

The Gift of Singleness

Part 1

Introduction

How do you see your singleness: Do you consider it to be a blessing? Or do you see it as a curse? A cross? A burden? A punishment? Do you feel God couldn't possibly understand what it's like to be single, or He's never impose singleness on people?

Perhaps you'll be surprised to learn that God has a very different perspective about singleness.

Our Study

The Scripture: 1 Corinthians 7:7 in The Living Bible

"God gives some the gift of a husband or wife, and others He gives the gift of being able to stay happily unmarried."

1. What does Paul call both marriage and being single? _____

Surprised? Surprised enough to consider changing your attitude toward singleness (if it needs changing)? Many of us respond to God's gifts much as small children do. We open them, then instead of trying them out and appreciating them, we immediately look around to see what everyone else got and begin to question the value of our gift.

The Scripture: 1 Corinthians 7:8, 9, 24

"I say to those who aren't married...better to stay unmarried if you can....But if you can't control yourselves, go ahead and marry....What situation a person is in when he becomes a Christian, let him stay there."

2. What is Paul's advice to the unmarried? _____

Paul goes on to explain that married people have extra problems; while the unmarried are freer to serve the Lord. Many biblical scholars believe that Paul wrote this chapter in Corinthians at a time similar to our own day in many respects--a time when the Church began to suffer persecution. He repeats several times that it is better to remain single.

Perhaps you think that Paul's words were for another day. If you are single and unhappy, it may be because you believe that service to the Lord is a poor substitute for marriage. We forget that God created us for Himself. Only when we put Him first in our lives will everything else fall into proper order.

Instead of giving Him His rightful place, however, we may call ourselves Christians yet with the rest of the world put relationships between the sexes about all else. Today Christians live together without marriage, marry non-Christians, or divorce in almost epidemic proportions, then pay the price such relationships incur.

God never intended that singleness should be considered second best. The Bible makes a good case for remaining single. Let's look at some of the single men and women God has used to establish and spread His kingdom.

John the Baptist

In ancient times, whenever a king planned a visit, a messenger was sent out ahead to announce his coming. John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin, was the herald who announced the coming of our King, Jesus Christ.

Before John's birth, an angel appeared before his father, Zechariah.

The Scripture: Luke 1:16, 17

"Many of the people of Israel will he (John) bring back to the Lord their God. And he will go on before to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous--to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

3. What would John do? _____

John was born late in his parents' marriage, long after they had given up hope of having children. At his birth, Zechariah affirmed him in a strong prophecy.

The Scripture: Luke 1:76

"You, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for Him, to give His people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins."

4. What did Zechariah prophesy over John? _____

Zechariah's prophecy came true and many men and women repented and came to the Lord through John's ministry. Many people thought that John might be the long-awaited Messiah, but John rejected the idea.

The Scripture: Mark 1:7

"After me will come One more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie."

5. What was the message John brought? _____

Mary, the mother of Jesus

God could have chosen any of many ways to send His Son, Jesus, to earth. However, He chose a single peasant girl to bear the Messiah. Thousands of years before Jesus' birth, prophets began speaking of Him.

The Scripture: Isaiah 7: 14, 15

"The Lord Himself will give you a sign. The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."

6. What was Isaiah's prophesy concerning the Lord? _____

The Scripture: Matthew 1:18

"This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit."

7. How did Mary conceive? _____

Most of us are familiar with the story of Jesus' birth, of King Herod's attempt to find and kill Him and how God protected Him through His childhood years.

Jesus

Next we need to look at Jesus. While He lived on earth, Jesus never married; even though it was the custom for Jewish men to marry (I have been told that there wasn't even a word for the term bachelor in the language of His culture.)

What particular problems or concerns related to singleness can Jesus empathize with?

The Scripture: Hebrews 4:15

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with us."

8. What does this verse tell us Jesus can do? _____

The Scripture: Hebrews 2:18

"Because He Himself suffered when He was tempted He is able to help those who are being tempted."

9. When is He able to help us? _____

10. Why? _____

Too often we are so locked into our own problems that we forget the human nature of Jesus. We believe our own problems are unique, rather than remember that Jesus lived on earth as a flesh-and-blood person and was subject to the same temptations, the same desires that we all have.

Paul

Another "single" God used greatly is the apostle Paul.

The Scripture: 1 Corinthians 7:8

"I wish that all men were as I am (single)."

11. What does Paul say in this verse? _____

Before his encounter with Jesus, Paul was notorious for his persecution of the Christians.

The Scripture: Acts 8:1-3 and Acts 9:1, 2.

"On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered through Judea and Samaria....Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison....Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if they found any there who belonged to the Way...he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem."

12. What did Paul do? _____

The Scripture: Acts 9:2-6

"He (Paul) went to the high priest and asked for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way...he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem, as he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul why do you persecute me? I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' he replied. 'Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.'"

13. Briefly describe what happened to Paul on his way to Damascus. _____

While Paul honored marriage, he accepted God's gift of singleness for himself and was used mightily in establishing the Church.

In the second part of this study, we will continue to review of some of the singles God used to spread the news of Jesus and His kingdom.

The Answers

1. A gift
2. It's better to stay unmarried if you can. A person should remain in whatever situation she is in when she becomes a Christian.
3. Make ready a people prepared for the Lord
4. He would be called a prophet of the Most High; he would prepare the way for Him, to give His people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins.
5. Someone was coming who was more powerful than John and whose sandals he was not worthy to untie (the work of a slave).
6. A virgin would give birth to a son.
7. Through the Holy Spirit
8. Because He Himself suffered when He was tempted He is able to help those who are being tempted.
9. When we are tempted
10. Because He was tempted.
11. He wishes all men were as he was.
12. He began to destroy the church and dragged off men and women to prison.
13. A light from heaven flashed around him and a voice asked Paul why he was persecuting Him. The voice identified itself as Jesus. Then He commanded Paul to go to Damascus where he would learn what he was to do.

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