



Introduction:

It's tough being single during a series on the family. While you know there might be some indirect application to you in the sermons, there is a constant nagging feeling that it's really about someone else. It might be easy to check out. In fact, very rarely when talking about family do we ever consider that very common family unit, the single. And yet, we have plenty of singles. Some are single because even though they plan to marry, they either haven't found someone to ask, haven't found someone to accept their proposal, haven't been proposed to, or haven't been proposed to by someone whose proposal they are willing to accept. Some are single because they have simply decided the single life is better suited to them. Some are single by circumstance, either through the untimely death of their spouse or a divorce. Whatever the case, I want to begin by pointing out that singleness is neither a curse nor should it be a stigma. For those who are single and don't want to get married, I hope to help you and those around you be comforted that your choice is a perfectly legitimate one that doesn't need fixing (or fixing up). For those who are single and want to be married, I'm not going to insult you by trying to act like you have to feel that singleness is as great a blessing as you view marriage. I'm in a tough spot, I don't want to denigrate marriage in order to make you feel that singleness is just as good as marriage, but neither do I want to so talk up marriage as to make you feel like the gift of singleness is a consolation prize. However, as we start, I want to point you to **I Corinthians 7:7**. Paul says he wishes all could be single like him, but every one has their own gift from God. Paul is essentially saying singleness is a gift from God and being single victoriously is definitely a gift from God. We need to understand that neither singleness nor marriage is better, they are simply different. So, if you aren't married, how can you use this gift victoriously?

Discussion:

I. The victory for the single is not getting married.

- A. Despite what our culture pursues, especially the Christians in our culture, the great goal of singleness is not necessarily to end it through marriage. You weren't successful as a single simply because you finally found someone to take you in marriage. For all the positive statements about marriage in Scripture, I am not aware of any that demands marriage as the ultimate victory for you or as the only way to successfully serve God. In fact, in **I Corinthians 7:8**, Paul says it is good for the unmarried and widowed to remain single. (Yes, I understand that benefit is heightened because of special distressing circumstances, **I Corinthians 7:26**, but it still makes the point that marriage is neither required nor is it the only outcome of successful singleness.)
- B. Please note that there were victorious singles in the Bible. It seems to me that Daniel was single. He was certainly single when taken captive and there is no mention or any indication of ever getting married or having a family. Paul was single (**I Corinthians 7:8**). It appears to me from Paul's connection of Barnabas to himself in contrast to the other apostles in **I Corinthians 9:3-6** that Barnabas was single. Anna the prophetess of **Luke 2:36-38** was single. I can't prove it 100%, but it seems to me that Dorcas/Tabitha of **Acts 9:36-43** was single (no mention of a husband, and when resurrected Peter did not present her to any biological family but merely to the spiritual family). Again, I can't prove it certainly, but Lydia in **Acts 16:11-15** was likely single, probably widowed. She runs her own business. She has a household that were all converted, but no husband is mentioned. That seems odd since this narrative runs in the same vein as that of the Philippian jailer. The head of the household is converted along with the entire household. Then there is also the possibility of Mary the mother of John Mark, whose house Peter went to after his miraculous release from prison in **Acts 12:12**. It is possible that the house is stated as her house merely because her husband wasn't a Christian, but it seems more likely to me it is her house because her husband had died. And, of course, our Lord and Savior never married while He lived on earth (though as God, His bride is the church).
- C. With this in mind, I'd like to draw two conclusions.
 1. As a single, be aware that your singleness is not a failure or a stigma. It doesn't mean something is wrong with you. You don't need to be fixed. Let me say two things to the married about this.
 - a) Married people, don't stigmatize the single. Don't view them as second rate (this is of special application to the divorced). Make sure you are not doing this accidentally. When we view our single friends as those poor people who are missing out, we sometimes start to exclude them from our lives being afraid that the mere presence of happily married couples will make them feel bad. I conducted

a poll on Facebook to see how singles feel about this and the overwhelming majority want to be included. Of course, there were a few that said being around married couples was upsetting to them. Here is the conclusion I draw from this. Let the single decide whether they want to join you or not. Invite them and let them decide if they think you are an awkward couple to hang out with. Finally, on this point, I appreciated what one good friend of mine said. She pointed out what hurt the worst was never receiving the invitation to spend time with married friends until they happen to end up at the same restaurant together and then being invited to pull up a chair. She said that didn't feel like inclusion, it felt like being an afterthought.

b) Married folks, do not look at your single friends as incomplete, broken people who need you to fix them up. Some single folks have chosen to be single, and those who haven't don't necessarily want your help in this matter. Unless you are asked for help in finding a date or a mate for someone, you need to quit asking them when they are going to get married, quit suggesting people they should pursue, and quit trying to "fix them up" with someone. This language alone often portrays the tacit idea that something about them is broken. And please understand that just because a person is single longer than you would expect does not necessarily mean they are struggling with same gender attraction issues. At the same time, if you find out they are, it still doesn't mean they are broken. It means they are human and face temptations like the rest of us. Don't treat them as if they are carrying a contagious disease. Rather recognize and honor them as a great example of maintaining holiness despite great temptations.

2. As a single, your greatest pursuit should not be a spouse. Don't misunderstand, I'm not telling you not to pursue marriage. If you want to be married, then by all means pursue a spouse. I'm simply saying it should not be your greatest or number one pursuit.

II. The victory for the single is undistracted devotion to the Lord.

A. **I Corinthians 7:32-35** expresses the number one blessing of singleness. For all the blessings of marriage, the greatest negative is it distracts from single-minded devotion to the Lord. The married cannot simply think about what is pleasing to the Lord, they have to think also about how to please their spouse. It is not a sin for them to do that. It is right for them to do that. But it does hinder the use to which they can be put by God.

B. Think about this. When someone puts out an e-mail asking to pick up someone at the airport, help someone move, go on a mission trip to Nicaragua, contribute to someone's financial need, be part of a Bible study or whatever the case may be, you, as a single, are far more free to help in any of these situations than your married counterparts. You don't have to check in with a spouse. You don't have to consider how it will impact your spouse. You don't have to worry if it will separate you from your spouse for some period of time. This, of course, does not mean the married can't be involved in any of these things. But the married can't just ask if it pleases the Lord, they also have to ask if it pleases their spouse.

C. The victory for the single is not getting to live in whatever free way you choose, but in being able to take the emotional, financial, and spiritual independence you have and focus it on your relationship with the Lord. I certainly don't mean that singles can't have any hobbies or pursuits in addition to the Lord. But the single life is victorious by focusing your devotion to the Lord.

D. To those who are single and want to stay that way, understand that the victory and blessing of singleness is not found in the freedom to pursue all of your business goals, your educational goals, your travel goals, your recreational goals. I'm not saying you can't have any of that. But the victory comes from devoting yourself to the Lord and doing what pleases Him. That is, of course, the example set by the ultimate model of singleness, Jesus Christ (**John 8:29**).

E. To those who are single and don't want to stay that way, I want to encourage you not to pursue the escapes from your discouragement and displeasure that so many in our world pursue. I understand that being in that state is emotionally hard. Instead of trying to escape those negative emotions through worldly distractions, may I encourage you to focus on being filled by your relationship with God. No, I don't want you simply to make God your escape mechanism. However, I want to encourage you to let devotion to God be your mainstay. Let it be your anchor. Trust me on this one. There is no person out there that can be the resolution to all your emotional struggles anyway. I know you may feel lonely. But I want to assure you that marriage is not the fix for loneliness. There are a lot of lonely married people out there. Just as you want married people to know that the freedom of singleness is not all that we sometimes romantically remember it being, I hope you will understand that the marriage relationship is not the fix for all emotional struggles and loneliness that you romantically think it is. There is only one who can resolve those issues and that is God. God can be your rock and your refuge in ways that no one else can (**Psalms 18:1-2**).

III. Some conclusions about living the victorious single life.

- A. *Use your single time to find your place in God's kingdom and in society:* Maybe you plan on marrying some day. Maybe you are even pursuing it. But remember that as a single, you are uniquely placed to have undistracted devotion to the Lord. Use this time to seek the kingdom of the Lord and His righteousness (**Matthew 6:33**). Use this time to figure out your gifts and abilities (**Romans 12:6-8**). Use this time to figure out how you can best serve God in His kingdom. But this is not just about your spiritual role in the kingdom, but how you are going to interact with society. We are in God's kingdom, but we don't go out of the world to be part of it. Do you want to be a teacher, a craftsman, a doctor, a machinist, a lawyer, a carpenter, a filmmaker, a policeman, a governor, a nurse, a salesperson? Do you want to work in a restaurant or own the restaurant? Do you want to travel the world or settle in somewhere? Do you want to work with numbers or do you want to work with people? Take your single time to figure these things out and how they will work together with your role in God's kingdom.
- B. *Focus more on being the right person than on finding the right person:* Whether your plan is to get married, get remarried, or be single your whole life, your unique position affords you the opportunity to focus on personal growth, especially personal spiritual growth. By "being the right person," I don't mean being the right husband or wife, I simply mean focus on being the kind of servant God wants you to be. After all, our model single person is Jesus who came to serve, not to be served (**Matthew 20:28**).
- C. *Recognize the supremacy of spiritual relationships:* As hard as it is for married people to grasp, the relationships that will last into eternity are not the civil relationships, but the spiritual. When we walk in the light, we have fellowship with others who are also walking in the light (**I John 1:7**). Those relationships forge bonds that will last into eternity. And while the marriage relationship can be great and the parent/child relationship that often comes from it also, the deeper, more lasting, more eternally significant relationships are the ones forged by the blood of Christ. As shocking as it is, while marriage is for life, it was never intended to be eternally permanent. In **Matthew 22:23-33**, Jesus explains to the Sadducees that we will not be married in eternity. As foreign as that is to us, we need to grasp it. Further, consider Jesus Himself in **Matthew 12:46-50**. When someone told Him his mother and brothers were looking for Him, His response was His real family were those who did the will of His Father in heaven.
- D. *Don't pursue the pleasures of marriage without the benefit of marriage:* One of the reasons there are more people classified as singles today is not necessarily because there are more unattached people, but because there are more people who are deciding to live together instead of getting married. While **I Corinthians 7** demonstrates both the blessings and gifts of marriage and singleness, it is also very clear that it does not please the Lord to burn in your passion. You simply cannot be a victorious single if you are having sex with someone. If you have already crossed that line, I urge you to please seek out the help and counsel of your shepherds. Yes, I know it will be embarrassing. I know it will be painful. But I also know these men would rather walk with you through the embarrassment and the pain, helping you overcome and get back to being a victorious single than watch you turned away on the day of judgment. By the way, this includes pornography and all that goes with it. You cannot be a victorious single by fantasizing about the pleasures of marriage in lustful ways (cf. **Matthew 5:27-30**).
- E. *Don't be self-satisfied:* For those who don't want to be married, you run the danger of being too wrapped up in self. This is especially true if you went through a period of longing for marriage and overcame it by convincing yourself that you just don't need anyone else. You don't necessarily need a spouse. But you do need others. For starters, you need God. **Ephesians 2:12** demonstrates that without God, you have no hope. Further, you need friends. **Ecclesiastes 4:9-12** shows that we are easy prey when we are self-satisfied and think we are self-sufficient. **Hebrews 10:24-25** demonstrates that we need the provocation and encouragement that comes from others. You can be victorious as a single, but you can't be victorious by yourself.
- F. *Find your contentment in God, not others:* Don't be self-satisfied, but I hope you can learn contentment. Though **Hebrews 13:5-6** is talking about a different struggle with contentment, I'd like to draw a parallel with our topic. **Hebrews 13:5-6** is talking about a desire for material goods distracting from contentment, but a desire for a spouse could do the same thing. The Hebrew writer encourages us to be content with what we have. But, I hope you will notice that in the context of money, he is not saying that we should be content with the amount of money we have, but with the fact that we have God. In the same way, when we talk about contentment in your present relationship status, we are not talking about being content with the level of relationships you have with other people, we're talking about being content because you have God. If the rising divorce rate teaches you anything, let it teach you this. If you can't find contentment in God as a single, you won't find contentment in your spouse as a married.

Conclusion:

There is no stigma or shame in being single. In fact, I want to close by honoring our victorious single brothers and sisters. I want to honor you for the service you offer to the Lord and to us. I want to honor you for the gift God has given you. I want to thank you for the example of contentment in Christ that you show. I want to thank you for example of service to God and others that you show. I want to thank you for the example of undistracted devotion that you display. You are a blessing to this church and to the kingdom of Christ. Focus on your undistracted devotion to the Lord and lead us by example in serving God.