

The Purpose Of Being Single

Jonathan Rue

1 Corinthians 7

The Purpose of Everything Series

10.03.10

Tonight we continue in our series called 'The Purpose of Everything'

SLIDE:

The Purpose of Everything Series Graphic

And in this series we are looking at God's intention and purpose for why he designed things the way that He did. And we're spending the first half of this series looking at relationships, the way that God designed the various relationships that we have in life. Last week we talked about friendship, and next week we are going to talk about marriage. But this week I want to talk about something that all of us know something about. We all know what it's like to be *single*, because everyone is created *single*.

SLIDE:

Everyone is created single

Nobody comes out of the womb married. We're all born single. Now we have other types of relational connections: family relationships, and people that are caring for us. We might have brothers and sisters and mom and dad but in terms of a romantic relationship or a life long partner with somebody else, we do not have those attachments at birth. God created every single one of us single, and furthermore, we remain single for a quarter or a third of our lives, if not longer.

Being single isn't just something that's a blip on the radar screen, but it's something that takes up a huge portion of our lives. And so because God created us single, and because we spend such a huge portion of our lives being single, I think it's important we look into what purpose God has in creating us like this. He didn't have to—He could have structured the world in a different way, but he didn't. He made us single, and there is a reason and a purpose why you were single for the time that you were or there is a reason and purpose for why you currently are single.

So, as we approach these dangerous and emotionally charged waters, I've called tonight's talk the '*Purpose of Being Single*'. Let's pray.

SLIDE:

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Now, as we begin talking tonight about being single, I realize that this is a painful issue for many of you. Some of you are single and don't want to be, you long to be married but that hasn't happened yet. Some of you are single again after going through a painful divorce. And some of you might have no desire to be married and are perfectly fine with being single. But if you're single, then that's where God has you right now, and I want to talk tonight about why. What is the purpose behind singleness? So we're not going to talk about how to change your situation, but rather about what God wants to do in and through you while you are single.

Some people God calls to be single for a season, and some people are called to be single for life, but either way, *being single does not mean that you are a second-class citizen*. Singleness is not an inferior state of life, if that were true then the coming age when Christ returns and resurrects us to new life would be an *inferior age* because Jesus tells us that in the life to come, we will not be married. But we will be in relationship with one another and with God. So, singleness is not inferior, Jesus was single, the apostle Paul was single John the Baptist was single. There are many of the heroes of the faith in both the Old Testament and the New Testament that were life-long single people that never married.

That being said, there are right reasons to be single and wrong reasons to be single. I want to begin by talking about the wrong reasons to be single.

SLIDE:
The wrong reasons to be single

If you are single *because you are selfish*, that's a bad reason to be single. If it's just the fact that you don't like to share anything, you have to have everything your way, you want to spend all your money on yourself and you just can't imagine sharing your personal space with another person at home. That's not really a great reason for why you should remain single. One single woman that writes on the topic, named Paige Benton, says this:

SLIDE:
Singleness is never carte blanche for selfishness. A spouse is not a sufficient countermeasure for self. The gospel is the only antidote for egocentricity. Christ did not come simply to save us from our sins, he came to save us from our selves. And he most often rescues us from us through relationships, all kinds of relationships. –Paige Benton

And so relationship is one of the vehicles that God puts to death selfishness in us. It does not have to be a marital relationship. This can happen through friendships. But selfishness is not a great reason for you to remain single and isolated.

If you have a *raging fear of commitment*, that is not a great reason to remain single. Fear is never a great way to navigate through life or a good a way to make decisions. God desires that we would walk in freedom, to be able to discern His will for our lives without the knee-jerk reaction of fear being the primary driver for our decision making in life.

Bad personal hygiene is not a good reason to remain single. Guys, I'm talking to you now. If you ever want someone to sign on the dotted line and commit to spend their life with you, you have to smell good. You have to wear clothes that are fairly clean. Bad hygiene is not a great reason to be single.

So there are some wrong reasons to be single. God might have the gift of marriage for you, but your fear and selfishness is keeping you from receiving it.

But there are some really good reasons to be single. So what are the right reasons to be single?

SLIDE:
The right reasons to be single

To answer that question, I want to turn to the Apostle Paul for guidance, because he was a life long single man and proud of it! Paul wasn't throwing a pity party for himself because he never married. He wasn't envious of his buddies like Peter, who was married and took his wife along on ministry trips with him. Paul was single and proud to be single.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 7 he's writing to the Corinthian Church and he gives some explanation about the single life and what reasons we have to pursue it. And the first reason that Paul gives to be single in 1 Corinthians 7 is because God has given you a gift of singleness.

SLIDE:
Because God has given you a gift

That's how Paul understood his experience of being single. When he spoke to the Corinthians in chapter 7 about marriage and correcting some of their misunderstandings about marriage, he makes a statement in verse 7 about the good gift of singleness. He says this in 1 Corinthians chapter 7 verse 7.

SLIDE:
1 Corinthians 7:7 (TNIV)

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.

So what Paul is saying is that both singleness and marriage are gifts from God and some people have the gift of singleness and some people have the gift of marriage. But both states of life are gifts from God. They are good gifts from God.

Now Jesus said a very similar idea in Matthew chapter 19 starting in verse 11 when he said this:

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Matthew 19:11-12 (TNIV)

Jesus replied, “Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. 12 For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others have been made eunuchs; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.”

Now we don't use the word eunuch much today but what that meant 2,000 years ago is either somebody that was born impotent that they were not able to have children; or somebody that was castrated and actually made themselves physically not be able to have children; or metaphorically somebody that made a decision to commit themselves to God and to not ever marry or have sex with anybody else out of a vow to God.

So Jesus says some have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. This was pretty revolutionary because he's speaking into a culture where marriage was taken for granted, and it wasn't something that if you find the love of your life then you'll be married. It was a culture where your parents made decisions about who you were going to marry. And there was a business transaction part of it and it was thoroughly entrenched in the lives of everyone. Marriage was taken for granted and Jesus comes along and Paul comes along and says: *wait a minute—there are some people that have the gift of singleness that have been set aside by God in a special way for the purposes of the kingdom of God. And furthermore, this special purpose and unique call of God does not require a wedding, new “Corningware”, or spending weekends at Bed, Bath and Beyond with a price gun in your hand!*

Now this is an unpopular idea in Christian circles today. C.S. Lewis said that “Chastity is the most unpopular of Christian virtues.” And unfortunately, the church has written off singleness and taken a view very contrary to Jesus and contrary to Paul. We have elevated marriage which in itself is not a bad thing because the Bible teaches strongly on how wonderful a good gift that marriage is and we're going to talk about that next week. But, what's unfortunate is that in our elevation of marriage we have devalued the single life. We have seen

singleness as a lower role of life. And that is absolutely un-biblical. Jesus was a single man and was not deficient in any way in his humanity even though he did not have a wife or have any children or ever have sex.

Singleness is a gift from God and there is goodness in it. I want to share one more thought from Paige Benton, a single woman who says this:

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I am not single because I am too spiritually unstable to possibly deserve a husband, nor because I am too spiritually mature to possibly need one. I am single because God is so abundantly good to me, because this is his best for me. It is a cosmic impossibility that anything could be better for me right now than being single. The psalmists confirm that I should not want, I shall not want, because no good thing will God withhold from me.”
–Paige Benton

Now Paige is a woman who wants to be married, but who refuses to live her life in waiting or in whining. She self-identifies as a “single *Christian*”, and not as a “Christian single”, because the defining identity of her life is in Christ, not in being single. She is receiving her gift of singleness from God and using it for His glory.

There is much good in the single life. In a website called “Purposeful Singleness,” they surveyed people and asked them what their experience of being single was and this is what some people said:

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- “I am thankful for the time I have to spend with God. For depending on God as my help and refuge.”
- “I am thankful that I have learned much about depending on the Lord and the importance of finding my purpose in him.”
- “In this singleness season, I have grown in my walk with the Father and matured as a person.”
- “I am so thankful for being single. It has been almost two years since my divorce and God has drawn me close to him. I have never known love like God’s love.”
- “The gift of being single has been such a blessing. The opportunities of this present to minister to many overflows. Ministry opportunities often happen at a moment’s notice, and being single allows time to immediately focus on His work instead of our relationships.”

-Survey from Purposeful Singleness website (www.singleness.org)

These are people that are experiencing the goodness of God’s gift of singleness. That there is purpose in it that there is meaning in it, that it’s not just a deficiency of not having something. Being single allows a focused attention of our hearts

toward God. God gives of Himself in a special way to single people and has ways that he wants to use single people.

Now there are some that are given the gift of singleness for life. And others that are single for a season. You may very much want to be married and you are dating and are open to meeting somebody, and yet you are currently in a season of singleness. Don't miss out on what God has for you in this season. Don't wait for your life to begin once you become married. God has purpose for you right now. I have a friend who's a psychiatrist and a few years ago he told me something that has always stuck with me. He said this:

SLIDE:

"Most people wait their whole lives for the right season, only to miss the one their in." –Rob Johnson

If you are single right now God has you here in this season of singleness. Don't miss what he has for you now.

So one of the right reasons to be single is because God has given you a gift of singleness. And another reason is because God wants to grow you.

SLIDE:

Because God wants to grow you

A little later in 1 Corinthians chapter 7 Paul talks about singleness in this way. He says this in verse 25.

SLIDE:

1 Corinthians 7:25-31 (TNIV)

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.

So what Paul is describing is a state of submission to God and to where God has us. Remain where you are Paul says because of what he calls “the present crisis.” Paul is expecting the imminent return of Christ, and so he is radically re-orienting life in light of that. And he makes it clear that this is not a point of doctrinal necessity. He not commanding us to not ever change our marital status if we’re single. Rather, Paul is saying, “I’m offering this as a piece of counsel to you.” He says marriage is fine if you are pledged to be married go ahead and get married if you are not pledged to be married then learn to live where God has you now.

Now I want to make a point about Paul. Paul is single, and he’s giving advice as a single man. It’s good to note that, and this is not the only counsel that the scriptures give on singleness and marriage. Paul himself is a marriage advocate in other places, and speaks against those who would misunderstand and forbid people to marry. That’s not what he is doing here. But what’s going on is that Paul is teaching us to value what is coming in the next life as more important than what is in this life. That is called *spiritual growth*, and God want to grow you in this. Singleness is a great vehicle to in which to grow.

God wants to grow us into people that find peace and contentment and joy in Him, not in all the circumstances of life, singleness being one of many such circumstances. Paul himself had great opportunity to learn and practice this, as he went through many circumstances that did not lend themselves to joy or contentment. He says in Philippians 4 verse 11.

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Philippians 4:11-13 (TNIV)

I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

What spiritual maturity it takes to say something like that. “God you matter more to me than my circumstance and because I have you, I have everything I need for joy in life.” Can you say that? Or do you need to be married before you can say that? Can you say “God I love you and I want to serve you even if you don’t give me what I want.” That’s growth. That’s moving out of selfishness into a mature faith that is centered on God.

Now the question that often comes up for many single people when we talk about this idea is Psalm 37:4, which says this:

SLIDE:
Psalm 37:4

Take delight in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.

So single adults often say, “the desire of my heart is to be married, isn’t God going to give me that? Is it wrong to want that to desire to be married?”

That’s a great question. Here’s my response: No it’s not wrong to want to be married, that’s a good thing. To want to be married is a good desire. But the point of Psalm 37:4 is the beginning. Take delight in the Lord. Take delight in God. And be wary of using God as a mechanism to get what you want.

See if your desire is to be married there is a desire underneath that desire for union and connection with another person. God longs to give you that desire of your heart. And it’s first and foremost fulfilled in relationship with Him. And it is going to be in the life to come fulfilled in a much more satisfying way than could ever be known here in this life. But when we take delight in God we find satisfaction in Him, and completion in Him.

John the Baptist understood this John the Baptist was a single man. He was preaching that Jesus Christ was coming, Jesus comes, he baptizes Jesus, and then Jesus goes off and teaches and is baptizing people and we see a curious thing happen in John chapter 3 verse 26, when read this.

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John 3:26-30 (TNIV)

They came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about—look, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him.”

27 To this John replied, “A person can receive only what is given from heaven. 28 You yourselves can testify that I said, ‘I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of him.’ 29 The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. 30 He must become greater; I must become less.”

John the Baptist’s joy was in Jesus and his delight was in Him. And he found completion in the love of God.

Lastly, a good reason to remain single is because God wants to use you.

SLIDE:

Because God wants to use you

Paul says this in verse 32:

SLIDE:

1 Corinthians 7:32-35 (TNIV)

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.

Paul's main goal is undivided devotion to God and he as a single man says God has such good purposes for you I will spare you some practical care and concern that is going to come if you get married. Marriage is a good thing, but there are certain realities that change when you get married, when you have kids. You're not as free to do the kinds of things that you maybe could do as a single person. So if God has a calling to use you in a specific way, for a specific purpose that requires you to be uninhibited and unhindered then you should remain single. We have greater flexibility as single adults rather than married adults. When you get married and you buy a house and you buy cars and you get kids and you're buying car seats and pack-n-plays and all of the stuff that you need for kids, all of a sudden it gets a lot harder to go on a mission trip for two weeks, it gets harder to teach and lead a bible study once a week, it gets harder to serve at a food pantry downtown or to volunteer in the community center. You have less control over your time because you have made a commitment to prioritize your family. And that is a Godly thing there is not a difference in holiness between the married life and the single life, what Paul is making a point of, is there is a difference in practicality. That you are more unhindered as a single person to pursue things that God has for you, and His purposes in your life.

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The wrong reasons to be single

The right reasons to be single

Because God has given you a gift (v. 7)

Because God wants to grow you (v. 25-31)

Because God wants to use you (v. 32-35)