

Singles & the Church

A facilitated discussion using the *WISDOM* process

Work the Issue



What's really at stake?

Investigate the
Scripture



What does God say?

Seek Counsel



What do wise people say?

Develop your
Response



What do I think?

Openly Discuss



What do we think?

Move to Action



What will I do?

WORK THE ISSUE

What is the exact nature of the problem?

Soundbite #1 - How to Serve 'the Singles'

"We are often The Singles: one monolithic block of unmarried people. But there are as many stages and seasons to single adult life as there are for married adults. A single woman in her 50s with a demanding career caring for elderly parents is not equivalent to a recent college grad who is still living at home. Both are unmarried, yes, but chances are, the older single woman and the parents of the college grad may have more in common."

Soundbite #2 - Threshold Christians

"Just as married adults are a sign, pointing to the marriage of Christ and the Church, single adults are also a sign. They point to the reality that believers are complete in Christ regardless of their situation, part of His family, and commissioned to bear spiritual heirs."

After reflecting on the soundbites, what are one or two words that come to your mind about the main questions (i.e. isolation, fulfillment, availability, stereotypes, confidence, sex, purpose, God's will) that need to be addressed?

What are one or two words to describe your feelings (i.e. lonely, hopeful, desirous, frustrated, misunderstood, pressured, insecure, fulfilled) about men and women and the state of being single?

INVESTIGATE THE SCRIPTURES

What does God say?

| | Jesus | Paul |
|--------------------|--|--|
| View on Marriage | <p>Matthew 19:2-6</p> <p><i>"and the two shall become one flesh"</i></p> | <p>Ephesians 5:25-27</p> <p><i>"Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church"</i></p> |
| View on Singleness | <p>Matthew 19:11-12</p> <p><i>"eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven"</i></p> | <p>1 Corinthians 7: 32-35</p> <p><i>"But the married man...his interests are divided...I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint on you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord"</i></p> |

Matthew 22:30

For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.

Paul's Outlook in 1 Corinthians

- *Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? (9:5)*
- *To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings. (9:22-23)*
- *But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you", nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor...(12:9-23a)*

SEEK COUNSEL

What do the experts say?

Does Singleness Require a Special Calling?

(adapted from the article "7 Myths about Singleness" by Sam Allberry)

The Gift of Singleness

Many Christians have taken "the gift of singleness" to mean some special capacity to cope with it. It's an unusual endowment that enables certain chosen people to survive as single. It's like a superpower.

But there are a number of problems with this way of thinking.

1. It is ultimately another way of denying the intrinsic goodness of singleness.

"Think about it: if singleness requires a special spiritual superpower just to survive it, it must be really terrible."

2. It encourages bitterness rather than the pursuit of godly contentment.

"For those who are [unhappily] single...this thinking can be a way of writing off the contentment others may have in being single."

3. It unwittingly permits disobedience.

"God's Word is never contradictory. Acceptance of one part of it never, ever involves denying another part of it."

4. It is hard to see why someone should not apply the same logic to marriage.

"The fact is, marriage is not easy. Thinking that singleness uniquely requires a special gift masks the extent to which marriage is also very challenging to sinners like us."

5. This way of thinking about gifts does not fit with Paul's teaching more generally.

"In his writings, Paul always uses the word 'gift' to mean an ability God gives to build others up. Paul is not speaking...of some kind of elusive, stress-free state."

DEVELOP YOUR RESPONSE

What do I think?

Which Scriptures impacted you the most?

Does singleness require a special calling? Why? Why not?

OPENLY DISCUSS

What do we think?

- What is the difference between a church family being “nosy busybodies” or “facilitating relationships”? Why do we find it so difficult to embrace single men and women in their current state of life and accompany them in their growing understanding and confidence of God’s plan regarding marriage, without pressuring them but encouraging them to develop a deeper life of trust in the Lord?
- What would it look like for singles to treat the church like the ultimate role model for what singleness ought to look like—broken and blemished, but becoming beautiful and worth protecting? Reflect on the goodness of singleness. If God has not given the equally good gift of marriage to someone, rather than treating someone’s singleness like a “meantime,” how do we affirm singleness as a good and timely gift?

MOVE TO ACTION

What will I do?

1. Single brother or sister, what is your plan for fulfilling responsibilities of your ongoing role in your family (with parents, brothers, sisters). How will you continue to prioritize family above work, ministry, and hobbies?

2. Regarding the possibility of marriage, where will River of Life create contexts for discovering and pursuing God's will related to the provision of a life partner, neither rushing people into marriage nor unnecessarily delaying, but encouraging their confidence in the Lord with the support of Christian community? Let's establish the guidelines that we will follow.

3. As a church what can we do to help singles to understand that will be known, loved, and developed for engagement in meaningful participation in the life of the church?

Articles and Resources Referenced:

- Serving Single: How the Church Can Best Serve Singles & How Singles Can Best Serve in the Church* - research.lifeway.com
- How to Serve the Singles* - desiringgod.org
- Single in the Church: How Church Practices Are Including or Excluding Single Adults* - missioalliance.org
- The Single Issue* - Albery Y. Hsu
- The Meaning of Marriage* - Timothy Keller
- True Spirituality: The Challenge of 1 Corinthians for the Twenty-First-Century Church* - Vaughan Roberts