

“THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY (#4): THE GIFT & JOY OF SINGLENES”

(1 Corinthians 7:8-9 & 32-35)

© 2024 Rev. Dr. Brian E. Germano

[Cornerstone U.M.C.; 9-29-24]

--I--

1. [Read CEB scripture text: 1 Corinthians 7:8-9 & 32-35 and Pray.]
2. Today we're concluding our worship series “*The Christian Family*” -- exploring biblical insights into creating and sustaining vibrant families that are sources of joy and renewal -- by talking about the gift and joy of singleness.
3. Now, as I mentioned to the *single* folks in last week's sermon on *marriage*, I want to ask our *married* folks not to "tune out" in this sermon on *singleness*.

A--After all, since our singles had to sit through a *marriage* sermon *last* week, I think we married folks can afford to sit through a sermon on singleness *today* (if nothing more than because its often the *married* folks who *most* need this sermon, because WE tend to be the most *insensitive* to the needs of singles!)

B--Not only that, but our entire human *culture* often seems geared towards the life and needs of *couples* (married or not) -- whether on TV, social media, out shopping, or even our churches -- our society seems obsessively focused on *couples*.

4. When we do so, though, we forget that *all of us* today either *are* or *have been* single at some point in our lives, and many who are married *now* may be single again in the *future*.

A--And regardless of whether we are currently married or single, we all at least *know* (and are *in ministry with*) people who are single.

B--So today, as we look at Singleness as an important part of a Christian family, I want us to begin by remembering that (unlike Marriage) Singleness can refer to a whole *host* of life-situations and circumstances:

1--Some are single because they've *consciously chosen* not to get married -- and there's nothing wrong with that.

2--Some *want* to be married, but the “right person” simply hasn't come along.

3--Some are single-again because they've been widowed (or are a widower), or are separated or divorced.

C--But whatever the reason, in my years of ministry, I've discovered that most Singles at one point or another have to struggle with at least **TWO MYTHS** about their identity that I want to spend a few moments dispelling.

--II--

5. The first myth is the belief that **Singleness Means Loneliness**.

A--I can't quite figure out from where the logic for this comes, because in my own pastoral counseling, I've observed that many of the *loneliest* people in the world are the *married* ones!

B--Sure... Singles can be lonely, but so can Married folks -- just because a person walks Single in life *doesn't* mean that they walk *alone*, because scripture teaches that God will be our faithful partner who knows our needs & will walk with and take care of us.

1--Hosea Chapter 2 speaks of God's relationship with Israel, but it's also a metaphor reminding Singles of God's intent to take care of them -- Listen to Vss. 16,19-20:...

2--... "On that day, says the Lord, you will call me, 'My [spouse],!... And I will take you for my [spouse] forever; I will take you for my spouse in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will take you for my [spouse] in faithfulness; and you shall know [that I am] the Lord.'" <sup>1</sup>

C--So, if we don't have an *earthly* spouse, then according to these verses, God Himself will be our spouse who knows and will take care of our needs and desires -- meaning that Singleness does *not* equal loneliness any more than *marriage* does. <sup>2</sup>

6. The second myth that needs to be dispelled is that **Single People Can't Be Spiritually or Emotionally Whole**.

A--The ancient Greek philosopher Plato once mistakenly wrote, "An individual is only half a person who spends [their] life looking for [their] missing half." <sup>3</sup>

B--Today, there are a lot of people (including many Christians) who unfortunately believe and say the same thing -- but nothing could be further from the truth!

1--As I mentioned in my sermon last week, according to the Bible, while marriage can be ONE source in finding wholeness in life, the reality is that if we're looking to an earthly *PERSON* to provide wholeness and completeness (whether it's a spouse, a friend, a child, preacher, politician, or anyone else!) we're going to be sadly disappointed, because they'll eventually let us down!

2--Instead, according to scripture, the only true source of lasting wholeness and completeness in life comes from *God* through a relationship with Jesus Christ, *not* because we are married or in a relationship with another human.

3--The early church leader Augustine is famous for once praying "*Our souls are restless, O God, until they rest in thee!*"

C--What's more is that Verses 32-35 in today's scripture from 1 Corinthians 7 essentially say that Singles have a distinct *advantage* over married people in this regard, because they don't have all the concerns and issues that married people have which tend to take them away from a focus on their spiritual lives.

D--In other words, according to Paul, Singleness provides a *more blessed* and spiritual existence than being married -- for him, Single people can possibly experience a *MORE whole and complete life* than a married person can, because they are experiencing life with *God/Christ* as their spouse!

7. Yet, in addition to dispelling these two *myths*, let me also suggest **TWO IMPORTANT IMPLICATIONS** about the Gift and Joy of Singleness.

--III--

8. The first is for those who are currently Single. And that is...**Celebrate Your Singleness!**

A--Remember that, according to today's scripture, you have opportunities for connection and special intimacy with, & service for, God that married people simply don't have.

B--Know that you stand in good company, and that some of the most famous and Godly people in the Bible and throughout history were Single: Jesus; John the Baptist; the apostle Paul; for much of his life, the founder of Methodism John Wesley; Mother Teresa; and many others.

C--Contrary to what popular culture often tries to insist, Singleness is NOT a "curse", but (like marriage) it *can* be a source of great *blessing*, if we'll allow it to be so.

D--You see, God intended it to be (in the words of today's title) a GIFT and source of JOY for all who experience it!

9. The second implication is for those who are currently *married*. And that is...  
**Be Aware of & Sensitive to the Needs, Cares, & Concerns of Those Who Are Single.**

A--This refers both to our words *and* our behaviors.

1--We married folk aren't always aware of it, but we often alienate (& sometimes even *hurt*) our Single friends when ALL we talk about around them is our marriage or our spouse.

2--In general, church classes and groups are really bad about this -- we're often very *insensitive* about the presence of Singles during class discussion times, and we then wonder why Singles don't feel comfortable in our classes!

B--I've noticed this is especially true for those of us with friends who've been widowed.

1--Well-intentioned married people sometimes *inadvertently* ostracize their widowed friends *simply because* we feel uncomfortable and don't know how to relate to them anymore.

2--I learned this vividly from a woman named Betty Driver at my first church appointment in Carrollton, GA (Stripling Chapel UMC) -- after her husband Vachel died of prostate cancer, she confided to me her hurt about the fact that many of her couple friends no longer hung out with her or ever asked her out for dinner or activities because she was now single.

3--Yet, the loss of a spouse is *exactly* the time that widowed people *need* the support of long-time friends, whether those friends are still married or not.

4--So, if you're married, don't let *your* uncomfortableness about the singleness of your widowed friends keep you from inviting them out, or allowing them to talk about their loved one -- they need your presence and listening ear now more than ever!

C--Finally, God's Church need to do better about being sensitive to the needs of Singles. 4

1--In addition to programs and ministries geared towards & catering to the needs of *married* folks, we also need to offer programs and ministries which address the unique cares, concerns, and needs of our Singles.

2--For example, not only do we need ministry for people who've experienced the loss of a *spouse* (like the GriefShare support group we offer here each year), but what kind of ministry do we offer for people... experiencing divorce or separation? ...or who are single *by choice*? ...or who are *looking for a spouse*?

4--At the very least, we need to ask ourselves if our *existing* classes and groups are "Single-friendly"?

(a) You know, Singles don't always like being segregated from everyone else as if they have some disease!

(b) Instead, we should consciously and intentionally *include* them and their needs in our ministries and programs.

--IV--

10. The bottom line is that Singleness is intended by God to be a good gift, and a great source of joy and blessing!

A--It doesn't *have to mean* loneliness, and it doesn't mean that a person can't be spiritually or emotionally whole.

B--Instead, it's something for *singles* to CELEBRATE, and something for *married people* to honor and be SENSITIVE to.

C--For you see, scripture teaches us that (along with Marriage), Singleness is one of the important, vital relationships within "*The Christian Family*" -- ...

D--...It's one vital way that we can honor and glorify God in our lives today!

11. [PRAY]

12. [SUGGESTED CLOSING HYMN: UMH#419, I Am Thine O Lord]

### **ENDNOTES:**

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 54:5 & Isaiah 62:5 have the same message, as well: if we don't have an *earthly* spouse, then allow God HIMSELF to become our spouse.

<sup>2</sup> In other words, the key to avoiding loneliness in *any* life-situation (whether Single OR Married) is to learn to trust in *CHRIST* as our partner who'll meet our every need.

<sup>3</sup> Plato, cited from his work "*On Marriage*."

<sup>4</sup> Despite all the Biblical exhortations to the contrary, the Christian church through the centuries has often been the worst offender of all in overlooking or underestimating the needs and concerns of Single people.