

Series: "Single. Married." (Part 7)  
"Pitfalls and Potential In Being Single"

How many of you have never been single? Granted, for some who are married, it may *seem* like you've always been married! But you haven't. Everyone has the experience of living as a single person.

Single people come in many forms! Any church trying to start a ministry to singles soon discovers this fact! Or maybe there are some of you who tried a group for single persons and found people there much different in age or life situation from you. There's a vast difference between a 19 year old college freshman, and a 75 year old widow or widower. The interests and needs of a single mom in her late 20's with 2 small kids are much different than those of a 50 year old who's never married. So, we can't lump all single people together and assume they're alike!

***What's it like to be single? What are some of the issues single people face?***

I asked single persons on the questionnaire that was given out, "What don't you like about being single?" and "What is most difficult for you about being single?" Several things came through loud and clear.

***The lack of companionship came through very strongly.*** "Miss having someone to go out with socially." "Not having someone to cuddle with while watching a movie or go on trips with." Not having "a person to share and do things" with, "having no one to share joys or worries or help make decisions", facing problems "and no one to talk it over with", "having someone to confide in, laugh with, help with decision making." Some mentioned having to be solely responsible for things: "being responsible for everything all the time," "having to depend only on me," "having a man do the little (or big) things like carrying groceries, cleaning snow off the car." "Have to get someone at times to drive me or pick me up."

***Closely tied to the lack of companionship was loneliness.*** Some used the word loneliness or lonely. "Lonely at times." "The loneliness that you feel at times. Especially at holiday time." "The loneliness and not having anyone to do things with." "Being alone – not having someone to talk to." Other comments suggested a sense of loneliness: "I miss the hugs." "Someone to love and hug and have human/adult conversation." "No one there to hold you when you go home after a bad day" Another commented: "I still miss him."

***One of the difficult things for some is feeling out of place among couples.*** One person wrote: "Always feel like a 5<sup>th</sup> wheel. This is a couples' world." Another: "I hate being single. I find that it is much harder being single after having been married and liking being married. I absolutely hate most holidays and especially Valentine's Day. You don't think about it when you are married or are in a relationship, but it is the pits when you are single and everyone else is getting flowers or know they have a

significant other. You know, this definitely is a couples world which makes it a lot harder too.”

*In some ways, it is a couples' world.* Often there is an insensitivity towards those without partners. For instance, I was in high school, or perhaps my first year of college. A friend of mine had a girlfriend, then got engaged. He was head over heels in love and bragging about his “find”. I didn’t have a girl friend at the time. His flaunting of his engagement really hurt me and cut deep.

Churches sometimes feed into this insensitivity toward single persons. I have seen worship services advertised as a “family service”, or churches talk about their “family night suppers”, or call one of their buildings a “family life center”. What does this say to those who are single and alone?

Once again, I want to thank those who took the time to share their thoughts on the questionnaires.

**One of the difficulties about being single is that sometimes pressure is put on the person to date or get married.** There can be kind of an underlying assumption that the “norm” is to be married. Single people are viewed as being in a holding pattern until they do what normal people do – get married! Maybe if you are single you’ve felt some of this!

A single lady gives this advice on how to stop people from bugging you about getting married. She says, “Old aunts used to come up to me at weddings, poke me in the ribs and cackle, ‘You’re next!’ They stopped after I started doing the same thing to them at funerals.”

Let me ask those of you who are unmarried: Are you ok being single? Are you at peace about being unmarried? Or do you see this as something you just “put up with” until you can find a partner? This mindset can keep us from allowing God to make this time of our life both beneficial and satisfying.

Let’s turn to the Scriptures now. The Bible doesn’t say a lot specifically about being single. The most extensive text is 1 Corinthians 7. The apostle Paul is writing to 1<sup>st</sup> century Christians in the church in Corinth, Greece. People in the church had written him, asking a number of questions about being married or unmarried. He is answering them. He says, “I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God, one has this gift, another has that” (1 Corinthians 7:7). The same verse in *The Message* version of the Bible reads, “Sometimes I wish everyone were single like me – a simpler life in many ways! But celibacy is not for everyone any more than marriage is. God gives the gift of the single life to some, the gift of the

married life to others.”

He wishes that all were single like himself! Now we must understand his words in the historical setting in which he spoke them. Paul and others in the church expected Christ to return at any moment. Why go through the hassles of getting married, and complicating your life, if the world would end in a few days or a few weeks?

The following verses relate to this belief of the imminence of Christ’s return: “Because of the present crisis, I think it is good for a man to remain as he is... what I mean, brothers and sisters, is that the time is short... for this world in its present form is passing away” (1 Corinthians 7:26, 29a, 31b).

But Paul does make some concessions and deals with reality: “Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried as I do. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion” (1 Corinthians 7:8-9). Paul says, if you can’t control your sexual urges, get married! I’ve heard people make fun of Paul for saying this! Not a very noble reason for getting married, they laugh - I just can’t control myself! But he’s being practical and considerate – again in light of the view that Jesus was coming back at any moment, and the world as we know it would end. I talked in the last message about how difficult it is to be sexually pure in our culture. Realistically, marriage can provide an honorable outlet for our sexual urges.

Paul goes on to suggest that we should try to be content in our present situation, whether we are single or married. “And don’t be wishing you were someplace else or with someone else. Where you are right now is God’s place for you. Live and obey and love and believe right there. God, not your marital status, defines your life. Don’t think I’m being harder on you than on the others. I give this same counsel in all the churches... the Master did not give explicit directions regarding virgins, but as one much experienced in the mercy of the Master and loyal to him all the way, you can trust my counsel. Because of the current pressures on us from all sides, I think it would probably be best to stay just as you are. Are you married? Stay married. Are you unmarried? Don’t get married” (1 Corinthians 7:17, 25-27 *The Message*). Remember, again, Paul’s advice is colored by the belief that the time was short, and Jesus would return at any moment.

A valid point in all of these Scriptures, I believe, is this: ***Try to be content in the state we are in.*** If we’re single, rather than focusing all the time on the longing to find someone - accept our status (at least for now) – and allow God to teach us and help us grow.

The Apostle Paul goes on to say there are advantages in not being married. “But there’s certainly no sin in getting married, whether you’re a virgin or not. All I am

saying is that when you marry, you take on additional stress in an already stressful time, and I want to spare you if possible...I want you to live as free of complications as possible. When you're unmarried, you're free to concentrate on simply pleasing the Master. Marriage involves you in all the nuts and bolts of domestic life and in wanting to please your spouse, leading to so many more demands on your attention. The time and energy that married people spend on caring for and nurturing each other, the unmarried can spend in becoming whole and holy instruments of God. I'm trying to be helpful and make it as easy as possible for you, not make things harder. All I want is for you to be able to develop a way of life in which you can spend plenty of time together with the Master without a lot of distractions" (1 Corinthians 7:28, 32-35).

Realistically, *there are* advantages to being single, especially if we desire is to serve the Lord. We may have more time to pray, or do ministry in the church and outside of church, without worrying about any obligations to a spouse, or leaving our husband or wife at home if we are going to a church meeting or some ministry in the community.

***If we are single, we can choose to focus on the positives and the advantages of not being married, and not just dwell on the negatives.*** On the questionnaires, people were asked, "What do you like most about being single?" The overwhelming response had to do with the freedom and flexibility that was theirs. "I can do what I want when I want to." "Independence." "No responsibility to others when I change my mind about doing something or not doing something (i.e. staying late at the office). "Freedom to come and go as I please on my schedule." "Being able to do what I want without clearing it with someone else." "I don't have to answer to anyone except to God." "Control over activities and schedule without basing it around someone else."

Of course, *single parents* (especially if they have younger children), don't have nearly that amount of freedom or flexibility.

The bottom line is: whether single or married, we can get into this "the grass is greener on the other side of the fence" mentality. Single people can insist, "I just wish I had a companion!" Those who are married can lament, "I just wish I had more time to myself and only had to be responsible for me!" There is something to be said for appreciating the positives about our situation in life, and seeing each day as a gift. "This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it" (Psalm 118:24).

One thing the Scriptures can teach us is that if we are single, we have a golden opportunity to devote ourselves in a more unencumbered way to the Lord!

Let me close with some thoughts about *entering into a new relationship following a divorce, or death of a spouse*. Some of you are divorced or widowed, but you have no desire whatsoever to date or be involved in a romantic relationship. Others see that as a possibility, or hope, for the future.

*How do we know when we're ready to start a new relationship?* Here are some suggestions from a writer named Gary Richmond. I think these represent good advice. There are questions to ask yourself. Even though Richmond aims these words at those who are *divorced*, most of his suggestions apply to those whose spouse has *died* also.

- 1. *Am I now living more in the present than in the past?*** Consider your thought life. Are you still rehashing the past, maybe thinking, "What if...? Or, are you focused on the present, and future, thinking "What will I do now?"
- 2. *Have my periods of depression become fewer and farther apart?*** Whether you are grieving the death of a mate or the death of a marriage, there will be sadness and depression. If depression still seems to cast a shadow over your outlook on life, you're probably not ready to move on.
- 3. *Have I overcome my tendency to look for nurturing or rescue?*** If you are still seeking a person to make it all better, this is a risky place to be. Not only are you not ready to move on – you need a different perspective. No one will ever "make it all better"! God should be the one you are trusting in for your future. Friends or lovers don't have it within their power to fix you.
- 4. *Have I learned to live alone and not be lonely?*** Can you comfortably live alone without expecting someone to fill the void? Are you content in your present life? We should never enter into a new relationship in a compulsive way, driven out of our neediness. Some men always seem to need a woman in their life; some women always seem to need a man. This is not healthy.
- 5. *Am I spiritually secure?*** You should have the inner feeling that God is caring for you and that in His time things will come together.
- 6. *When problems hit, do I have a problem-solving attitude?*** Explosive and uncontrolled emotions in the face of problems are a dead giveaway that you are still among the walking wounded. If you are healthy, you will pray, seek responsible counsel, and not overreact.
- 7. *Have I identified my weaknesses and am I willing to work on them?*** If divorced, can I take responsibility for *my part* in a failed marriage? Even if you

not divorced, but widowed, can I recognize negative things I may have brought to my marriage? Those who are unable to achieve this self-reflection and self-insight tend to repeat the same mistakes and negative patterns in a new relationship.

**8. *Am I thankful for the hard times?*** You should be able to look back at your painful circumstances and acknowledge that they brought growth and refinement.

**9. *Am I ready to contribute to a new relationship?*** The least healed are those most preoccupied with their own needs. Don't look for another needy, wounded person to bond to. If you do, you are on the road to heartbreak.

**10. *Do I consider myself complete with God, whether or not I ever remarry?*** Is God your happiness and your sufficiency?

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