

The Gift of Singleness

By Candi Finch

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

Be a reporter this week and interview three people of different ages. Ask each person, “What word do you think people would use to describe someone single and a teenager? someone single and twenty? someone single and thirty? someone single and forty?” Prepare to share the responses.

Assignment Two

Read 1 Corinthians 12:1–11. Who gives Christians spiritual gifts? Read Ephesians 4:7–16. What is the purpose of spiritual gifts (see especially v. 12)? Prepare to share your answers.

Assignment Three

Read 1 Timothy 5:3–5. Prepare to share your answer to the following question: Where should the widow “fix her hope” (i.e., what is her focus) according to verse 5?

Scripture to Memorize

. . . The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord.
1 Corinthians 7:32

Session Goal

Consistent with God’s Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will understand and be able to describe the way God views singleness.

Candi Finch is assistant professor of Theology in Women’s Studies at Southwestern Seminary. Candi’s greatest passion is to see teenagers and women come to know the Lord and become mature disciples of Christ. Several women invested in her life when she was a new believer in high school. The impact they had on her reminds her daily of the positive influence we can have on others for Christ. Candi has contributed to several books for women and youth, including *Women’s Evangelical Commentary on the New Testament and Old Testament*, *The Study Bible for Women*, *Impact: The Student Leadership Bible*, and *Critical Issues, Absolute Answers: Solutions for Students*.

It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

Your friend, Katie, is getting to know a new group of girls. When they ask her if she is dating anybody, she feels embarrassed to admit that not only is she not dating anyone, but she has never actually been on a date before. Most of the girls in the group have dated several guys. Katie thinks it will make her seem uncool if she admits she has never dated anyone. What advice would you give Katie? Do you think people feel it makes them look cool or more mature if they have dated?

Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now report on how the people interviewed think most people would describe a person who is single in his teens, twenties, thirties, and forties.

A Spiritual Gift Given to Some and a Season of Life for Everyone

Loser. Free. Lonely. Independent. Sad. Normal. Weird. Cool. People have different opinions about being single! What God says about singleness is important, especially since everyone will be single for some part of life. No one leaves the womb already married.

Read 1 Corinthians 7:1, 7 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 1. the matters about which you wrote. The book of 1 Corinthians is addressed to the believers in Corinth, a thriving Roman colony. Because of a flourishing trade business, this city had great ethnic, cultural and economic diversity. Paul wrote the letter to the young church to help clear up confusion about certain doctrines and answer specific questions about Christian practice the church sent to him. In chapter 7, Paul addressed specific questions about marriage, divorce and singleness. Verses 1–6 address marriage.

Verse 7. as I myself am. Paul pointed out that he was single. He made this clear in 1 Corinthians 7:8 and 9:5. **gift.** Paul referred to his singleness as a gift. He used the same Greek word he used in 1 Corinthians 12:4 and Romans 12:6 to describe a spiritual gift. **from God.** The source of the gift of singleness is God.

Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week can now share answers to the following questions: Who gives Christians spiritual gifts? What is the purpose of spiritual gifts?

Read Matthew 19:3–12 out loud.

Studying the Passage

In Matthew 19:1–12, Jesus responded to a question about divorce. The Pharisees were trying to get Him involved in a controversial debate about acceptable grounds for a couple to get divorced. After Jesus responded to the Pharisees' question, the disciples had a strong reaction.

Verse 10. better not to marry. The disciples reacted by saying that if what Jesus had just taught about marriage and divorce was true, then it was better not to marry at all! Jesus quickly

corrected their thought, because marriage was designed by God (see Genesis 2:24). Marriage is not something to be avoided. In fact, God designed marriage to show His people what kind of relationship He wants to have with them (see Ephesians 5:22–33).

Verse 11. it is given. This phrase in the Greek is an expression that is repeated at the end of verse 12. This helps us understand what “it” is that “has been given.” The only people who can accept that it is better not to marry are those who have been given the grace to voluntarily abstain from marriage, if even for a short time, for the sake of the kingdom.

Verse 12. eunuchs. This word in Greek literally means “one in charge of a bed,” a reference to the practice of using eunuchs as keepers of harems (seen in Esther 2). The term also came to mean a male who had been castrated. **made . . . by men.** In some ancient pagan religions, castration was considered a way of pleasing and serving a pagan deity. Parents sometimes even had their infant sons castrated for that purpose. Castrated men do not have normal desires for a woman. **made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom.** Regarding this third category of eunuchs, Jesus was not telling His disciples that some people will physically castrate themselves for the kingdom. The word *eunuch* came to be associated with a person who voluntarily abstains from marriage. In this case, the reference is to a person who has been given the grace to be single for the specific purpose of advancing the kingdom of heaven.

On Your Own

In the space below, summarize in one sentence what 1 Corinthians 7:7 and Matthew 19:12 teach about singleness. When everyone is finished, the group can share their responses.

Discussion Question

Can you think of any people in the Bible who were single that God used to advance the kingdom? What about any people in church history?

The Focus of the Single Person

Read 1 Corinthians 7:32–35 out loud.

Studying the Passage

In these verses Paul addressed the focus of the single person.

Verse 32. unmarried. This term refers to a person who has never been married or to a widow.

Verse 34. interests . . . divided. Paul was not condemning married people, but was speaking practically. A married person cares for a spouse and family. This does not mean a married person is not devoted to the Lord, but part of that person’s service to the Lord involves caring for a family and considering their well-being.

Verse 35. undivided devotion. The single person has an opportunity to give a unique level of service to the kingdom and to those in need; a level of service that is unfettered and without distraction. The single person does not have the practical cares of a spouse or children.

Assignment Three Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week can now share an answer to the following question: Where should the widow fix her hope, according to 1 Timothy 5:5?

On Your Own

Whether a person is gifted to be single for a lifetime or only single for a season, the Bible teaches that the single person should have undistracted devotion to the Lord. In the space below, write what it means to have undistracted devotion to the Lord. Include ways you can you grow in your relationship with Jesus during this time.

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below, and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Give the group this update: “In our last session I made a commitment to. . . . I want to let you know how that turned out. On that same issue I think the Holy Spirit now is leading me to . . .”

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Disciples can agree on a way to hold one another accountable. Confessing faults with other disciples allows them to offer grace, insights, and encouragement. Even more important is confession to Christ, the source of true forgiveness and cleansing.

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Prayer

7 minutes

Every disciple will pray aloud, offering praise to Jesus, thanking Him specifically for His gracious acts, making heartfelt confession, committing to actions flowing from the Bible study, praying toward evangelism locally and globally, and interceding for others as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

At Home: Nail It Down

John MacArthur once remarked, “In his discussion of marriage and singleness, Paul has made it clear that neither state is spiritually better than the other. . . . Being married or single has nothing in itself to do with spirituality. A married person for whom it is the Lord’s will to be married is no more or less spiritual than a single person for whom it is the Lord’s will to be single. Spirituality is based on obedience to God. . . . Many books, magazine articles, conferences and programs today focus on the biblical standards for marriage and the family. . . . Much less attention, however, is given to what the Bible says about singleness. A great deal of literature and programs for singles is directed toward helping them ‘cope,’ and seems to reflect an underlying assumption that being single is not quite normal and is certainly not desirable.” (John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1984, page 178).

According to God, singleness is not a jail sentence to be endured but an opportunity to live for Him with unfettered devotion. *Everyone* will experience a time of singleness, so don’t waste your singleness pining for what you don’t have.

First Corinthians 7:32–35 says that your time of singleness allows you to focus on the Lord without distraction. Spend this season (for however long it lasts) deepening your relationship with Jesus. If you never get married, you will have spent your life pursuing God’s Son—what a blessing!

Paul, one of the greatest missionaries the world has ever known, was single. His contentment was found in Christ, not in possessions or relationships. Learning to cultivate a spirit of contentment while single will only help you if you do get married someday (see Philippians 4:11). Besides, each person’s ultimate satisfaction and joy were meant to be fulfilled in a relationship—a relationship with Christ.

Follow up Question

How does God view singleness?

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.