

— A FRANK TALK —

*Making Room
at the Table*

*Bridging the Gap Between
Married and Single
Believers*

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Introduction

Most churches don't intend to marginalize single people. That's part of what makes the problem so hard to see. They organize events around families because families are common. They schedule activities around children because children require schedules. They build community around couples because couples are visible. And before long, normal church life quietly becomes a world where unmarried believers can attend for years and still feel like guests.

Single believers don't feel excluded because married people are fundamentally cruel. They feel that way because churches can drift into a lifestyle that assumes marriage is the center of belonging. If you're married, chances are you've never noticed. But if you're single, you probably have.

Unmarried saints often describe the same experience with similar words: unseen, uninvited, unconsidered. Serving faithfully, they can still feel peripheral. They might be mature in Christ but treated like they're not quite there yet. To them, church can feel less like their home and more like they're visiting someone else's.

Some endure quietly, smiling politely at insensitive comments about how they're still single. Others move from church to church, looking for a place where they fit. And sadly, some believe the lie that marriage is the only solution to their spiritual discomfort. That thought is dangerous, not because being married is bad but because it turns marriage into something it was never meant to be.

Why can singles feel sidelined? There are many reasons but a major one is that the church can affirm oneness doctrinally while practicing separation socially. And many are blind to it. We can proclaim a unified body of Christ on Sunday but still build a weekly life where singles are functionally invisible.

We began this project as a two-episode podcast series on singleness in the modern church. It was well received, and some encouraged us to expand and assemble these thoughts in written form, hence this book. As we began, we had two main goals:

- Present a biblical theology of singleness and marriage, one that honors both without idolizing either.
- Encourage the church toward genuine oneness, not a theoretical unity but a genuine, shared, vibrant family.

If you're single, don't expect this book to be a bag of tricks that will help you cope until marriage comes and life begins. We wish to remind you that, because you're in Christ, your life has already begun and can be richly fruitful right now. If you're married, don't presume we'll shame you for not including singles in your circle. Our aim is to help you see how the Holy Spirit might widen that circle and deepen your practice of oneness.

Our Target Audiences

This book is for single believers who love Christ but feel like they don't belong, who need the Holy Spirit to re-anchor their spiritual identity in truth. It's for married believers who want to honor Christ by building communities that look more like families than clubs. It's for pastors and leaders who want a church culture shaped by Scripture rather than by habit. And it's for anyone who desires a deeper understanding of singleness and the richness that unmarried saints bring to every local body.

Chapter 1

The Hidden Wounded

Modern churches are busy places, bustling with ministries for all ages. First-time visitors often leave with armloads of information about marriage weekends, couples Bible studies, youth groups, children's ministries, and the like. These activities, while focused and enriching, often have one thing in common. They consider family as the core of Christian community.

Churches celebrate marriage and family, and rightly so. It is a sacred covenant, a gift from God of unity, companionship, and lifelong commitment. And family is the joyful fruit of that union. Beginning in Genesis 1 and culminating with an eternity in heaven, our Father God has worked through marriage and family to weave a glorious tapestry of love, redemption, restoration, and favor. His promise to Abraham, that through his descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed (Genesis 22:18), is proof that marriage and family have always been key parts of God's plan.

But God's plan is bigger than marriage and family; it engages all His children. Despite the church's best efforts, there's a group that's often overlooked, one with lingering unmet needs. These are the singles, the unmarried saints in the body of Christ. Many of these believers carry a quiet ache that's not always visible, not always spoken, but deeply felt. For some, it feels like loneliness and for others, a bit more like anger. But for all, it's a subtle sense that, because they're single, they might be missing out on real life and meaningful ministry.

Many of these saints report feeling invisible at times in local assemblies, quiet and largely unseen. They might attend faithfully and worship sincerely, yet many lack a sense of real belonging. They can serve sacrificially, give generously, and be hungry for the Lord, yet still feel like

outsiders standing near the edge of the community. Over the years, many have said the same thing in different ways:

- “Everything here is built around marriage and kids.”
- “People are polite, but they don’t really include me.”
- “I either feel like I’m invisible or being evaluated to find out what’s wrong.”
- “When will they recognize that one is a whole number?”

In many ways, singles are the hidden wounded in the local church.

The Uncomfortable Truth

Somewhere along the way, without consciously intending to do so, the church began to consider marriage as the default lifestyle for a Christian. Singleness became a pre-marriage period, a time of waiting until you found the right partner and were finally complete. Many saw singleness as a problem to be solved rather than a gift to be treasured and richly enjoyed. Even today, the needs and interests of single people are often viewed as outside the church’s normal ministry sphere. Singles’ groups, if they exist, can function more like dating arenas than sincere efforts to encourage and support unmarried saints in their ministries.

A married woman once described her years as a single believer in a local church. Her words are sobering. She told how singles are often unseen, unappreciated, and marginalized. Married Christians sometimes don’t befriend them, convinced that fruitful fellowship occurs only with like-minded couples. Unmarried saints can be considered less mature, inexperienced, and undiscerning, their opinions carrying surprisingly little weight. They can be misunderstood when discussing dating frustrations and can feel resentful when well-meaning but naïve believers dismiss their concerns with a cavalier, “It will all be fine once you’re married”.

This woman’s story might be hard for married people to understand, but for many singles it rings painfully true. And the tragedy is that, when single believers feel this way, they often drift from church to church,

shopping for a place where they fit – where they can finally feel like they belong.

The Spiritual Cost

You might be tempted to dismiss this as an emotional issue confined to singles, something they must resolve on their own. But it's far more than that; it's a spiritual issue too, one that comes at a real cost. Here's what we mean.

When Paul wrote *Christ in you, the hope of glory* (Colossians 1:27), he used the plural form (y'all) to explain how God's glory is most fully experienced among groups of believers. The New Testament is filled with examples of saints experiencing and expressing Christ's life together. Rooted in the Lord's command to love one another, these early believers devoted themselves to worship and fellowship while they learned to forgive, encourage, and share another's burdens.

These rich aspects of life in Christian community can seem distant, even unreachable, when you don't fit in. Sadly, this describes many unmarried saints in the modern church. When Jesus promised the blessings of love, joy, peace, rest, and abundant life, i.e., the blessings of belonging, to all who believe in Him, He meant exactly what He said – *all*, whether married or single. But folks who believe they're alone, who feel marginalized and unappreciated, can leave many of these blessings on the table.

Seeing marriage as the ticket to belonging, unmarried saints often respond by ramping up their spouse-hunting efforts. But there can be negative consequences along this path, particularly if they shift from cultivating intimacy with God, the perfect Husband (Isaiah 54:5), to pursuing an earthly spouse who will be far from perfect. When marriage is the supreme goal, believers can wind up settling for a less-than-ideal partner, driven more by fear, loneliness, and the desire to belong than by wisdom and Spirit-empowered love.

These circumstances can come with spiritual costs for all concerned. Local churches, indeed, the body of Christ at large, can miss out on the gifts, the perspectives, and the unique personhood that unmarried saints offer. And those singles who pursue marriage at all costs risk joining with

someone who doesn't share their spiritual desires, who dampens their enthusiasm for ministry, or who undermines their efforts to develop a culture of Christian worship in the home. Pursuing what they think they need, they miss out on what's most important – an intimate walk with their Creator.

But we mustn't think these risks are unique to singles. Wives and husbands can struggle in much the same way when they prioritize their marital relationship above all else. Most certainly, loving, serving, and sacrificing are key to successful lives together. But married believers can become so preoccupied with efforts to please their spouse that they neglect their intimate walk with Father God. When that happens, they can fall victim to the very same ruse – pursuing what they believe is most important while turning from what truly is.

Whether single or married, giving anyone or anything higher priority than God is never a wise choice. Scripture has a name for such behavior – idolatry.

The Focus of this Book

Please hear us clearly; we're not against marriage. Both authors have been married for more than 40 years and are well acquainted with the challenges and benefits of being spouses. Further, we're not against singleness. In fact, we have deep love and respect for unmarried saints, particularly those who have played important roles in our spiritual maturity. We began this project as an attempt to restore theological clarity to a muddy area in the modern church. And in the process, we learned that the church has largely overlooked the important place of singleness.

Singleness is not a consolation prize in the Christian life. It's not a spiritual deficiency or a second-tier discipleship. It is a legitimate, fruitful, and blessed way to know Jesus Christ, walk with Him, and serve Him. So to singles, we offer these important truths: you're not unfinished or incomplete. You're not settling for plan B. You are unique expressions of the living God, fully equipped to bear much fruit for His kingdom. And that is enough.

The Scripture describes singleness as a gift. Jesus was single, as was Paul, John the baptizer, and many of those who followed our Lord during His time on earth. Of the twelve apostles, only Peter was married. And through the centuries, entire movements in the church were shaped by unmarried believers. If you're single, you're in good company.

Thank you for joining us in this journey as we learn together the unique role of singles, the key parts played by marrieds, and most importantly how they can be fruitful together in the body of Christ.

Chapter 2

The Beacon Verse

A single verse seems to serve as a spotlight, a beacon so to speak, when it comes to singleness and marriage. It's Genesis 2:18, which reads *Then the LORD God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.'*

It would be impossible to count how often well-meaning Christians have quoted this verse, frequently to the nearest unmarried person. Generally it comes across as a subtle stamp of disapproval on their singleness, as if they're saying, "You're not in a good place. You need a spouse. Even the Lord says so." And then there are saints whose comments can border on brutality. Often laced with tragic stories about lonely spinsters and on-the-shelf bachelors, their words carry a thinly veiled warning – don't let this happen to you.

Scripture in Context

Sometimes a verse can be such a bright beacon that it blinds us to what comes before and after it, and that's exactly what can happen here. So before we examine Genesis 2:18 more closely, let's consider it in a greater context, beginning with Genesis 2:15. There we read, *The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.*

Pay close attention to this verse. It shows Adam alone, doing his job to watch over and tend the garden. There's no hint he's struggling with these tasks or failing to complete them. No sign he's ineffective or needs help. Scripture doesn't show him as incomplete or useless, struggling or desperate for a spouse. Adam is solo, doing exactly what God entrusted to him. And he seems to be getting along just fine.

This verse alone ought to dispel the faulty assumption that singleness is inherently less fruitful or purposeful in God's kingdom. But if you need more evidence, jump ahead to Genesis 2:19-20, where we find Adam again busy with a task God gave him - naming the animals. And apparently, he did a great job with that too. In fact, God was so satisfied with Adam's work that *whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name*. Once again, Adam's single-handed service to the King earned two thumbs up.

We need to carefully consider the impact of these passages relative to singleness and marriage. Countless people, including the authors, have enjoyed lasting, fruitful, productive marriages. We know firsthand the unity of body, soul, and spirit that supernaturally enables two to be one. And we fully recognize that, without marriage and family, the human race could not continue.

But the bedrock truth of these verses from Genesis 2 is this. It can be perfectly fine for believers to be single. They can be fruitful and extremely productive in their Father's kingdom. Their lives can be rich, filled with satisfying, dynamic relationships. And they can fully experience the love, joy, peace, rest, and abundant life that Jesus promised those who love Him. All these can be theirs ... without being married.

There's one more thing we must consider: what these verses *do not* say. Genesis doesn't introduce us to an Adam who was lame and limited, incomplete without a wife. There is no indication that, despite being alone, he lacked dignity or value in his Creator's eyes. Just the opposite, he had been created in the image of God, so was very good. The Scripture suggests he enjoyed nothing less than intimate friendship with his Father, complete with the evening strolls we see in Genesis 3:8. Adam wasn't given unimportant tasks or busy work to keep him out of trouble until his wife arrived. And despite what many still believe, the Scripture doesn't show Adam as half a person waiting to be made whole.

Instead, we see a totally different Adam, a single person who richly enjoys life with his Father and fruitfully completes the ministries appointed to him. This is the picture of singleness that the Scripture presents. The modern church must recognize and appreciate that not every one of Father's children needs or even wants to be married. In fact, the more we continue to endorse marriage as the only proper path for

believers, the more we risk alienating single saints and undermining the fruitful lives Father has gifted them.

A New Task Requires the Right Partner

Adam was doing fine but another task was coming, the biggest so far, and some changes were needed before it could be accomplished. Recall from Genesis 1:28 that God would give the man and the woman a joint assignment: *Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it*. Adam had done a great job thus far, tending the garden and enjoying his Creator. But that task to fill and subdue the earth would definitely be out of his league.

So to ease him into what was next, God gave Adam another task, a simple job with deep significance. He was to name the animals God paraded by him, presumably in male and female pairs. Adam did great naming things, but this straightforward task uncovered a glaring omission. While all the animals had suitable partners, there wasn't a partner fit for Adam (Genesis 2:20). Of course, this would be a problem when it came to filling and subduing the earth because Adam couldn't possibly do that alone. He'd need some critical assistance.

God gave that assistance when He provided the right partner, the perfect provision for this new task. The Scripture introduces her as *a helper fit for him* (Genesis 2:18). Let's consider this phrase to learn more about what Father provided.

The Hebrew word translated helper is *ezer*, and while that's an adequate translation, the true meaning is much richer. *Ezer* appears 21 times in the Old Testament, and in 17 of those it describes the Lord. In those verses, *ezer* means a trusted protector, a reliable comforter, a committed ally who comes running when there's a need or a cry of distress. Completely in tune with us, the Lord, our perfect *ezer*, provides exactly what we need precisely when we need it.

When we think of *ezer*, words like faithful, steadfast, and champion come to mind. These traits fit well when one considers that mammoth task to fill and subdue the earth. Both man and woman would need each other, relying on their unique giftedness to multiply and to expand the garden so it filled the earth. God knew the limitations He built into Adam:

completely sufficient for some things but completely unable to populate and subdue the earth without an *ezer*. Woman was that *ezer*, and together they could accomplish things neither could do alone.

But unfortunately, many believers continue to embrace a different view of *ezer*. Focusing on the English translation rather than the original Hebrew, they define helper as an assistant, an auxiliary, or a subordinate, someone who is less than or inferior to. While these definitions might fly in some circles, they run headlong into a wall when you realize that God Himself is our helper, our *ezer*. We would never diminish our God by using terms like auxiliary or subordinate to describe Him. In the same way, using them to describe the woman minimizes her role and marginalizes her impact. And frankly, it blinds us to the beauty and glory of God's male and female children and to the incredible role He wanted them to play in His kingdom.

A New Task Requires the Right Fit

Let's circle back to that phrase in Genesis 2:18, *I will make him a helper fit for him*, this time considering the word fit. It's the Hebrew word *neged*, which carries the idea of one who corresponds. The woman matched perfectly, different but with a shared nature and equal worth. She wasn't hurriedly thrown together from one of Adam's extra ribs. Neither was she an aide whose sole job was to fetch the boss what he needed. God crafted her to perfection as a corresponding equal, a flawless partner ideally suited for the task He gave them to complete together – be fruitful and multiply and subdue the earth. This helper was so special that, when Adam saw her, he said, *This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh*. He had finally found the one fit for him.

What did this perfect fit look like? The first aspect, the physical union between husband and wife, is obvious. With time, together they produced multiple generations of descendants. Adam affirmed this when he named her Eve, *the mother of all living* (Genesis 3:20). But childbearing was by no means the only feature that made her a perfect fit.

Let's look again at that command in Genesis 1:28 to *fill the earth and subdue it*, focusing on the word subdue. This Hebrew word (*kabas*) occurs often in the Old Testament and means to take over, bring under control,

or dominate. While it can carry a sense of forceful conquest, the more likely thought here is one of responsible stewardship that brings order to chaos. The Scripture doesn't tell us about conditions outside the garden, but it's clear there was much work to be done. And that work required not only the man's strength and experiences but also the critical set of gifts, abilities, and perspectives that God instilled into the woman. Given the rich meaning of *ezer* coupled with the command to subdue the earth, one might rightfully see the woman as a warrior princess standing together with her warrior prince.

The Bottom Line from Genesis 1 & 2

From the very beginning, God designated both singleness and marriage to fill critical niches in His kingdom. Man alone, and then afterward man and woman together, received tasks that were distinctly different but perfectly tailored to the unique way they had been created. Father God had wired them differently, with traits and abilities that gracefully complemented each other. Equally blessed, equally loved, but delightfully different, they were the perfect representatives of their Father God in the world.

Considering the monumental task of filling and subduing the earth, it's hard to exaggerate the importance of marriage. Through it, multi-generational foundations of faith can be built, advancing His kingdom in countless ways through families and children. And the union of husband and wife is still the best picture we have of the union of our spirit with the Holy Spirit, of Christ in us, the hope of glory. It's safe to say that marriage can reveal the glory of God in ways no other lifestyle can.

However, we mustn't see marriage as superior to singleness, overshadowing its importance in the body. With their exceptional giftedness and perspectives, unmarried saints can contribute to His kingdom in ways married believers might find impossible. Free from the burdens of spouses and family, singles can devote themselves much more fully to kingdom work, often in circumstances where marriage and family simply won't fit.

But the blessings of having singles in our church go far beyond simply what they can contribute. Unmarried believers offer us a glimpse into

what heaven will be like for all believers. Here's what we mean.

As we've stated, the marital union is the best picture we have of our union with Christ.-When husband and wife-pursue intimacy with God as their top priority, their relationship with each other can overflow with love, acceptance, and mutual support. But as good as the picture of marriage can be, it's only temporary; its significance is confined to life on this earth. Jesus taught (Matthew 22:30) that, in the resurrection, we'll neither marry nor be given in marriage. All believers are betrothed to Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2). When we finally get home to heaven, the Lord Jesus will be our Husband. And our married life on earth - as good as it was - will pale in comparison to our eternal union with Him.

In much the same way, singleness in this life can picture that same eternal union with Christ. When unmarried saints make intimacy with God their top priority, their walk with Him can be vibrant, fruitful, and satisfying. While they're on this earth, single believers can enjoy the rich privilege of giving us an amazing glimpse into our future marriage to Jesus. And just like marriage, singleness too points us toward eternity and our beautiful fulfillment in Christ.

The New Testament, particularly Apostle Paul, has much to say about singleness in the body of Christ. Stay with us as we explore these truths in this next section.

Chapter 3

The Great Commission

When we turn to the New Testament, the role and importance of unmarried believers in the body of Christ become even clearer. We see an initial hint of this in Matthew 28:19-20, when our Lord gave His disciples what we now know as the great commission.

That first command in Genesis 1, to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, required a man and woman together, a married couple, to complete. No single person could do it alone. Put another way, marriage was prerequisite for satisfying God's command. But the great commission, part of the New Covenant, offered a new way to live, a path where both married and unmarried saints could be equally fruitful in Father's kingdom. Whereas the original commission involved subduing the earth, bringing physical order to natural chaos, this new commission involved filling the earth with disciples, bringing the Lord's order to spiritual chaos in the lives of unbelievers.

When it now comes to kingdom matters, the New Covenant provides a completely level playing field for both single and married believers. Both are equally empowered to spread the gospel. Both are invited to join Father as He builds His church. Both are uniquely gifted and encouraged to use those gifts for building up one another in Christ.

The Gift

Apostle Paul makes some important points related to marriage and singleness. In 1 Corinthians 7:7-8, we read *I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another ... single, as I am.* Did you catch that? Paul didn't consider singleness a punishment, an accident, or a liability. He called singleness a gift,

considered himself blessed to have it, and desired that others would be similarly gifted.

Let's take a moment to consider that word gift. It's *charisma*, which is derived from the Greek root *charis*, a word most believers will recognize immediately. It means grace, God's unmerited favor, kindness, and benevolent help. Put another way, Paul considered singleness a spiritual endowment, a divine gratuity, a special favor from the Lord. Not surprisingly, a few chapters later he used *charisma* to describe the gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:4). What an amazing revelation. Our Father used the same word for singleness that He used for the major league gifts like wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, discernment of spirits, tongues, and the like. In modern thinking, we usually don't include singleness on lists of spiritual gifts. Perhaps we should.

Paul placed great value on being single because it enabled him and his companions to endure the hardships, dangers, and extended time away from home that their missionary journeys required. Marriage and family, as valuable as they are, would be incompatible with this type of ministry. Being single was key to meeting these particular challenges while advancing the message of the New Covenant.

Knowing this should cause us to look differently at the unmarried saints in our local assemblies. Do we see them idling in neutral while waiting for a spouse? And is that how we pray for them? The examples of Paul and his companions, of the other apostles, and of those unmarried believers who walked with Jesus should motivate us to change how we view them. When Paul asked for prayer, things like boldness to share the gospel and open doors for ministry topped his list, all directly tied to his giftedness and service. This should be an example for us. Unmarried friends and loved ones might benefit much more from our support and encouragement in their unique ministries than from our prayers for a spouse.

Self-Control

In 1 Corinthians 7:8-9, Paul wrote *to the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with*

passion. This passage highlights a misunderstanding that demands correction. Being single doesn't mean a person lacks sexual desire. In fact, the apostle affirms just the opposite. He wrote that the desire for sexual union can be strong enough to overshadow the gift of singleness.

Regardless of our spiritual gifts, we need self-control to use them properly. The lack of self-control in Corinth was behind their misuse of gifts, leading to ill-treatment, factions, and disorder in their local body. And still today, misguided believers use their gifts more for their own benefit than for strengthening the church.

The same is true for the gift of singleness. Without self-control, itself a facet of spiritual fruit, unmarried believers will struggle to govern their normal sexual desires and channel them into efforts for the kingdom. Paul encourages such believers to marry, cautioning that it's better to take a spouse than be inflamed with sexual desire. This desire, he suggests, can be so strong and consuming that it can render God's precious gift of no effect.

Self-control is critical for married saints too, perhaps even more so because physical intimacy can be seen as so readily available. In marriages, lack of sexual self-control wounds both spouses and can allow bitterness and resentment to root. Marriage doesn't guarantee *carte blanche* access to physical intimacy. Rather, it presents constant opportunities to live sacrificially and to count your spouse as more significant than yourself or your desires (Philippians 2:3).

The way Paul addresses this issue is so very real. He doesn't cavalierly dismiss sexual desires as trivial or naively believe God takes them away in a package deal with singleness. And he doesn't say sexual self-control is a personality trait reserved for the non-romantic. On the contrary, he knows the desires are real and powerful, very likely from his own experience. And he cautions plainly that only the Holy Spirit can govern those desires. He promised the Galatians (5:16) they'd not gratify the desires of the flesh if they walked in the Spirit. That very same promise applies here. Only God can govern those desires in us, and only if we submit them to him and then willingly listen and obey.

What exactly does self-control look like in this arena? First, it's not a product of someone's valiant efforts to conquer their desires. Neither is it a steady diet of cold showers or rigorous gym sessions designed to help us

work off sexual energy. That's self-discipline, a poor substitute with no long-term reward.

On the contrary, self-control is something we can never achieve on our own. It's part of the Holy Spirit's fruit in our lives (Galatians 5:22-23). As such, it's fully available to us when we choose to live in habitual obedience and reliance on God. Paul calls this walking in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16) and describes self-control as an active, continuous yielding to the One Who alone can produce godly character. Paul told Titus (2:12) that only God's grace can train us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives, which are particularly important in this area.

What About Masturbation?

While full consideration is beyond the scope of this book, we need to clarify some important points. Masturbation is a sensitive subject for Christians, many of whom are confused about whether it's right or wrong. Some condemn it as a sexual sin, bundling it with lust, incest, adultery, and the like. But is this the proper way to consider it?

The Scripture describes many things people do as sins, but a quick check of these lists will show that masturbation isn't mentioned. It falls in a group of behaviors that are amoral, neither right nor wrong on its own. But it can be either right or wrong depending on circumstances. Here's what we mean.

Paul wrote (Philippians 4:5) we are to do all things in moderation. Eating and drinking are good, even necessary, but doing them to excess leads to gluttony and drunkenness. These amoral acts become sins when we allow them to develop into something we can't live without. They can occupy supreme places in our minds, controlling and driving us away from Jesus Christ as our life. They are poor substitutes for Him and, left unchecked, they can consume us.

The same is true with masturbation. While not inherently sinful, it becomes sinful when lustful thoughts are involved, when it becomes obsessive, or when it has mastery over us. Further, it's sinful when we allow it to interfere with sexual obligations in marriage. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 7 are clear; your body belongs to your spouse. Masturbation

to consciously replace or avoid the sexual union is not only sinful, but also deeply wounding.

Can masturbation be sinless? We believe it can when God is in the equation. With pure thoughts, we can thank God for creating us as sexual creatures and enjoy what He has given us. It's perfectly okay to appreciate the sexual parts of our bodies, how well they work, and how pleasurable they are. After all, sexuality was His idea and He wired us to take pleasure in it.

By setting their minds on what is good and lovely, single believers can receive and fully enjoy their sexuality without feelings of guilt and condemnation. And that's a big deal. It also means that, when married people are apart or unable to consummate for some reason, masturbation can serve as a pure, holy, and temporary alternative.

For a more thorough discussion of this topic, we direct you to the book, "Masturbation. What Does God Really Think" (ISBN 978-1523730193), available from OurResoluteHope.com and Amazon.com.

Available, Not Asexual

Married people can enjoy lives devoted to Christ, finding ways to worship sincerely and serve sacrificially. But marriage comes with its own set of obligations that can cut into ministry efforts. This doesn't mean it's somehow less desirable or less fruitful than singleness. It's just that these obligations are real and tend to expand as families and responsibilities grow.

Paul called these divided interests. He wrote in 1 Corinthians 7:32-34, *The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband.*

Notice he didn't insult marriage or say it was less holy or worshipful in God's eyes. Neither did he criticize or condemn husbands or wives for caring about their spouses or the things of the world. He simply described reality. Marriages require attention and intentionality, because they don't thrive passively. Spouses must invest time, energy, and focus to care for

each other. And when children come, responsibilities increase greatly. The apostle's point is not that married people love God less or are less devoted to Him. He simply acknowledges that marriage narrows a believer's sphere of attention. Kingdom work for them can focus more on a smaller arena highlighted by spouses, children, households, and the like.

In contrast, singles can have a wider radius of ministry influence. They are often able to respond more quickly, travel more easily, and have greater availability when needs arise. They can pour themselves into people and ministry in ways married believers sometimes can't, at least not until much later in their lives when children are raised and the pressures begin to ease. But as is true for all of us, availability for ministry must balance with responsibilities of careers and other obligations.

Singleness, then, isn't about being less sexual, less human, or less real. It's about being more available — more open to the Lord's direction, more ready to respond, and more free from the obligations that come with marriage and family.

Marriage and singleness are simply different paths in the same kingdom for the same Lord. Both fruitful, both rewarding, both honoring to God.

Chapter 4

The Scripture holds both marriage and singleness in high regard, and it records many faithful and mighty acts done by married and single saints. Here are just a few examples.

Honor to Both

The epistle to the Hebrews extolls the absolute supremacy of Jesus Christy over every Old Covenant institution. The final chapter (Hebrews 13) contains a summary list of exhortations for Christian living, and it's there we find verse 4, *Let marriage be held in honor among all*. It's as if the author is asking us, 'In light of all these glorious truths about our Savior, how should we live?' And toward the top of that list is the reminder that, no matter the circumstances, we should always honor marriage.

Jesus honored marriage by defining it in Matthew 19:4-6 as a permanent union instituted by God, saying *what God has joined together, let not man separate*. And just a few verses later (v. 12), he honored singleness by reminding His disciples, *For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven*. This last group is of particular interest. Our Lord didn't treat their choice as dishonorable, one that relegated them to second fiddle or a consolation prize. He commended them for choosing sexual abstinence and remaining unmarried to spend more time spreading the Gospel.

The Scripture tells us about many unmarried saints who were heroes in the kingdom. The prophet Jeremiah did not marry (Jeremiah 16:4). Neither did Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, likely made eunuchs in Babylon (Daniel 1:3-9). God sustained these single guys through a den of lions and a fiery furnace. Quite impressive indeed! Both the prophet Elisha

and the prophetess Miriam have no record of being married. The Lord Jesus Christ was unmarried, as were nearly all of His disciples. The eunuch in Acts 8 was unmarried and, after his divine appointment with Philip, likely carried the Gospel back to Ethiopia, evangelizing an entire country. And of course there's Paul the Apostle, who wrote nearly half the books in the New Testament.

Complete

In light of all these truths, we need to stop considering singleness as a defect that needs correction or a weakness that demands repair. Unmarried saints don't need a spouse to complete them. They're already complete in Christ, the same as every other believer, married or single.

If there is one passage that demolishes the myth of 'a spouse completes you,' it's Colossians 2. There we read some amazing truths about those who've trusted Christ. All, whether married or single, share in His fullness and His completeness (vv. 9-10). All have been spiritually circumcised, buried, and resurrected (vv. 11-12). And all have been made alive together with Him (v. 13). Not one of these truths is minimized or put on hold until a saint gets married.

Colossians 2:9-10 demands a little more explanation. Those verses read, *for in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.* Imagine that. Jesus Christ is fully divine, embodying the total nature of God in bodily form. And through our union with Him, we are fulfilled, completed, made to abound. That's the meaning of *pleroo*, the Greek word that's translated filled. All believers, whether married or single, are filled. Complete. Whole. Not partial. Lacking nothing required for living a Godly life (1 Peter 1:3).

A believer's identity and fulfillment aren't found in another person, they're found in Christ alone. Believing someone is made complete by a spouse might seem romantic, like something on a sentimental Valentine's Day card. But that's not romance; it's a form of idolatry because it sets a spouse in the place only Christ can occupy. A spouse can complement you and partner with you. A spouse can sharpen you, strengthen you, and expand your ministry. But a spouse cannot complete you. That role is reserved for the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

Bearing Fruit

There's lingering confusion among believers about the relative fruitfulness of singleness versus marriage. Married believers, caught up in the struggles and pressures of family life, can view their impact for the kingdom as limited. Daily routines seem more like drudgery than ministry, their time filled with the never-ending demand to love spouses and children sacrificially. And it can really feel like sacrifice when our desire to soar on eagles' wings in the kingdom gets hijacked by laundry, homework, and carpooling. If your married life looks like this, it's easy to see how you can view singleness as the true path to fruitfulness.

Surprisingly, single believers can feel quite the same. The desire to be married can be so overwhelmingly strong that it can throw a wet blanket over other parts of their lives. Their spiritual gifts can go unexpressed, their ministries incomplete, and the passions of their hearts muzzled, all collecting dust on a shelf until a spouse arrives. Feeling lonely and empty, they can gaze longingly at marriage and family, and the feeling of belonging it offers, and see it as the best path to fruitfulness.

Hopefully, you've realized the flaws in both groups' thoughts. The key to happiness isn't having what someone else has. God calls that covetousness, which never ends well. Our joy is full when we receive and rest in the gifts He has already given us. If married, you have that gift so bear fruit in your marriage. And if single, you have that gift so bear fruit in your singleness. Here's how that works.

Bearing fruit for the kingdom has its root in one thing only - abiding in Christ. Said differently, we must make our home in Him, get completely comfortable with Him. I like to picture it as putting on my slippers, sitting side by side with Jesus in matching recliners, enjoying the sunset, and discussing life together. By the way, there's no spouse in this picture, just my Lord and me.

Our Lord promised His children love, joy, peace, rest, and life in abundance. This means all of us, married or single, can enjoy Him richly and bear abundant fruit for the kingdom. While it's true these blessings are ours now, how well we bring those online in our lives depends on how fully we're abiding in Christ. That's why our Lord's instruction in John 15 to abide in Him isn't a suggestion; it's an imperative, a command. It's entirely

possible that we, whether married or single, can waste the time and talents our Father has given us and reach the end of our lives looking back sadly and saying, “If only...”. Unless we continually choose to make our home in Him, we will have difficulty bearing fruit, spouse or not.

Understanding what it means to make our home in Him will change our perspective about fruit for the kingdom. Many of us define fruitfulness using terms like magnitude, budgets, and measurable impact, but God views things differently. He told the Colossians (3:23-24), *Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.* Do you see the difference? Abiding is the only soil from which fruit grows. So whether you're single or married, changing diapers or travelling on an overseas mission trip, the formula for bearing fruit never changes. It begins with making our home in Him. Fruitfulness will follow in His time.

Beloved, the point is simple. God will be God to us in whichever circumstances we find ourselves – if we will tap into Him. Are you single? Great. Chat with Father about how to employ the gifts and desires He placed in your heart. And if you're married, that's great too. Invite Him to reveal new ways to love and serve Him through your circumstances. Because when you're abiding in Christ, it's all kingdom work, it's all fruitful, and it's all good.

Hanging in my kitchen is a slate plaque I received from my mother. It contains only four simple words but delivers a powerful daily reminder: bloom where you're planted.

Practical Applications

Through His written word, our Father God has revealed truths about the opportunities, responsibilities, and blessings that come with singleness and marriage. But these truths mustn't remain simply the fruit of an interesting theological study. Their greatest impact occurs when they're woven into the lives of all believers.

We've identified just a few simple changes that would help improve the dynamics between singles and married couples in your local church. We present them in no particular order.

- Get to know the singles in your body as people, Father's treasured children. Share meals together, invite them to your homes and occasions, and express interest in their lives and struggles.

A single woman told us about the emptiness she felt each week after Sunday services ended. Couples and families would gather in the parking lot, discussing plans for Sunday dinner but not asking her to join them. In her eyes, there was nothing quite so sobering as living this every week, walking to your car alone and eating by yourself at home. She saw herself as 'all dressed up with nowhere to go'. It became so depressing that she stopped attending Sunday service.

- Stop treating matchmaking as a church ministry. Introducing people can be fine, but constant pressure placed on singles, be it subtle or direct, communicates inferiority or deficiency. Not everyone wants to be married or set up with someone who's 'perfect' for them. The Spirit of God can lead relationships without the church behaving as if singleness is a crisis.
- Structure singles' ministries to encourage and support unmarried saints in their ministries instead acting as foyers to marriage.

- Not every activity needs to be designated for either marrieds or singles. Your church is a family and families do things together, regardless of age or marital status. That's how we learn to bear each other's burdens instead of othering each other.
- Don't exclude gifted single men from leadership simply because they are unmarried. Misusing the 'husband of one wife' requirement (1 Timothy 3) as a blanket disqualification would have removed Paul (who wrote the verse), Timothy, Titus, most of the apostles, and even Jesus Himself from ministry. 'Husband of one wife' is better translated as 'one-woman man,' which speaks more to character issues like devotion and commitment than to marital state.
- Leadership potential for both men and women should be based on spiritual maturity and Godly wisdom, not on cultural assumptions. Over the years, far too many gifted single women have been excluded simply because they have no spouse.
- Show respect for the avenues people use today to meet others. If singles are interested in marriage, options can be limited in local churches. Dating sites or other modern means may be effective tools, provided the goal is to form friendships and walk wisely in love instead of getting married at all costs. The danger isn't where or how you meet, it's turning marriage into an idol.
- Cultivate and encourage the attitude that singleness isn't a problem, it's a privilege. See it as an advantage granted by our Father—a gift with purpose, a unique and fruitful ministry with a key place in the kingdom.
- Clearly and repeatedly communicate this message to singles: you belong here fully, completely, exactly as you are. Not as a project or a future married person in training but as a complete, gifted, and welcome member of the body of Christ.
- Repeat that same message to married believers and couples, reminding them about the single saints in their church family.

- And this last one is important. Singles often lack touch for days or weeks on end. So, hug your single friends ... and mean it. Hugs go a long way to help them feel like they belong.