

# Singleness and Marriage

## INTRODUCTION

### THE GIFT OF SINGLENES

#### 1. What is the "gift" of singleness?

"For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb, there are eunuchs who were made by men, and there are eunuchs who have **made themselves that way** because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who is able to accept it should accept it" (Matt. 19:12).

"I wish that all people were as I am. But each has his own **gift from God**, one person has this gift, another has that. 8 I say to the unmarried and to widows: It is good for them if they remain as I am. 9 But if they do not have self-control, they should marry, since it is better to marry than to burn with desire" (1 Cor. 7:7–9).

"I am saying this for your own benefit, not to put a restraint on you, but to promote what is proper and so that you may be **devoted to the Lord without distraction**" (1 Cor. 7:35).

*The gift of singleness is an unusual, Spirit-given contentment with being unmarried, such that a person is freely led to choose the state of being single for the sake of undivided devotion to Christ and ministry.*

#### 2. Why would anyone choose singleness?

- a. Opportunity to devote greater and more undistracted attention to ministry (1 Cor. 7:35).
- b. Opportunity to display certain truths more brightly (Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 106).

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### 3. How is the “gift” of singleness often misunderstood?

- a. Assume that anyone who is single has the “gift” of singleness.
- b. View singleness as inherently *superior* to marriage.

“Now the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will depart from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons, 2 through the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared. 3 They forbid marriage . . .” (1 Tim. 4:1–3).

- c. View singleness as *necessary* for pastoral ministry.

“Don’t we have the right to be accompanied by a believing wife like the other apostles, the Lord’s brothers, and Cephas?” (1 Cor. 9:5).

### 4. How do you know whether or not you should pursue a life of singleness?

“One way to know, then, whether or not a person may be called to singleness is to see whether or not they can exercise self-control and remain sexually pure (1 Cor 7:9) [also 7:37]. Beyond this, there is no substitute for following God’s personal step-by-step leading through the Holy Spirit; and one’s understanding of one’s own calling will of necessity be provisional, since it is impossible to know what God might have in store for someone in the future” (Köstenberger, *God, Marriage, & Family*, 389 n. 21).

“Not only is celibacy a divine gift, it is also a divine calling that is both limited to a select few and freely chosen rather than foisted upon the individual by his or her circumstances or condition” (Köstenberger, *God, Marriage, & Family*, 178).

“While singleness is a positive condition in which Christians are free to remain if they are unmarried, especially if they are so gifted, it is wrong to expect someone to adopt a life of singleness against their will” (Köstenberger, *God, Marriage, & Family*, 178).

“Singleness should be recognized as a gift for the select few that holds significant advantages for ministry, but is neither intrinsically superior nor inferior to the institution of marriage (Köstenberger, *God, Marriage, & Family*, 182).

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### THE TRIAL OF SINGLENESS

1. **What God calls us to in every trial we face in our lives is to trust him in the midst of our suffering.**

“You rejoice in this, even though now for a short time, if necessary, you suffer grief in various trials 7 so that the proven character of your faith—more valuable than gold which, though perishable, is refined by fire—may result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:6–7).

“Consider it a great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing” (Jas. 1:2–4).

2. **Should also ask whether there is something you should be learning or growing in while in the face of this trial.**

- a. Spiritual maturity
- b. Social maturity
- c. Relational wisdom
- d. Unreasonable standards

3. **Pursue purity.**

“Don’t let anyone despise your youth, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12).

### SINGLES AND MARRIEDS TOGETHER IN THE FAMILY OF GOD

“Then Peter said, “Look, we have left what we had and followed you.” 29 So he said to them, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left a house, wife or brothers or sisters, parents or children because of the kingdom of God, 30 who will not receive many times more at this time, and eternal life in the age to come” (Luke 18:28–30).

“Don’t rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers, 2 older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters with all purity” (1 Tim. 5:1–2).

“How members of the church relate to each other as married and single will witness to the world that our lives are oriented on the supremacy of Christ and that our relationships are defined not just by nature, but by Christ” (Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 117).

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**Question:** What are some of the things we would want to see in the life of the church in terms of the way singles and families relate in the congregation?

**1. Not age/life-stage graded in our life together**

- Small groups
- Ministry service

**2. Families showing hospitality to singles. Singles showing hospitality to families.**

- Meals
- Holidays

**3. Remember there are a variety of single people:**

- Widows and widowers
- Divorced
- Those who are single by choice
- Those who want to be married

**4. Remember marriage is not the final destination for any of us.**

“Jesus told them, “The children of this age marry and are given in marriage. 35 But those who are counted worthy to take part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage” (Luke 20:34–35).

### SINGLENES FROM CREATION TO THE FINAL STATE<sup>2</sup>

	CREATION	OT	NT	FINAL STATE
SINGLENES	Non-existent	Uncommon and generally undesirable	Advantageous for kingdom ministry	Universal
MARRIAGE	The norm	The norm	The norm	No marriage

### PREPARATION FOR NEXT LESSON:

- Read “Can This Marriage Be Saved?” by Jim Elliff at [bulletininserts.org/can-this-marriage-be-saved](http://bulletininserts.org/can-this-marriage-be-saved)

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<sup>2</sup>Andreas Köstenberger, *God, Marriage, & Family* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 198.