
**"Single for the Glory of God"
(1 Corinthians 7:25-35)
Pastor Peter Yi
May 18th, 2008**

Introduction:

Starting today, we're going to be looking at a 3 week mini-series on relationships and family. Today is about being single for the glory of God. Next week is about being married for the glory of God. And then finally, two weeks from now will be about being parents for the glory of God. Married folks, you might already be thinking, I guess I can tune out today and single folks, you might be thinking, well I don't need to show up next week and the week after. Well I hope none of you are thinking that way. First of all because we believe that all Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. For married folks, we all know people, within this church and outside it who are single and it's good to know what Scripture begins to say for single people, if we are to give them godly advice. And obviously for singles, many of you will someday be married and will someday be parents, so I trust the messages that follow will be stored away in your hearts for use at a later date. And then another reason why it's good for the whole community to listen to sermons addressed toward specific life-stages is for the sake of unity and accountability. Now that we as a community know the truth, we can all help each other stay accountable, no matter which life stage we are in. So my hope is that all of you will take a mature and humble attitude to God and his word as we begin this mini preaching series.

Here are some general observations about people's perceptions about singles. Some are very broad and some quite specific to our Asian culture. Some are myth and some are true. I'll leave it to you to decide which is which.

1. Many singles consider the word 'single' as a dirty word. They don't want to be labeled by their marital status, so we need catchy names like 'emerge'.
2. Singles are often perceived to be less responsible. They're immature. Maybe because they're still living with mom and dad and mom's still doing all their cooking and folding their underwear. And so there's this perception that singles are less mature and less responsible. Now, again, I'll let you all decide whether or not these things are true.
3. Singles are staying single longer. Either by choice because they have so much to do in life and being married would be a hindrance to their life dreams. Others not by choice. For whatever reason, though they would like to be married, they have yet to do so.
4. Singles are regarded in society as second-class citizens, especially in Asian culture. I'll give you an example. This past week, I wanted to test if my hypothesis was true. So in a very scientific manner, I browsed through the Korean ministry's member directory. And what I was looking for as I browsed the directory were photos of single people. You know what I discovered? The only single people photos were of senior citizen, widows and widowers. I didn't see any 30 year old single male or female pictures. What's the message there? You're still a kid. That's why we call them young adults as if to say they are not yet adults.
5. If you are single you are incomplete. You are complete when you get married, so at all costs, no matter what, you should be married. And our parents are on us about that day in and day

out.

6. Singles are lonely, so we've seen over the past decade the explosion of online dating sites like match.com, lavalife, eharmony. I bet many if not most of you know of someone or know of someone who knows someone that's met a person online through one of these sites or through chatting and perhaps even ended up married.
7. For a single your life is on hold and really doesn't begin until you're married. There's this perception out there that life begins when I'm married. Ask a married person, they may say the opposite. They'll say oh boy, that's when life ended, haha. But because of that perception, they don't get involved. True or not?
8. Singles are passionate about life and issues beyond themselves. Singles are looking for a cause or a purpose to make their lives count, to make their lives fulfilled and meaningful.
9. Singles are very transient. Singles are more willing to pick up and leave their home towns and move to another city or country. But because they're transient, the church can wrongly begin to think we shouldn't 'waste' too many resources on them because you never know when they'll pick up and leave. And for the record, that's ridiculous. The church should never, ever have that mentality. If anything there should be a sense of equipping and empowering, so that wherever the Lord should move a single, or for that matter a married person, he or she will leave the church and go to another city or country with a missional mindset.

So those are some very general thoughts I've read about and thought of regarding singles. Feel free to agree or disagree about any or all of them. Use them as a conversation starter later today and throughout this week. And I bet there are tons more generalizations we can make about singles. But with all of these ideas floating around out there, I find that the need is great for singles, especially Christian singles, to understand what scripture says about being single.

Now you're in luck because two of the most famous people in all of Scripture were single. The Son of God, Jesus was single and the greatest pioneer missionary and Christian theologian of all time, the Apostle Paul. Now, I'm not saying this flippantly. We really are fortunate to have two incredible people that show us first hand how we are to live the life of a single person. So I encourage you, when you read scripture to view their lives as an example and encouragement.

Here are some absolutely undeniable truths about being single.

1. You have absolutely no idea how long you'll be single.
2. Everyone is called to a life of singleness at some point in their lives.
3. You can be single or single again either because of divorce or the death of your spouse.
4. Singleness is a gift from God, as is marriage.
5. Singles must find deeper Christian fellowship and friendships in the church. Folks that are married have a great blessing in their spouse. They can share life's problems, victories, sorrow and joy. They can have very intimate fellowship at any time. Singles have to find that same kind of deep fellowship in the church. And equally true, singles **must** find that kind of intimate community in the church. Listen to what Jesus said in redefining Kingdom relationships.

Mat 12:

⁴⁶ *While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him.* ⁴⁷ *Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing*

*outside, wanting to speak to you."*⁴⁸ *He replied to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?"*⁴⁹ *Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers."*⁵⁰ *For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."*

6. Singles can be much more committed in their devotion to Christ. This is an absolutely undeniable truth. And I'd like to linger at this point for the remainder of today's message. First I know it's true because in this laboratory called church, I've seen it unfold before my own eyes. Some of you when you were single used all of your vacation time to go to Cancun, golf excursions? Nope. You went on mission trips. Now that you're married and have kids, you just can't do that as easily. Some of you when you were single were ministering in so many places inside and outside the church. You were acting as a deacon. You were a teacher in the church Sunday school. You were an active member of some committee. You came out to every social and function. And you had time left over. That's how my life was when I was single. I was a full time graduate student, I was a pastor in a local church. I was leading this Bible study. Preaching weekly, meeting with people. Socializing with friends, and doing some serious dating with Linda. But as a married person now, as a parent it is much more difficult. So for you married folks, don't feel guilty about it, don't get too down on yourselves, hoping to relive the so-called glory days. You have a new calling now.

The other reason I know that singles can be much more committed in their devotion to Christ is because of what it says in Scripture and that is far more reliable than my personal observations.

²⁵ Now about virgins: I have no command from the Lord, but I give a judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. ²⁶ Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for a man to remain as he is. ²⁷ Are you pledged to a woman? Do not seek to be released. Are you free from such a commitment? Do not look for a wife. ²⁸ But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this. ²⁹ What I mean, brothers and sisters, is that the time is short. From now on those who are married should live as if they were not; ³⁰ those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; ³¹ those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away. ³² I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs—how he can please the Lord. ³³ But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife—³⁴ and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband. ³⁵ I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.

Here the context of Paul's writing.

1. There was a false asceticism that was going around that was saying that anything of the flesh was evil and sinful. And since marriage fell into the category of this world, of the flesh, it was inherently evil. So the Corinthian Christians were really confused as this false teaching was making its way around.
2. There were single people in the church who were betrothed to be married very soon, but the climate of the times was that of uncertainty. It might have been some sort of persecution that had already surfaced or was in the near horizon. So in the light of this false teaching and the possibility of persecution, they were wondering if they should get married. And Paul gives them this advice. It's okay to get married and it's okay to remain single.

3. So Paul's in sort of a dilemma. And the gist of this passage is Paul affirming biblical marriage. He couldn't do otherwise, but at the same time, teach that for serving the Lord, it is better to be single.

Let me give you just a couple principles from this passage.

1. Marriage is not the end all of life. V32 says, For this world in its present form is passing away. What does that mean? It's a reiteration of what Jesus taught the Saducees. Jesus taught that marriage is an institution only for this life on earth. In heaven, there is no marriage. And so marriage is important, and we should be faithful in it, but it isn't everything.
2. marriage brings with it, its own set of issues. What's Paul saying? He's saying that for those of you who think marriage will solve all of your problems, do I have news for you. It presents its own set of problems. Or another way of looking at it, Paul is saying, "You think being single is hard, try holing up two sinners in close confines for the rest of their earthly lives."
3. Paul elaborates by speaking in two categories. One category deals with the Lord and the other category deals with the world. Listen again to a few verses.

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He says that singles have the great opportunity and freedom to have their laser guided lives beamed in on Jesus and only Jesus. They can give every single bit of their energy and resources to the Lord's work. How?

- 1) **Time.** Do you know what the life of a spouse or parent looks like? Do you realize how many hours in a given week is given to family? One recent study stated that a typical stay at home mom works 80-90 hours a week and should be getting a 6 figure salary based on the skills they use. That's cooking, cleaning, changing diapers, taking junior to soccer and hockey and piano and dance and kumon and everything else under the sun. That's why the church doesn't lean on moms to pull their weight. That's why we have things like New Moms bible study. Because their lives are that much more demanding. Singles generally have more time on their hands.
- 2) **Money.** Single people have more disposable income to do the Lord's work. Kids aren't cheap. All of those lessons and sports, clothes, kid's cell phones, food, bigger homes, bigger cars, gas, RRSP and RESPs. And families still have to tithe too. Singles have far fewer expenses and more disposable income. And so with the extra available time and the extra available money, God can do tremendous things through you. Maybe you can recalibrate your finances to reflect a life of serious devotion to Christ.
- 3) There's one more think though. And that's **risk.** For a married and family person, there is more at risk when you make important life decisions, such as a career change, moving to another part of town, let alone another city or country. You have to always be asking, how will these decisions affect my spouse and children. As a single person, it can still be quite complicated, but the risks don't involve as many people. If God calls you to live among the

urban poor in our city or to quit your private sector job and go non-profit, you don't have to think about how it might affect your spouse or children. Take a risk and step out in faith.

So here are three great resources you have as single folks: Time, Money, and Risk. Use them for the God, his church and his Kingdom.

Maybe you're thinking, what about the married folks, what about them? Are they off the hook? Oh...don't you worry...it'll take at least two sermons to address their issues.

So with that said, the Apostle Paul is asking single people for an undivided devotion to Jesus and his ministry. And I'm asking and encouraging all the singles of our church to jump on this season of opportunity. No one knows how long this incredible window of opportunity will last, so jump on it. There are practical things you can do. Serve in a ministry in the church. Serve in the community. Go on a mission trip. Make your life into a life that will count for eternity. Step out in faith and obedience to live the one life God has given you for his glory.

