lord I think I had a nine month window where I wasn't dating someone and we started this chapter during that time and I tormented one of my mentors when he had the audacity to get engaged he was our figure head we broke into his apartment we opened Bibles all over his apartment to this passage and me and my fellow members have all been happily married most of them have been happily married for over 20 years and have lots of kids so it was not a very success but there was an arrogance and a pride about the desire for that and it's possible that some of you are thinking it's just too much work to be married and if that's true that's probably not a very good reason to pursue singleness because it's a very self centered and selfish understanding right so what

I want you to hear this is really nuanced right this is that there's a good calling to pursue the glory of God in your life and to pursue singleness and not be not spend all of your time looking saying oh do you think I wonder if she's you know where you spend all your time wondering where the next relationship might happen or might come from right there's a goodness about that but there can be a selfishness about that I think we need to be really careful with thirdly the perils of singleness welcome to church church can be one of the hardest places to be single at times because we stand up here and we talk about marriage and the glories of marriage and the wonders of sex and you're sitting there going uh-huh I know I know and you have people who come and say oh well don't you think he's he's a really godly guy I think you should get to know him and you feel like you're constantly getting fixed up and the subtext is always there's something wrong with you if you're not pursuing someone or you're not getting married and you know and you get offhand comments like oh you're serving in the nursery well that looks good doesn't and I'm sure that means you love children you know and these these little comments like that that get thrown around in church can completely undermine the gift of singleness because the gift of singleness is that you can devote yourself to loving and serving others that you can devote yourself all of your time at 1130 at night when your married friends are wiping noses and changing wet beds you are free to go sit with a friend in crisis when you meet someone who wants to grow in the

Lord you have the ability to say hey let's get out of here tonight let's let's drive to New York City and have a great evening of just fellowship and a crazy road trip friends you're married particularly your parenting married they don't have that flexibility you have an incredible opportunity to serve the married couples in this church I'm getting ahead of myself but you have an incredible opportunity in singleness Paul calls it a gift to be single-minded and not distracted it's a really good thing I want to acknowledge it can be costly right it can be lonely and sexual temptation doesn't just come from our culture it comes from our own hearts and our own desires and there are different seasons of singleness that have different challenges it's way different being single and 24 and wondering why you haven't found someone yet and being 35 or 45 and not having found someone yet and it's different when you've been married and now you're not and wondering what do I do with that each of these seasons have different challenges and yet

Paul says this is a gift and you are to take it and to treasure it and to seek all the good that is in it and to not spend all the time looking over the fence because you know what your married friends do that too they look at all your single all you singles out there and say that looks like fun we used to be fun didn't we did we ever do that man that was a long time ago I can't remember it's so easy to be discontent Paul says no God's given you a gift use it invest it practically it's Valentine's Day anyone want to do some babysitting I don't need it but I'm sure there's some people in our church who do have you asked your married friends if you could give them a couple hours today to go off to just celebrate being married together can you serve them in that way or maybe that's not your deal or maybe you don't know married people yet in our church celebrate

[49 : 36] Valentine's Day by pulling together some of your other single friends and having a time just have a time together have fun you know watch a cheesy Hallmark romance movie and laugh at it and talk about how the glorious picture of what God gives you is much better than the cheesy romances on channel 117 not that I know anything about it but or maybe you just need to go and spend time with your bridegroom go spend time with Jesus and live in his love and know that you don't need anything beyond him and his church you don't need to be married to be whole and to be all that God has called you to be now the passage ends with a caveat that helps put everything into balance right pastor Paul comes in and having held up the glory of marriage and now held up the glory of singleness he says well okay how do you muddle through the middle well it's better to get married than to sin that's basically what he's saying in verse nine right if you find if you find that this is a huge area of struggle that may very well be an indication that God is going to lead you into a marriage right now let me tell you this getting married so that you can find sexual release is a really really bad idea it's a really really bad idea it will come and it will be a good blessing of that marriage but if that's your primary reason then you have violated all of what

I was saying in verses one through five right because what what I want you to see is that if you have that desire there is a good estate for you to aspire to but understand that what God calls you to in that estate is not selfish gratification but it is self-sacrificial loving and giving for the sake of God and for his kingdom so Paul says recognize your gift wait for it really briefly some people talk about the gift of singleness like oh do you have the gift of singleness 24 year olds shouldn't be having that conversation about whether they have the gift of singleness there are almost no 24 year olds who know whether they do or not I think it's often something that you discover over time as you continue to walk in life pursue the glory of God and his purposes for your life and you will decide you will find out along the way because if you don't get married you probably have the gift again bachelor of the ratchet club we had that all figured out not really but God has given you this gift

God has given you this gift of your life a life that he has bought going back to the end of chapter six your life has been bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ he has laid down his life to redeem you from selfishness and self centered living and he has given you not only a new life so that you might live for the glory of God but he has given you a pattern of how to live that way not selfishly taking but giving to one another will you invest your life your love life whatever it is to the glory of God and happy Valentine's Day let's pray Lord we ask for your help because these things are hard there are hard words that challenge us challenge how we live challenge how we feel challenge what our assumptions are about what is and what ought to be in our relationship life

God I pray that you would help us this morning Lord to see the depth of our selfishness to see the depth of your love for us in Christ and how he can free us from that so that we might live for your glory in all that we do we pray these things in Jesus name amen amen