

Good News for The Single Life

1 Corinthians 7:1-9 (ESV)

¹ Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." ² But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. ³ The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. ⁴ For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. ⁵ Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

⁶ Now as a concession, not a command, I say this. ⁷ 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.

⁸ To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am. ⁹ But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

Background

In the Old Testament, marriage and children were the social norm. It was part of God's mandate and plan, tied to covenant blessing and social continuity.

We see this from the beginning, in Genesis 2:18: "Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make a helper fit for him.'" Only the woman, created in God's image, was found to be a suitable helper for Adam. The man would leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they would become one flesh, a union both physical and spiritual, sealed in a marriage covenant. God then gave the mandate to be fruitful and multiply.

In ancient times, to be single was seen as going against this mandate and undermining God's blessing, even as cutting off one's family line. It was rarely chosen. Yet Jeremiah was commanded by God to remain single, as a sign of judgment on Israel (Jer 16:1–4). In Jewish tradition, singleness was often seen as a lack, even a deficiency.

Singleness carried real pressure in ancient times, as it still does today.

But the New Testament says something surprising.

DISCUSS

1. What the Apostle Paul says (1 Cor 7:7-9, 32-34)

Paul speaks about singleness with care, honour, and dignity, as something with purpose for God's kingdom. He tells the Corinthians, "I wish that all were as I myself am," and calls singleness "his own gift from God" (v7). In the same breath, he says

marriage is also a gift, given to those who need it "so that they would not burn with passion" (v9). Both singleness and marriage, then, are gifts from God, given to different people for His purpose and kingdom.

Later in the chapter, Paul says the unmarried can be "anxious about the things of the Lord" without the "divided interests" that marriage brings (v32-34), free to give the Lord undivided attention. Single people are therefore not to be seen as incomplete, deficient, or peculiar. Paul's own language shows they are no lesser, but have an equally meaningful place in God's kingdom.

In what ways have you seen singleness, yours or someone else's, as "less than" marriage? How does Paul calling it a gift challenge that view?

2. What the Apostle John says (John 1:12-13)

While God said it is not good for man to be alone, in redemption history God has given us something greater than the biological family: the church. John writes that "to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12), born "not of blood nor of the will of the flesh... but of God" (v13). This new birth makes every believer part of God's own family, brothers and sisters to Jesus and to one another.

This means no believer, married or single, is ever truly without family. Belonging in God's household does not depend on a spouse or children. As John makes clear, it depends only on being born of God.

What difference would it make to how you live if you saw fellow believers as true family, not just friends or acquaintances?

3. What Lord Jesus says, (Matthew 12:48-50)

Jesus is told that his mother and brothers are outside, wanting to speak with him. Rather than going out to them, he looks at his disciples and asks, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" Then, pointing to them, he says, "Here are my

mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matt 12:48-50).

It is a striking answer. Jesus does not deny the value of his biological family, but he redefines what counts as family in God's economy. The tie that matters most is not blood but obedience to the Father. By this measure, every believer is drawn into the same family as Jesus, and into family with one another.

For the single believer, this means the ache for family is not left unanswered. Jesus himself supplies brothers, sisters, and mothers within the church, bound together by shared obedience rather than birth.

Who in the church could you invest in as a spiritual brother or sister this season?

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Pray For:

1. Receiving Singleness as a Gift

Pray that single believers would take hold of Paul's word and see their singleness not as a lack, but as a gift from God with real purpose in his kingdom.

2. Resting in God's Family

Pray that every believer, married or single, would know they are never without family: born of God and given the church as brothers and sisters.

3. Living Out Spiritual Family

Pray for grace to actively invest in others as spiritual brothers and sisters, doing the Father's will together.