

1 Corinthians 7:25-40

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Preacher: Matt Coburn

[0 : 00] . Well, good morning.

Good morning. Good morning. Good morning. I'm talking to Singles. When I began working with a singles ministry, it was a young seminarian over 20 years ago.

I remember sitting and talking to one of the leaders and we talked about the challenge of how to create a singles ministry that avoids the silly and correctness of the Loser's Club and a sharp tag of dating.

How is it that you actually have something else? Singleness is something that we struggle with in our church culture. It's something we struggle with in our product culture.

I don't recommend a movie, but I read reviews of the 40-year-old virgin. And one of the subtexts of the gags that posted on the movie is that it's indescribable that there would be some person who would live a single, sublimit life that would be meaningful and fulfilled.

[1 : 27] I think the movie at the end, if I read my reviews right, maybe subverts that. But the very fact that that's the cultural assumption upon which a whole two hours of Steve Carroll gags can be built, tells us something about our culture.

And this is a common experience that they may be for many singles. How many times have you heard someone say, He's such a great guy. How peaceful is single.

How is she such a gags? How does she get married? The implications behind such questions is that great men who get married, and those who are not great do not.

How many can keep single and print upon them meaning that touches their very identities, and in fact that the second grade is somehow less than others who marry them. So that it's very, broke the ball head upon, uh, gospel-cold mission bloggers about siblings.

Even in our loving single single friends, we come and say, I'm praying for you, for that precious someone. Or, when a parent sees you serving in children's ministry, gives you a wager and an honor and says, that's a good place to show off how many more of those kids, isn't it?

[2 : 49] Being single in our world today is nice. I think that at its core here is really our problem. We see singleness as an inherently unstable status.

We think that it's something that needs to be resolved somehow. It's not something that could be who we are. A place where we can, as Christians, pursue wholehearted devotion to the Lord and find a meaningful and significant life.

Here's a litigious task for us as a church to think about it. Think about it. Don't, don't overreact.

There's some good reasons to think through. It's worth, it's a thought experiment. But think about it. Could you see someone like that as actually mature? And actually able to minister to you as a congregation.

Another place I can just think about how difficult it is for us to think about how unstable it is. I remember this in my own life. Where do you go for Christmas? When you're a married person, you can stay home.

[4 : 03] Because I've got my home, I've got my family, and I'm able to just... I know, not everyone does. They still go home to mom and dad, and that's great. But when I was a single, it was an expectation that I would go to be with my parents for Christmas.

And it would have been a big deal for me to say, actually, I'm going to do something else this year. It's another way in which our culture views singleness as inherently unstable.

Something that has to fit into particular forms. We need something else in our lives. For those of you who are visitors or don't know me very well, here are my credentials for preaching this sermon this morning.

I was 38 years single. I got married in 2006. I was happily married for six years. Now I am single again as a widower as of a little over a year ago.

And facing, in some ways, a similar question. How stable is this? I ask myself this question. Is this tenable? Can I continue in this?

[5 : 07] Well, this is the question that brings us to our passage today. It's the question we always want to ask, right? What does the Bible say about this? What does God have to say about this?

So we're going to continue in 1 Corinthians. If you've been following along, this is where we're at. We're at the end of chapter 7. And what's our page number? I forget. 956.

956. 956. You can turn with me. 1 Corinthians chapter 7. And I'm going to read just 32 through 40, actually, this morning.

So if you want to turn with me there, we're going to read the text. And then we're going to pray. And then we'll launch into our exploration of this topic. 1 Corinthians chapter 7, verse 32.

2. I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife and his interests are divided.

[6 : 16] And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband.

2 Corinthians chapter 7. I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.

2 Corinthians chapter 8. If anyone thinks he is not behaving properly towards his betrothed, if his passions are strong, and it has to be, let him do as he wishes. Let them marry. It is no sin.

3 Corinthians chapter 8. But whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity but having his desire under control and has determined this in his heart to keep her as his betrothed, he will do well.

So then he who marries his betrothed does well. He who refrains from marriage will do even better. A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives.

[7 : 14] But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. Yet, it is my judgment she is happier if she remains as she is.

And I think that I too have the Spirit of God. Lord, we pray this morning that as we look at this text and as we think about this topic from your perspective, Lord, that you would help us to see the glory of your gifts.

And Lord, the wonder of what you have called us as your people to be and to do in this world. Lord, I pray you would help us as a community to grow in being a loving community that together spurs one another on in our undivided devotion to you.

Jesus, I pray you would help me this morning, that my words would be useful, but your Spirit would take them and use them in our lives, Lord, to draw us closer to you.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. So what I want you to hear this morning is this.

[8 : 24] God calls us all to see singleness as a gift from God. And calls his church to support those who will walk in this calling.

God calls us to see singleness as a gift from God. And calls his church to support those who are called to walk in it. So here's where we're going to go.

Hang on to your seatbelts if you're a note taker. Get your pen ready. We've got a lot of ground to cover because there's a lot to say about this topic. And I feel like I'm never going to get to do this again.

No, I'm sure that's not true. But this is my one shot, so I want to do it as fully as I can. So here's, we're going to have three movements to this message. The first one is going to be the big picture.

The big picture of what the Bible has said about marriage and singleness. It's a bit of a recapitulation of what we've talked about for the last couple of weeks. And what we've been doing in Sunday school and some other things.

[9 : 20] So we're going to do the big picture first of what the Bible says in the flow of 1 Corinthians. And secondly, we're going to look specifically at this passage to just unpack its meaning and its core truth.

And then the third one is we're going to try to live for a little while in application. And you're going to be blessed because there are words of wisdom from people in this congregation. I sent a bunch of emails out and some of you so graciously responded.

And I have great words of encouragement and counsel and advice from some of you that I will share. And for those of you who responded, I will not name names. So you are anonymously safe this morning.

So you can relax now and enjoy the sermon. So here we go. The big picture. The big picture of what God is saying to us about our relational life.

What is the direction of it and what are the boundary markers of it? Okay. Paul is ending a section from chapters 5-7 in 1 Corinthians where he's talking about our sex lives.

[10 : 20] And how that is impacted by the gospel and by following Jesus Christ. Do you remember that in chapter 5 the presenting problem had to do with this egregiously offensive display of sexual immorality.

And how it was addressed. And it's continued all the way through. It's been a subtext. It hasn't always been the focus of it. But it's been this whole section of 1 Corinthians is trying to, Paul is trying to teach the Corinthians who are living like we do in a world where this is a, there's a lot of freedom and a lot of discussion about what it looks like.

And Paul is saying there's a distinctively Christian way to live out our lives with regard to who we are as sexual beings. And at its core, in his message, I think is, if you want to look back to the end of chapter 6, at its core he wants to say this to all of us.

You are not your own. You were bought with a price. Therefore, glorify God in your body. Now, remember what it means that you have been bought with a price.

Remember with me for just a minute what the gospel is really all about. God has done something for us in Jesus that is amazing. He has sent Jesus, the God-man, who offered to pay the price of his very own life to rescue us and people like us from foolish rebellion against God.

[11 : 54] Our independent rejection of God. Our desire to live our lives in every way, including our sexual lives. In every way apart and independent from God. Separated us from him.

Brought his anger and wrath upon us. This rejection was so serious that the only response, that death was the only appropriate response to it. But God was determined in love to not leave us there.

He was determined to rescue us from that. And he sent Jesus to pay that price for us so that we might be freed from the penalty of sin and be purchased for him to be his own children.

To be his spiritual sons and daughters. And so we, who through faith in Christ, have been rescued, are called to reorient our lives around serving and honoring this God who has saved us at such a great cost.

This is how great the Father's love is for us. That he sent his only son to die. Now then, glorify him in your life.

[13 : 03] And specifically, glorify him with how you hold yourself with regard to your sexuality and your relationships. That's the direction that this whole section is going.

Now, if that's the ship, if that's the direction that the ship wants to head, what are the channel markers that are going to help us not run aground as we head in that direction?

But we've said a number of things and I'm going to run through these. Each one of these is a sermon in and of itself. So buckle your seatbelts. We're going to run through a lot of theology really quickly here. But I want to remind you of all these things so that we see what this channel looks like as we're pursuing it.

First of all, we see that the Bible sees marriage as a glorious and good gift. It was not good for man to be alone. And in the Garden of Eden, God gave marriage as this precious and wonderful thing.

And we see this testified throughout Scripture. We see it in the Song of Solomon, this glorious celebration of the union of a man and wife and the way it pictures and points to God and the intimacy that he will have with his people one day.

[14 : 17] And we see in Ephesians 5, again, this holding up of marriage, this great sacrificial love for one another, giving to one another in love and submission, and how marriage is meant to be this great gift, leading us towards Revelation 21 and 22, where God calls his people into the marriage supper of the Lamb, where his church is the bride and Jesus himself is the bridegroom, and we enter into this eternal and glorious relationship where intimacy and love and acceptance and joy and pleasure untold are ours.

And that's, he gave us that as marriage. And that's what it's for. So that's point one. Point two is that God gave us sex as a sign and expression of the covenant commitment between a man and a wife in marriage that is meant to reflect that covenant commitment between God and his people.

And so the Bible is clear that there is no sex outside of marriage. I just stepped on a landmine. If you've just been here, go back and listen to the sermons for the last six weeks, and you'll get a little bit of perspective why I can say that so flippantly and then move on, because we've been talking about it for a while.

Thirdly, one of the things that we see is that sex and marriage are not ultimate. We see in Matthew 22 that in heaven there is no marrying or being given in marriage, because at that point we now have the fulfillment of what marriage is pointing to, and we no longer need to have marriage as a part of it.

What a glorious thing this is. To see that this thing that our culture and maybe our own hearts so long to make so important is actually a signpost towards something greater that we have with Christ and God.

[16 : 19] So that's the third thing, right? So marriage is great. Sex is for marriage. Sex is not ultimate. Marriage is not ultimate. Fourth, Matthew 19.

Jesus talks about those who have been born eunuchs, those who are made to be eunuchs, and those who choose to be eunuchs for the kingdom of God.

Without getting into a deep exegesis of it, Jesus is simply saying there is in the kingdom of God, and particularly in the new covenant kingdom of God, a place for those who will never be married, will never have children, will never have some of these what are often seen, and particularly in Jesus' day, were core social identities.

There is a place for them in the kingdom of God. And some of them may be unwillingly doing that, and some of them may be willingly doing that. And yet it is a good thing.

If you were able to sit in to Justin Hawkins' Sunday School class two weeks ago, he talked about the progression of the idea of singleness. How in the Old Testament, singleness was usually seen as a curse.

[17 : 32] In fact, it was sort of unknown. You just didn't see it talked about, or when it was talked about, it was seen as a negative thing, a lack of God's blessing. But then there is this shift with Jesus and with the new covenant.

There comes this holding up of singleness as a good in and of itself. It is no longer, it is no longer seen as a curse.

Think of the fact that two of the most significant people in the formation of the church, Jesus and Paul were both single through their significant times of ministry.

This is unheard of. Justin wrote this, Such also is a condition of those who are single in Christ now. Far from being a deficiency or an abnormality, those who sanctify their singleness to the work of the Lord and the love of God and neighbor now have a privileged position within the body of Christ.

Singleness is a calling, not a curse. Ten seconds. Bookstall. Redeeming Singleness. It is all about it. It is a great book. Go check out our bookstall.

[18 : 40] Okay, that is number four. Right? That there is a new covenant place in singleness where whether willingly or not, there is a redemptive purpose and calling for singles in the church.

This then brings us to 1 Corinthians chapter 7. Point number five. Look with me. Chapter 7 verses 8 and 9. Nope.

Go back and look at it. Verse 7. Sorry. Verse 7. I wish that all were as I am, but each has his own gift from God. One of one kind and one of another.

The truth is that God gives gracious gifts to his people. Some who are singled and some who are married. And you know how you know what your gift is? Look at your finger.

If there is a ring, you have the gift of marriage. If there is no ring, you have the gift of singleness. And that is a joy and a pleasure. And that is what God has given to you. They are good things.

[19 : 47] And then finally, if you were here last week as Pastor Nick preached through this section right before verse 32, he talked about this greater coming.

That part of living in this New Testament time with regard to our relationship status is seeing that there is a present distress. There may be good reasons now to forego what would be normal goods for the sake of pursuing Christ and his kingdom, knowing that Christ is coming back.

And that we can live with contentment in whatever situation we find now. Not spending our whole lives looking, thinking the grass must be greener somewhere else. Friends, the grass is greener in heaven.

And that is what we long for. And that is what Paul is saying by saying, live as if all these things weren't true. Because what you are really longing for is coming.

And so live in light of that future reality. And you can live with contentment now. And so, these are the channel markers that I want you to see.

[21 : 01] Right? In the direction of how do we glorify God. Marriage is good. Singleness is good. Singleness is good. How do we live that out? What does our passage today say to us about how we live out singleness in particular in light of this?

And this is where we are. So look with me again at chapter 7, verse 32 through 38. Alright? So if there is a summary verse in this section, I believe it is verse 38.

He who marries his betrothed, he does well. But he who does not marry his betrothed does better.

Paul is saying that there is a goodness in singleness. In fact, there is a distinct and a unique and a wonderful goodness about single that needs to be held up, esteemed, honored, valued, and cherished.

In the individual lives of those who are called to singleness and in the life of the church. This is what I want us to see this morning. I think this is what this passage is saying.

[22 : 13] It is holding singleness up as an unmitigated good. It is not obviously an absolute better. It is not that all disciples of Christ are called to not to be single.

That would be a very short procreative cycle for us to continue the church or the world for that matter. But instead what it is, is it is saying, look, in this culture I want to uphold this good for you.

So let's look at it. Look at verses 32 through 35. Look at Paul's pastoral concern as he begins his passage. I want you to be free from anxiety.

Anxiety might arouse in your mind the thought of sort of fretting or, you know, an ungodly worrying. And that could be part of what he is trying to get at here.

But in fact, I think it is better translated, this is simply the proper care and responsibility that you have for your life. And he unpacks that, you see, in verses, in the following verses.

[23 : 19] The unmarried man doesn't have any other cares. They are free. Right? They are anxious only about what? The things of the Lord and how to please him.

Right? This is the application of chapter 6 verse 20. Glorify God. This is the unmarried man. It is all he has to do. It is all he has to do. I just have to glorify God. That is the only person that I really have to care about who cares about what I am doing day to day and how I live my life.

He says, oh, verse 33. But the married man is anxious about worldly things. How to please his wife and his interests are divided. And he goes on, he says the same thing about an unmarried woman.

An unmarried woman has the freedom to devote herself fully to pleasing the Lord. But, and just as a side note, to be holy in body and spirit, I think, is simply a metaphor to say in all of what she does.

I don't think there's any particular connotations there except for a picture of wholeness that Paul is pulling out there. But the married woman is anxious about how to please her husband.

[24 : 28] Here's what I want to say. Everyone who's married in this room or who has ever been married, you get this. Unless you're a completely insensitive Claude. Right?

If you are married, you understand, I have to care about these things. And it's not a bad thing. It's a right thing for married people to care about their spouses like this. In fact, it's a part of God's calling.

It's not even contrary. It's not like Paul's pitting this division as being a bad and a good thing or as two things that are competing. In God's economy, they actually work together.

But they are still very real. They are still very real. And Paul says, I want you to be free from these extra cares.

I want you to be undivided in your devotion to the Lord. This is what he says in verse 35, right? He says, look, I say this for your good.

[25 : 25] I don't want to lay any restraint. It's a picture of, I don't want to put a noose around your neck. So you do have this freedom. But having said that, I want to give you counsel to say, look, this is a good.

If you have this good or the chance for this good, treasure it. Cherish it. Pursue it. Because it allows you the freedom, undivided devotion to the Lord.

Really quickly, for application, what does this mean? For those of you who are dating or really, really wishing you were dating, the first thing I want to say is, Paul says, I want you to be free from that anxiety.

Don't let your dating life or your lack of dating life consume you. Paul says, clearly, you have something much greater to live for, which is for the glory of God and the undivided devotion to him.

Let your dating life flow from your undivided devotion to him. Don't let it consume your life. And let it be a test for those you might consider dating.

[26 : 34] Look for contentment. One of the best preparations for marriage is contentment in singleness. Look for that. Married people, recognize the privilege and the call that you have to care for your spouse.

This passage is not disparaging that. It is actually valuing it. Treasure that as a part of your calling. But for singles, you who have the opportunity for undivided attention, without distraction or, as it says back in verse 25, the worldly troubles that we have as married people.

Two stories from among you. One of you wrote about the example of driving home at the end of the day. And knowing that if you were in a relationship or if you were married, you'd be thinking about your spouse.

Going home, how do you prepare yourself to bless them? How do you want to come home and to serve them? You're having to unload the other things of work from the day so that you can focus on serving and loving your spouse as you walk through the door.

This person wrote, you know, I had the freedom to not think about that. And so I could think about the broken people in my lives and the people I got to love this week. And I got to pray for them and pray for their well-being.

[28 : 02] And obviously, it's not like married people can't do this. But I'm a guy. I can't multitask. So I can't do both things at the same time. It's binary. I'm doing one or the other.

Some of you women might be able to multitask better. But the reality is that it's for a single person, there's this freedom to do this without juggling. And it's a really wonderful thing.

Another one of you said, you know, I have the freedom to just pick up and go on a spiritual retreat when I'm feeling drained and need renewal. I don't have to ask permission.

I don't have to figure out who's doing childcare for the kids. I don't have to figure out who's making dinner. I can just go. Just go away for a day and be with the Lord.

And what a great freedom that is to nurture my soul. The passage continues in verses 36 and 38.

[28 : 59] Here, Paul seems to be addressing particularly the question of the betrothed. Because he's just said, stay as you are. Well, if you're betrothed, which means you were committed to marry someone but weren't marrying them yet, it's a little bit longer than our engagement today.

It was often done through parents and could have had a much longer time frame for actually bringing it from betrothal to marriage. But it also had a higher commitment whereby if you, for instance, strayed sexually while you were betrothed, it was seen as a great scandal.

This is partly why Mary's pregnancy was such a scandal in the birth narrative of Jesus. So, anyway, so he's addressing the betrothed because they're going, what do I do with this advice?

I'm supposed to stay as I am, but staying as I am is I'm betrothed, but I'm supposed to be getting married, but do I marry or not? That's basically it. And what does he say? He says, look, if you need to get married, get married.

It's a good thing. This is what he said back in, it's better to do that than to sin. If you can't control yourself and your passions, if you're struggling to do that well, if you feel like overwhelmingly this is the right thing to do, then do it.

[30 : 13] And verse 37, he says, but if, and recognize this is the pattern of his whole chapter in many ways. Here's the principle, but if, you know, but if you can actually see your way clear to be single, I think it would be better.

It would be a better thing. It's, it can't be a complete absolute.

One of the ways we see that, first Timothy chapter five, verse 14, Paul actually counsels younger widows to marry. It's a fascinating little, little, he says for you, you younger widows, you need to go and get married.

You need to, now different situation than Corinth. It was a different context and it was a different meaning. And part of what Paul seemed to be addressing in Timothy was widows who were not spending their time fully devoted to the Lord, but spending their time gossiping and potentially falling into sexual immorality.

Saying, no, that's not a good thing. Go get married. Go find, invest your life in a family. And so Paul doesn't mean this as an absolute, but he does say, it is a good.

[31 : 30] And if you can, if you can see your way to do it, what a glorious thing it is. What a wonderful calling it is for you to do this.

The time is short. And there's a goodness to be honored in singleness. Then verses 39 and 40, just to wrap up our chapter, he applies it to widows.

He's just coming back again and wrapping up saying, oh yeah. And by the way, widows, as long as you're, as long as you and your spouse are alive, you're married. Stay that way. But if he dies, you're actually free to marry.

Oh, but in the Lord, this is just a little side note, a little note warning. All of, right, Paul has always said, and he'll say it really clearly in 2 Corinthians, look, if you are going to hitch your wagon and live to the glory of God, hitch your wagon to someone who's going to share that calling with you, right?

Don't go marry someone outside of the Lord. Don't choose to take on that. It may happen to you, and God in his grace may sustain you through it. And he can, and he is for some of you in this room.

[32 : 38] But don't choose that. Don't choose that trial. If being married to a believer who wants to glorify the Lord is dividing your attention, how much more will it be dividing your attention to be married to someone who doesn't even share that goal with you?

Who doesn't share that? So, marry in the Lord. That's what Paul's saying in his little note here. But, yeah, it'd probably be better if not.

And I think I have the Spirit. And that's, he's going to, we'll come back to that in like chapters 11 through 14, where it seems like there are people in the Corinthian context who are claiming that they have some sort of divine, spiritual authority that is greater than others and maybe greater than Paul's.

And Paul's simply saying, hey, this is my pastoral wisdom for you, and I think you ought to take it seriously. That's basically what he's saying. That's what he's saying. So, as I read through this, the central point of this is, cherish the unique goodness of singleness, its distinct advantages, and live fully in it, and don't seek to remove yourself from it.

It's okay if you do, but there's a goodness in it. See that and cherish it. All right. So, we've done the big picture, our direction, our channel markers.

[34 : 03] Now we've looked at this passage. Now gets the fun part, right? Here we go. Application. What does this mean for us? What kind of a church should we be in light of this passage?

First of all, I want to talk about the reality of singleness. I mentioned briefly the gift, but here's a quote from John Stott about the gift of singleness. In spite of rumors to the contrary, I have never taken a solemn vow or heroic decision to remain single.

On the contrary, despite, during my 20s and 30s, like most people, I was expecting to marry one day. In fact, during this period, I twice began to develop a relationship with a lady who I thought might be God's choice of a light partner for me.

But when the time came to make a decision, I can best explain it by saying that I lacked the assurance from God that he meant me to go forward. So I drew back. And when that happened twice, I naturally began to believe that God meant me to remain single.

Looking back with the benefit of hindsight, I think I know why I could never have traveled or written as extensively as I have done if I had had the responsibilities of a wife and a family.

[35 : 14] And if you don't know who John Stott is, he might be one of the top three most influential Christian leaders in the church in the 20th century. He has written dozens of books.

He has started wonderful ministries of preaching. He was involved in world missions and student missions. And the freedom that he had to do that was significantly because he was single.

The gift of singleness is not some divine fiat that you get in a cave with a glowing aura when God speaks audibly to you. At some level, the gift of singleness is your status today if you're single.

It's as simple as that. And again, Paul isn't saying it's not, it doesn't mean you can't change that. But it does mean that today, live in the gift that God has given you.

Singleness, so that's part of the reality of singleness as we're navigating the idea of gift. This is going to be a bit of a like bullet point of application, so here we go.

[36 : 17] Singleness has all sorts of different looks, right? It looks different at different ages and stages of life. If you're a teenager and you're single, you're like marriage, whatever, that sounds really gross.

Maybe, I don't know. Hopefully you have a better view of that. But, you know, but from single to your 20s and early 30s to your late 30s and 40s in the middle of careers to 50s and 60s, some of you are widows and widowers and divorcees and your singleness.

Some of you have been lifelong single. There are all these different permutations, so it's really hard to speak of singleness as one experience. It's also very different because your singleness, maybe you've never been married, maybe you've been a single parent or you are a single parent.

And the difference between single because of divorce versus being widowed, all of these things shape your experience of singleness and the opportunities that you may have and the needs that you may have in your singleness.

Singleness will also look different if you are someone who deeply longs to be married and struggles with contentment or if you are someone who has made peace with it and who has found a deep level of contentment.

[37 : 34] Some of you may be running as fast as you can for marriage because you've seen how messed up it is in your own experience in life. All of those things are going to affect how you see singleness and what your experience of it is.

But here's what I want to say. Again, these are words. I know I'll bring it in now. So, words from one of you.

Perhaps for some single people, a real insatiable desire for union with someone else that is not satisfied is the cross they have to bear.

The struggle is not, therefore, the obstacle to their faithfulness. It is the very arena of their faithfulness. I think that's true more broadly.

Whatever your single status is, if you were single here this morning, it is the arena in which God wants you to live out your faithful calling to glorify him with all of your life.

[38 : 39] It doesn't mean it's easy. Here's some things that you shared with me about the challenges of singleness. Interestingly, one of the strongest ones, selfishness.

I find that singleness allows me to be a very selfish person. It is easier. One person said, there is something a little risky in not having someone else to be responsible for all the time.

It can feed a very self-centered life. It becomes easier. Another one said, it becomes easier to use people in relationships rather than truly love them.

Other challenges of singleness include loneliness, a lack of companionship, a lack of a sense of family. Here's what one of you said. Lots of couples plan dinners together.

And it's definitely less frequent for a couple to invite me to dinner. I eat with a wife, but eating with a couple together is usually something that only happens by chance.

[39 : 47] Some of you face singleness and one of the challenges is a lack of partnership. This is particularly going to be true if you are single parents. If you are an older widow, where you have had someone to help bear the burdens of daily life, of child rearing, of house management, of things like that.

And suddenly you lose some of those things. Another challenge is that a lack of being known. One asked, as a single, who can speak into my life with wisdom?

Who knows me well enough to speak into my life with wisdom and guidance? One of the other challenges is that sometimes the singles feel like one shoe in a two-footed world.

Right? You just don't fit very well. You get your wedding invitations and it's the you plus one. You know? Or, you know, you're thinking about, I don't know if you guys have ever thought about this, but like, when do you buy your bed?

You know? When I was a single guy, I just took something I could sleep on. Right? But at one point you just say, you know what, this is a bed I'm going to be sleeping in for the next 15 years. When am I going to go out and buy my bed?

[40 : 59] And as a married person, you buy it when you get married. You know? But as a single person, particularly if you're single for a while, when do you make those decisions? You feel like, I'm adrift and I don't have any cultural cues to tell me when to do these things.

Right? Right? Um, one of you said, social misfit, it's harder, it seems, to invite a family to dinner to your house.

Somehow that just doesn't seem to work very easily. It's very awkward. And sometimes in the church, being single is a social misfit too, in that you feel like you might get pigeonholed.

Oh, well, singles, well, they work with the youth. Or in the nursery. Or things like that. Thankfully, I don't think that's really strong in our church. But I, but it's a danger, isn't it?

Singles do these kinds of things. Married people can do those kinds of things. Right? So those are some of the challenges. I just want to lay them out for you, for those of you who are married and have forgotten what it's like to be single.

[42 : 00] Um, just to remind you. But then I asked about opportunities. And what a glorious, I am so happy to share these things with you. Undistracted devotion.

I have time to fall more in love with Jesus. That's what I do. Now again, it's not that married people can't pursue that. But there's a complexity of their lives.

And for singleness, there's a sense of like, I can do this. I can, I can just spend my time. One of the interesting things that came up over and over again was that people shared that being single has forced me to rely on the Lord more than I might have otherwise if I were in a relationship.

I've experienced completeness in Jesus. Finding that marriage is not needed in order to settle down. I turn to the Lord more when there's no other crutch that my heart has to turn to in the same way.

My stubborn heart still finds other pet idols, but there's been a sweetness to this season of being single. Here's another testimony.

[43 : 12] I can honestly say that God is my husband, my lover, and my best friend. I could not live this life without Him. I know that no one could ever love me the way He loves me.

And I am grateful that He loves me unconditionally. I deliberately spend hours at a stretch alone, but not in loneliness.

I want to be able to do this. To contemplate, to think, to be, and to commune with God. Friends, this is the opportunity of singleness that I want us to take hold of and to see and to cherish and to value.

There's also an opportunity to serve others. I love, I'm just quoting these people, your peers, in your pews, sitting next to you. I love that I can fill my schedule and flex around friends' schedules because my simple life can flex like that.

I have such autonomy and freedom to leave for weekends and visit friends, pack an evening just running errands and popping by friends' houses, especially when they're married and they have to coordinate schedules otherwise.

[44 : 18] I have the freedom to just do that and go for it. One said, I can invest my time in serving my roommates and my married friends and think about the freedom that I have from caring for my spouse gives me this capacity of care that I can spend on all these other people.

What a great joy that is. One of my heroes of the faith is a woman named Helen Rosevere who was a missionary to Africa in the middle of the 20th century.

She was a single woman missionary doctor, suffered deeply through the colonial rebellion period. But this is what she wrote.

And it is a privilege because as a single on the mission field, I was able to do things that I certainly would not have been able to do had I been married, had a family and had responsibilities for a home.

I was free. I could go into any African home. I didn't have to look first or think, is there a leprosy patient here who might take infection to my family? I could just go in.

[45 : 29] I didn't have to look at my watch to see that I get home on time to make the kids' evening meal. I was free and God blessed that so richly. He gave me African sisters who've been closer to me than any blood sister ever was.

I've had friendships with them on a level that I'm not sure I wouldn't have had in the same way had I been married. And it's been a privilege. Friends, this is what singleness presents for us as we want to live our lives for the glory of God.

To not spend our time being distracted, wishing that it were different, wishing that there was something else to do. God has given us this context for all of you who are single to live this out.

So what kind of community do we need to be to support this kind of single? Interestingly, the drumbeat of responses to this, and it's what I would have said myself, is that it's friendship.

Spiritual friendship, real friendship is what enables singles to pursue this kind. Because you know what? It is still true that it's not good for man to be alone.

[46 : 49] We were not meant to live independently. And therefore, the friendships that we develop with others are critical to us pursuing this calling.

As singles and for singles. Here's how one single described it. At least four times a week, I have conversations on things spiritual.

These conversations are deep enough that one can be accountable. For example, even in writing this response, I've sent it to three close friends for comments and spent two hours in conversation with a single friend in a different city going through it point by point.

What a beautiful picture of friendship that someone is that close. Married people long for friendships like that. What a great joy to have those things.

So what do these friendships look like? First of all, among singles, what does it look like? I love living with my roommates, being able to pray with them in the moment, encourage them, play games, and have deeper peeks into their lives that I would have had other way.

[48 : 01] Living together is a great way to develop these friendships. It's not a sure thing. You've got to work at it even when you live in the same house.

But if you live with other people, it's a great way to develop these friendships. Here's another thing about the kinds of friendships among singles that could be really good.

It means thinking with them on what it means to desire a godly spouse. What they should write on their online dating profiles. Hearing their stories and being willing to share your own.

It means celebrating milestones with them. This was such an interesting insight. What are the milestones for a culture for singles? For marriage, what is it? It's engagement party, bridal shower, wedding, baby shower.

Like they're built in times to celebrate. What are those for singles? And how do you find them and take advantage of them? Kind of friendships that get beyond the superficial.

[49 : 05] They get beyond just watching movies together. But are actually sharing life and serving one another. Seeking to spur one another on towards Christ. It takes time.

It takes investment. But it's the opportunity that you have as a single to do that with one another. It's really helpful to have someone to do something with on a Friday night.

When your married friends are putting their kids to bed or falling asleep. Right? I mean let's get real. At 10 o'clock some of you are just starting. And the rest of us are just going down.

Right? It's really helpful to have someone where your two choices are staying home and watching NCIS reruns on TNT. Or going to the bar and dealing with the ugliness of a social scene like that.

Like maybe you love going to bar and that's great. And I hope you know if you do that it's great. You know that's not a big deal for the glory of God. But having friendships that encourage you in Christ are central to navigating things like what do you do on a Friday night.

[50 : 17] Right? Having friendships like this is also one of the ways that we as a church minister to those who struggle with same sex attraction. When we have real friendships it allows us to be in community.

And allows us to encourage those of us in our midst who struggle with same sex attraction to see singleness and celibacy as a good honorable glorifying calling that God has placed on their life.

Here's my second bookstall. Spiritual friendship by Wesley Hill. It's not everything that you want to say about friendship. It has some particular applications but it's really worth it. These are both in the bookstall downstairs.

He probably pushes some covenantal aspects stronger than I would but it's good. It's good. So friends if you are a single seek out community.

Don't live in isolation. Find others. Keep pursuing it. Get involved in a small group for heaven's sake. It's partly what it's there for. So you can connect with others.

[51 : 22] But then for those of us who are married. Those of you who are married. I don't know where I fit in the sermon anymore by the way. So for those of you who are married. Right? How can you invest in your relationship with singles?

How can you invite them? Mary Lewis in the panel last week. I'm going to name her because she did it publicly. And it was such a great thing. She said you know when I was raising my son and on my own and wrestling through this.

It was such a blessing to have friends. Couples. Who would come and they were my friends. And they were my sounding boards. And you know what? They also. I got a little bit of overflow husbanding.

You know? Like fixing a light bulb or you know. And again. Apart from the gender stereotypes. Don't get hung up on that. But there's value to that. And I've experienced that too.

When I was single for a long time. The friendships that I had with couples. Where I would not just get there and go with the guy to the garage. And never see the. But where I'd sit and talk with both of them as a couple.

[52 : 28] I felt like I had a mother and a sister. And I had insight that sharpened me and challenged me and helped me to grow. It was such a wonderful thing to have those kinds of friendships.

Here's another one. I'm thankful for the married women who just want to share their lives fully with me. And don't make me feel less than them. Because I'm not married. Who reach out and love me in companion like ways.

They see me. And desire to see me deeply. They celebrate me. And pray with me. And encourage me. Another person described it this way.

Close friends. What has encouraged this person. Close friends over the years. Whether they're single. Married with children. Or married without children. That know me as a whole person. And ask me how I'm doing in my walk with God.

In general they know me well enough to know. I don't talk about singleness as a burden. Or marriage as a goal. And if it comes up. It comes up organically. Those of you who are married.

[53 : 35] Those of you who have families. You have an opportunity to bring your single friends into your family. I had the incredible privilege of experiencing this.

For many, many years as a single. Starting from when I was 18. Brought into the families of the campus staff that disciplined me. But ongoing in churches.

Where I wasn't brought in for a task. Or for an event. They just said, hey, we're doing this on this day. Do you want to come join us? Hey, do you want to come hang out? And I played with the kids. And I helped clean up the garage.

And I, you know, helped move furniture. And I helped cook dinner sometimes. And, but I was brought in. And was a part of their family. And it's such a blessing.

And you don't have to be a spiritual wizard. Or a theologian of grand renown. To invite someone into your home. And to involve them in your lives. And it's a huge blessing. And I've seen it on the other end.

[54 : 34] Brandy and I were able to welcome. Singles into our family. And our lives. And you know what? It's really good. It's really good. Some of those, some of you have blessed my kids.

Because the continuity of relationship that you have with them. From that time is now an incredible help. To me. Because my kids know you and love you. And see you as a part of our family.

And that's a wonderful thing. That's a wonderful thing. So don't think that marriage you are deigning upon these singles.

To bestow your wonderful blessings on these needy people. Right? In fact, it is simply the fabric of a wonderful community. Where people love one another. And invite one another into their, into their lives.

And when we have this kind of community. And one that doesn't say, are you tired of being single yet? You know? Can I hook you up with someone? It's okay to have those conversations with those who want to.

[55 : 37] But it's not always helpful to bring it up all the time. In fact, it's really unhelpful. It's much helpful, again, to be treated like a whole person. And simply to be known deeply for the things that you care about.

So this is the charge. This is the call. You're not your own. You've been bought with a price. So glorify God.

Glorify God. Glorify God in your singleness. It is not your core identity. It is the context in which you are called to live out. You're calling to Him.

To follow Him. To take advantage of the opportunities and the blessings of singleness. To love others and to build His kingdom. This is how one who bought you with a price gives you purpose, identity, hope, and calling.

So church, let's be this kind of church. Sound good? Alright, let's pray. Lord, thank you for this word about singleness. We pray that we would see it this way and that we would value it and treasure it as you have described it here.

[56 : 52] I pray for the singles here that they would be encouraged this morning. Lord, in their various stages of life that they would know the love that you have for them.

And Lord, that they would know the love of our community for them. Lord, I pray for our community, for married people. Lord, that we would not think too highly of marriage, but that we would rightly treasure it.

And in doing so that we would also love not only our married friends, but our single friends as well. Lord, we pray you do all this for your glory.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, friends, we are going to celebrate the Lord's Supper this morning.

This is a table of fellowship for those who have been bought by with a price. What we celebrate here is the sacrifice of Jesus and his life to rest.