

Lake Cities Community Church
Pastor Craig Schill
November 21, 2010
Series: 1st Corinthians

“Advice to Single People.”
1 Cor 7:25-40

Last week I shared with you the sad story of Ann Lee – You may remember that from a young age she desired to be single, yet was forced to marry by her father. I wondered how different her life might have been had she been allowed to pursue the single life.

About 100 years later, in Scotland in 1848, a child by the name of Mary Slessor was born. And interestingly you can take nearly all the aspects of Ann Lee’s life, and cut and paste them to Mary Slessor. Mary was born into poverty and dysfunctional home. By age 14, like Ann, Mary was the primary financial provider for the family, working 10-12 hours as child labor in a textile factory. Also, they were both fiercely independent and had non-traditional views of women’s roles in society. BUT, while Ann was forced to marry Slessor lived single her entire life.

Out of a marriage she did not want, Ann experienced great tragedy and started a forgettable cult based on false teaching (The Shakers). Mary on the other hand became one of the most famous missionaries in church history. She is so honored for her pioneering work in Africa that in Scotland her picture still graces their 10 pound note. Any woman going into missions, especially single-women, are indebted to the doors she opened.

Regarding her singlehood, Mary said: “(I am) a witness to the perfect joy and satisfaction of a single life.” (*From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya*, p.162). Mary was not discontent in being single. She was not sorrowful, or regretful, but was satisfied and joyful, and would say, I believe, as the Apostle Paul did – “I wish that you could be even as I am.”

Turn with me to 1 Cor 7: 25-40. Our passage this morning is a continuation from our sermon last week. Recall with me that Paul is responding to questions raised by the church – in particular in regards to the topic of celibacy. We saw last week, that there was a faction teaching celibacy, abstinence – not only to single people, *but also to married couples*. We saw how this was bad theology, not shaped by Scripture, but by their culture and popular worldly wisdom of their day.

But with respect to single people, abstinence is God’s plan! So today Paul makes a strong case for the legitimacy and blessing of being single. We will identify, as we move through the text **five reasons** that Paul presents for embracing the single life. Then we will explore **reasons not** to be single, finish with a **theological balance** and talk about application.

Paul’s Five Arguments in Support of the Single Life

Let’s start back in verses 7-8, where Paul first introduces the topic: **1Cor. 7:7 Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that.** Notice how excited Paul is about this topic! As a single man, writing on the topic of singleness we see in our passage today his passion for the option of being single! Paul wishes (7a) that everyone might be single, as he is!

In other words, in terms of our first reason to consider singlehood, Paul presents his **personal testimony**. Paul wants others to experience the joy and singular focus on Christ that he has as a single man. Paul is like a celebrity spokesperson! James Dobson advocates for what? Healthy families. Steven Curtis Chapman has become the champion for what? Adoption. The Geico lizard champions what? Car insurance! Paul was the earliest champion of the single life.

And singles should be glad for this, for there have been precious few willing to uphold, passionately, the call to be single. Think about this - How many modern, intelligent, godly and inspirational protestant single people do you know today giving positive testimony to being single? Can you think of any? One is the professor I am working for at Dallas Seminary, Abe Kuruvilla. A godly, intelligent man with three doctorates, he is "Single by choice, for life." Another is John Stott, now in his late 80's. All of us evangelicals are indebted to him as one of the most influential Christians of our generation.

We need single heroes today more than ever. Maybe there is someone here even that God will call for that purpose? The number of single people in our culture is growing. From a CNN article dated August 19, 2010: 43% of all Americans over the age of 18 are single according to the U.S. Census Bureau. That is 96 million people! Of those adults who are single - 61% have never been married, 24% are divorced and 15% have been widowed. (DMN, 8-19-10).

How many of those have ever heard a **Christian testimony** for the single life? We need spokespeople like Paul to say - "Look at me and consider the calling of being single."

This leads to our second reason to affirm the high calling of singlehood which is that ultimately it is **a calling from God**. [1Cor. 7:7b](#) ... However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that am. John Stott put it this way, "The gift of singleness is more a vocation than an empowerment, although to be sure God is faithful in supporting those He calls." (Albert Hsu, *Singles at the Crossroads*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997. p.178.). God calls many to the vocation of marriage, and to some he gives the gift, the call, the vocation of being single.

Third being single is not just a godly calling, but **a good calling**. [1Cor. 7:8](#) But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I. Being single is not a call to suffer for Christ. It is not a martyr's call. It is not a "Count it all joy when you face hardships..." type call. it is a joyful call, good thing. It cause of rejoicing. A Dean of a Midwestern Christian College said, "the evangelical culture of our campus does a lot to prepare its students for the inevitability of marriage, but we do little to set them up for singleness. ("Choosing Celibacy, 9/12/08, Christianity Today.org).

How many of us parents have prayed for our children's future spouses? Most of us. That is great - but have you every prayed that God might grant one of your children the good gift of being single? Probably not because we don't believe it is a good thing. We need to hear Paul's word - if God's calls someone to be single - that is a good, perfect calling in life

Paul continues his argument for singlehood in verse 26-27: [1Cor. 7:26](#) I think then that this is good in view of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is. [1Cor. 7:27](#) Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a

wife? Do not seek a wife. Verse 31b: *for the form of this world is passing away*. The fourth reason to embrace a single life is because **Jesus is returning**. Therefore, “stay as you are.”

The reference to “the present distress” and the world passing away, although debated, likely are referring to the return of Jesus and the suffering that the Bible teaches is present between the first and second advents. Therefore... consider staying single! Consider not marrying. Paul’s point is that being single is beautifully expresses the theology of living in expectation of the return of Jesus – that He may return at any time.

Paul’s fifth reason to consider a single life is in verse 32: *1Cor. 7:32 But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; 1Cor. 7:33 but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife*. And certainly truer words were never spoken. Ingrid Trobisch said, “There is only one thing harder than living alone, and that is to live with another person.”

Hey marriage is good!! But it takes a lot of time and attention to make it successful. Those who are single enjoy **undivided focus** and are unencumbered with respect to the time it requires to have a healthy marriage. They are free to use that time serving Jesus and the Kingdom of God.

And this is an important point. If you want to focus your attention exclusively on the Church and the Kingdom of God – singlehood is a great option. Or to put it negatively: *Don’t get married only to later sacrifice your wife and children for the sake of ministry*. Let me give you one of (unfortunately) many examples. Josaline and Jonathan Goforth (what a great missionary name) were missionaries, but Jonathan probably should have stayed single. He

left his wife and eleven children in Canada to minister year after year in China. The wife and children were desperate to reunite their family. The wife wrote: "Suppose I were stricken with an incurable disease and had but a few months to live. If we cabled you to come, would you come home?" Would you come? Would I be a high enough priority? He responded, "Suppose our country were at war with another nation, and much depended on me as a commander... Would I be permitted to forsake my post in response to a call from my family?" He led thousands of people to Christ in China. He was a great missionary, but a lousy father and husband. I would suggest he would have been better off as a devoted single man. *(From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya.)*

Bad Reasons for Being Single – Rebellion against Marriage

Personal testimony, calling from God, which is a good calling, the return of Jesus and to keep an undivided focus on Jesus. These are five good reasons to choose or embrace or support the single life.

As I stated earlier, there is a growing number of singles in America, but often singles are not single for any of those reasons. The world's version of singleness is very different from what we have been talking about. Most singles in our culture do not embrace celibacy. They do not seek to be focused on the church or Christ's work. They are single in order to pursue sexual freedom, to indulge their desires or because they simply no longer believe in marriage.

The PEW Research Center, (Nov 18, 2010) reported that the number of people who are single because they believe marriage is obsolete has risen from 28% in 1978, to 39%

today. Census data released in September shows that the percentage of single people getting married has reached an all time low of 52% for adults 18, down from 72% in 1960. Today 54% of single adults over the ages of 18 report that they do not desire to be married. Think of the opportunity that exists for godly single to minister to single in the world who struggle with purpose in life, with purity and with marriage. Having a strong theology of singleness is vital for any church ministry today.

Staying Theologically Balanced

We have one more point to make before we conclude. Some of you are saying, “OK Craig we’ve looked at how great it is to be a single person. But what about singles who don’t like being single? Those who desperately want to be married? What about them?”

Let’s go back to Paul for his answers. Listen to Paul’s theological balance: [1Cor. 7:28](#) **But if you marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. [1Cor. 7:35](#) This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, let him do what he wishes, he does not sin; let her marry. [1Cor. 7:36](#)** (This is a difficult verse, and I think the NIV has probably gotten it right in talking to engaged couples) **If anyone thinks he is acting improperly toward the virgin he is engaged to, and if she is getting along in years and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. **They should get married. [1Cor. 7:38](#)** So then, he who marries the virgin does right, but he who does not marry her does even better. (again – Paul’s passion!) [1Cor. 7:39](#) A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.**

Paul is saying, "Listen – getting married is fine and staying single is fine. Being single and then getting married is fine! Whatever God calls you to is FINE!!!" BUT – BUT – and here is they key -- because most people get married, because the married people are in the majority - it is incumbent on the majority to remember, and to support the minority – those who are single.

In our church we have about 44 families / or individuals 34 are married and ten are singles (and in that group we have those who have never been married, those single through divorce and widowed men and women). So who is more likely to be overlooked? Who is more likely to feel marginalized? To feel out of place? The singles. We have had a number of single people come to our church and then leave – perhaps because they didn't feel embraced by the majority of married people among us. I believe that if our church is going to continue to grow, we must grow in our sensitivity and ministry to singles – single moms and dads, single young adults and to widows.

Many of you know that my mid-week e-mail updates go to an audience that includes many friends and supporters outside of LCCC. After this week's e-mail a former ministry friend, named Tom wrote me back, excited about our topic this morning. Listen to his e-mail. It sums up everything we have been talking about this morning. He said, "I'm 40 and so far God has called me to lifelong ministry as a single person. I definitely realize it's not God's calling for everyone. But I absolutely love the flexibility of being in ministry as a single person. People can stop feeling sorry for me and trying to convince me I'm supposed to get married. If that's God's plan in the future, fine. But if not, I'm perfectly content too. Life is too short to have anything other than a focus on eternity. From my perspective, the only downside to being single is when I have to put my car in the shop and I don't have

anyone to give me a ride. That's a bummer." Hey no one said it would be easy! ☺

Application

The high call of being single – we have seen through Paul and other's testimonies. Being single is a good calling, full of joy and contentment. It is a life well suited for the return of Christ and to serve Him with undivided attention. Now let's consider a few points of application.

Two applications for married people, and two for those who are single: First, 1) If you are married – I want you and I to affirm the goodness of the single life. It is not a 2nd choice. It is not something to feel sorry for. It is not a problem to fix. We must believe that when God calls a person to be single – it is good and a cause for rejoicing. And it would also not be a bad thing to remember that the most famous single person of all time was our Lord Jesus Christ. Single and celibate his entire life, undivided devotion to His father and to the Kingdom.

2) For those of us married - consider one way that we can tangibly help someone who is single. Maybe, like my friend Tom joked, you know a single person who needs a ride to the shop to drop off their car, or to help shuttle a child to a music lesson. Single people face challenges that married people don't. Especially for our single moms and dads - Perhaps you can watch a single parent's child, or befriend their teenager. Invite a single out to lunch today and ask them what it is like as a single. See to be a blessing to them and they help they need.

Let me now say a word to our single parents. I know it is hard for you, and I want LCCC to be a place that embraces single parents. We may not have a formal singles ministry, but we do have ministry to singles – through our Community Life Groups, our women and men’s ministry. There is a place for you here. We love you and want to minister to you.

3) **N to those who are single** – and children are included here - consider whether God might be calling you to stay single your whole life for the sake of the gospel. Paul said to us today, “Stay as you are. Don’t be so quick to marry.” Are you called to be single? Maybe you are. Pray about it and commit it to the Lord.

4) **Finally, to singles** – Whether God calls you to be single your entire life, or just for a season. Stay undivided in your devotion to Christ. Don’t be distracted by leisure and hobbies. Devote yourself to the service of your family and then to the Lord. Don’t waste your life in trivial pursuits but spend your life for the gospel.

I will close with this rather profound short story.

John Fetterman, rector of Grace Episcopal Church in Madison, Wisconsin, told of an elderly woman who died. Having never been married, she requested no male pallbearers. In her handwritten instructions for her memorial service, she wrote, “They wouldn’t take me out when I was alive; I don’t want them to take me out when I’m dead.” ☺ God calls some to be single. It is a good calling, that reflects the theology of Christ’s return and allows for a focused life, dedicated to the Lord. That is a positive theology of singleness that we support at Lake Cities. Let’s pray.