

## INTRODUCE

Well, good morning church! If I haven't met you yet, my name is

**SLIDE "Chris Bar"** Chris Martin, and I'm the Lead Pastor here.

If you've got your Bibles, and I hope you do, please open them up to 1 Corinthians chapter 7. 1 Corinthians 7. That's where we're going to be.

We want every person to have a hand on their Bible. You can open your phone or tablet and literally Google search 1 Corinthians 7.

## INTRODUCTION: SINGLENESS

So, for the last few weeks we've been on the topic of sex as we're working our way through the letter of 1 Corinthians. And last week Tim brought us the message that sex is a good gift to married people.

Now, today we move into a section that talks about the unmarried people in the church. About a quarter of our church are single people, and so this is very pertinent for us! And Paul has some really interesting things to say about singleness that are countercultural to us today.

Unfortunately, in many Christian circles, it is implied, if not explicitly stated that there is something wrong with being single. As if it's some sort of Junior Varsity status to be looked down upon.

- So, I went to a Christian University,
- and the mantra that I learned,
- literally the first weekend,
- was 'ring before spring'.

And I didn't know it, but there were whole heaps of students there not primarily for an education, but primarily to find their spouse.

- Now, that's where I met my wife,
- So, I can't necessarily bash the end result for me,
- but it was fascinating how the culture
  - revolved around marriage.

And there are churches and ministries

- that intentionally or unintentionally
- function as something of a speed-dating,
- meat market for Christian singles.
- I've literally had dudes leave our church
- to go to other churches,
- because they want to 'find their spouse',
- and we don't have a singles ministry.

So, they go...

- and they show up in their ripped jeans
- and bro tanks
- doused in cologne,
- and when all the honeys are watching,
- he just lifts his hands at the right moment
- *"you are perfect in all of your ways"*.
- It's like Christian girl stink bait!

## TRANSITION

And I'm joking, ok? Kinda...But this is built upon a faulty view of singleness in our Christian culture.

- Singleness is sometimes looked down upon in the church.
- But the Biblical view of these things is much, much different.

So, let's dig into what our brother Paul has to say.

### SLIDE 1 CORINTHIANS 7:6-7

[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.

### EXPLAIN: HISTORY

Alright, so Paul begins with an elevation of singleness. When he says, I wish that all were as I myself am. He's talking about being single.

- And for 1500 years,
- really until the Reformation,
- the church tended to view singleness
- as the higher calling than marriage,
- thus the formation of monasteries
- and the celibacy of priests, nuns, and monks.
  - I actually read that there was a church council in 345AD
  - where they had to rebuke people
  - who believed that marriage prevented
  - a Christian's entry into the kingdom of God.<sup>i</sup>

Now, that's a bit of an extreme view of singleness, and I don't think Paul is trying to put marriage down.

Rather, I think Paul is speaking pragmatically here about the benefits of being single, which we'll get into in a minute.

But the crux of the start of this passage is when he says, **each has his own gift from God.**

## **POINT #1**

And this is my first point in the text today: **SLIDE** SINGLENES IS A GOOD GIFT FROM GOD. Actually, Paul is calling BOTH marriage and singleness good gifts from God.

And the Greek word for *gift* that Paul uses here is *charisma*, which means:

- a gift
- from God
- given by grace.

And we're going to get into this a lot later in 1 Corinthians, but this is the same word used for a spiritual gift...a charismatic gift! So, here's what we can derive...two things:

First, **your marital status is a gift to you, from God.**

- If you are single...
  - God has given this to you as a gift...
  - for however long you are single...
  - it is his gift to you.

- And if you are married...
  - God has given this to you as a gift...
  - for however long you are married...
  - it is his gift to you.

Second, gifts from God are always meant for the building up of the church.

- Gifts are never meant for you alone,
- but for the building up of God's body.
- Our entire lives are to display God's love.

And if you're married,

- you are to display the DEPTH of God's love
- by limiting yourself to loving one person
- exclusively, permanently, and intimately.

And if you're single,

- you are to display the BREADTH of God's love
- in your freedom and time to express the love of God
- to a broad range of people.

But your marriage or singleness is not for you alone.<sup>ii</sup> They are gifts.

## TRANSITION

Now, Paul is going to move specifically into the benefits of singleness in the next verse, so let's look at verse 8:

**SLIDE 1 CORINTHIANS 7:8**

[8] To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am.

**POINT #2**

Now, why would Paul say this, if in fact, he sees both marriage and singleness as a good gift from God?

Well, Paul is referring to the benefits of singleness. Now, there are benefits of marriage as well. But, let me make my second point: **SLIDE SINGLENES HAS BENEFITS.**

I just want to state that Paul is both pro-marriage, and pro-singleness. But there are benefits and challenges to both.

I'm actually going to skip down a bit further out of our text for today to address some of what Paul says. So, look down to 1 Corinthians 7 starting in verse 28:

**SLIDE 1 CORINTHIANS 7:28**

[28] But if you do marry, you have not sinned, [this is good news for all the married folk!] and if a betrothed woman marries, she has not sinned. Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that.

Now, I am so thankful that Paul puts this in here, because he's being extremely honest and pragmatic. He's like,

- *“Listen, marriage is hard.*
- *It brings with it a whole bunch of problems.*
- *And to my single crew,*
- *I want to spare you of that!”*

Now, just because modern evangelicalism seems to prop up marriage as the ideal, that doesn't mean the Bible does so, because Paul is ruthlessly honest with us here. He goes on in verse 32:

#### **SLIDE 1 CORINTHIANS 7:32-35**

[32] I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. [33] But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, [34] 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. [35] I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.

Ok, so, I think the benefits for marriage are easier to identify, and that's why Paul is paying closer attention to the benefits of singleness, but he says, **I want you to be free from anxieties.**

Now, believe it or not, there are anxieties that come with being married!

- Married people have to worry about their spouses.
- And listen, it's one of the great benefits of marriage,
- but it is also a cause of anxiety.
- My job as the husband of Maryse
- is to cultivate her heart.
- It's to tend to her emotional,
- spiritual,
- and physical well-being.
- And while there are many parts of that
- which are excellent and...
- it's also difficult.

## **ILLUSTRATION: WHEN I WAS SINGLE**

I mean things changed when I got married, and a lot of the freedoms I had as a single guy...changed.

You see, when I was single, I had hobbies.

- Lots of them.
- I've got a whole basement of gear to prove it.

I just don't have the ability to do all the hobbies I like anymore... and it's because I have a wife and a daughter.



When I was single, I had expendable income.

But as a married man, I spend my money on things I never knew I needed!

Like, I have bins of decorations in my basement for every single season of the year.

- I have a Spring bin.
  - It has Easter stuff,
  - and flowers,
  - and hand painted wooden signs
  - that say “welcome spring”.
- I have a Fall bin,
  - full of artificial gourds.

You see,

- when I was single,
- I had no bins.
- I had no décor.
- My apartment was decorated with a theme...
- the theme was walls.

But as a married man,

- I am constantly buying...
- or let me rephrase...
- I am constantly seeing Amazon confirmation emails
- that I have bought so many things
- I had no idea I needed:

- Picture frames,
- water filters,
- organizing bins,
- soap.
- I bought very little soap when I was single.

When I was single I had expendable time.

- When Maryse and I were in pre-marital counseling
- one of the questions asked of us was,
- *“How much time do you expect to spend with your friends?”*
- And I was like,
- *“Yeah, maybe I’ll have a dude’s night with Ryan like once or twice a week.”*
- And our counselor literally laughed out loud at me.

Things changed when I got married. And again, back to what I said earlier:

- in marriage I get to display the DEPTH of God’s love in one relationship.
- But when I was single I got to display the BREADTH of God’s love in how I loved all my friends.

It’s just different.

## TRANSITION

So, if you are married, there are real benefits to being married. But if you are single, here's what Paul says of you, whether you are single for a season, or for the long haul:

- you are free.
- You are free to be anxious about the things of the Lord.
- You are free to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.
- That is a gift.

But Paul does give one caveat in verse 9 that reveals one struggle for single people, so let's look at it.

### **SLIDE 1 CORINTHIANS 7:9**

[9] But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

### **POINT #3**

And here's my third point: **SLIDE** SINGLENESS HAS CHALLENGES. There are challenges, and Paul specifically points out the challenge of sexual temptation.

## ILLUSTRATION: BURNING WITH PASSION

Now, this is kind of a strange verse. I knew a Christian guy, when I was in high school, who was only a few years older than I was.

- So, he was like 19,
- trying to follow Christ,
- and he was dating a girl,
- and before I knew it, he had proposed to her,
- and they were rushing toward the altar.

Now, this is not to say that you should not get married at 19, ok?

- But my friend told me
- that they were just so tempted to have sex,
- that he was like, *“Man, I just had to propose*
- *so, we could get married...*
- *cause I’m burning with passion.”*

And I get it...

- like, those temptations are real and difficult.
- But it’s probably not the best reason to just up and get married.
- Because, like Tim said last week,
- while sex is a very good thing in marriage,
- it cannot sustain a marriage.
- And their marriage did not survive.

## EXPLAIN: SEXUAL IDENTITY

So, let me talk about sexual temptation in singleness for a minute.

First of all, one of the cultural lies that we have largely bought into:

- Is that in order to live a full and meaningful life,
- you must sexually express yourself.
- That in some way,
- you live a drab and neutered existence
- if you are unable to be sexually active.

This idea that your sexuality is linked to your identity and your flourishing is more a cultural result of Sigmund Freud than a biblical idea.<sup>iii</sup> Ok, it's just not biblical.

But singles, you are bombarded with this cultural message:

- that if you aren't having sex,
- then you are missing out on something vital to your identity.

And I don't want us to downplay how strong that cultural message can feel.

But here's the truth: **You do not need to have sexual experiences to be complete and fulfilled as a person.**

But what Paul is saying is,

- *"Some people have the gift of singleness for their whole life...*
- *but, if you aren't able to exercise self-control over*
- *your sexual desires as a single person,*
- *then you're probably meant to be a married person*
- *at some point."*

Remember verse 28: it is no sin to be married.

- But Paul seems to indicate that marriage
- is not the most desirable condition.
- Being single, content, and self-controlled
- seems to be Paul's highest standard.<sup>iv</sup>

Now, there are other challenges to singleness that our text doesn't get into today, but Paul is not painting a picture of single bliss...but the reality of the benefits and challenges to the gift of singleness.

## CONCLUSION

So, let me give some points of application for us when it comes to singleness in our church. Cause, yes, a quarter of you are single, but we are all doing this together, as a church family.

So, to our single crew here. First, you are not some sort of second tier of person, just waiting to find fulfillment in marriage.

Sure, if God has marriage for you, that will be great, but until then, **practice your singleness as a part of your commitment to Christ.**

I'll put it like this: **SLIDE** BE INTENTIONAL WHILE YOU'RE SINGLE.

- Don't live like you're waiting.
- Live the most fulfilled, joyful life you can now.
- Even if you don't want to be single,
- be intentional with this gift that God has given you right now.

God used men and women all throughout the scriptures who were both married and un-married. **Your marital status is not what defines you.** So, be intentional.

Second, **SLIDE** BE HEALTHY WHILE YOU'RE SINGLE.

- I often tell single people
- that the best thing they can do
- if they want to be married,
- is to work today on becoming the type of person
- who you want to be when you're married.

SO, ask yourself the question:

- what do I need to do today
- to live out of a healthy singleness for Christ?
  - What does your devotional life look like?
  - What does your work life look like?
  - What does your recreational life look like?
  - Do you have strong rhythms in your life?
  - Have you built good boundaries around your time?

As you are intentional in your singleness, grow in personal health in your singleness.

- What stirs up your delight for Christ?
- What restores and replenished your heart?
- Invest in those things.

And third, **SLIDE** BE IN COMMUNITY WHILE YOU'RE SINGLE. Singles, you are vital part of our community here at Fathom.

- You are not second best.
- You are not weird.
- You are vital!

- You are a gift from God for the building up of his church.
- And we need you.

If you are single, you will experience loneliness differently than a married person, but the church family is supposed to be a part of aiding that.

- The church is a family,
- and as best we can,
- we need to open up homes,
- open up lives,
- learn from one another,
- lean into each other's lives,
- married couples...
- and children...
- and singles.

This is why Discipleship Groups at Fathom have always been mixed age and stage.

### **ILLUSTRATION: SINGLE FRIENDS**

Maryse and I have lots of friends in our home, but we have one gal from our church who's single, and she comes over every couple of weeks to hang out and have dinner with us. Actually, before COVID, she was having dinner with us every Wednesday night.

- And she loves on Harper,
- and Harper loves her,
  - and asks when she's coming next,
  - and wants her hair done like hers.



- And we pour into her life.
- And she pours into our lives.
- And she's seen us at our worst and at our best.
- And we've seen her at her worst, and at her best.

Listen,

- I want single friends in my life.
- I want single friends to pour into my daughter's life.
- Married people, you need singles in your life.
- And single people, you need married people and children in your life.

Be in community. I mean, goodness, we have two wonderful, ferocious women of God who are single on staff here. Whisper and Amanda. Get to know them. Be in community.

## **ENDING**

So church, if you are married...that is your gift...to be used for the glory of God, and the building up of the church.

And if you are single...that is your gift...to be used for the glory of God and the building up of the church.

Let me leave us with two prayers from Pete Scazzero's book, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader*. One prayer is for married people, and one prayer is for single people. So, pray with me.

A prayer for married couples:

- Lord, grant me the strength to answer your call to be a living sign of your love.
- Make my love for my spouse be like your love for them:
- passionate, permanent, intimate, unconditional, and life-giving.
- May I be as present to them as you are,
- so that all the world can see your presence manifested
- in our tender love for one another.
- Help us both to stay close to you in the body of Christ.
- And continue to nourish our love with your love.
- In Jesus' name, amen.

And now a prayer for single people:

- Lord, grant me the strength to answer your call to be a living sign of your love.
- Make my love for others today reflect your love for me:
- loyal, faithful, unconditionally, and life giving.
- May I be as present to others as you are to me,
- so that all the world can see your presence manifested
- in my tender love for others.
- Help me stay close to you in the body of Christ.
- And continue to nourish my love with your love.
- In Jesus' name, amen.

## COMMUNION

Well, every week at Fathom we respond in 4 ways:

- First, every week we celebrate communion—The Lord’s Supper—
  - We take a little bit of bread and juice, two common elements given to us by Jesus to represent his body and blood sacrificed for us.
  - When we eat and drink, we are remembering his sacrifice, and proclaiming once again that we believe in him as our Lord and Savior.
  - If you are a Christian here today please get your communion elements ready, as we’ll all take communion together.
  - If you are NOT a Christian, we ask you to abstain from taking communion, as this ordinance means you are a believer...and you are welcome at Fathom even if you are not.
- Second, we normally give of our tithes & offerings as a community. And this is still needed.
  - Church, even though we are not meeting physically, we are still practicing first fruits giving.
  - We give our first and our best because in Christ Jesus God gave us his first and his best.
  - So, if Fathom is your home church, and you regularly give in the offering boxes, please go to **SLIDE** [fathomchurch.org/give](https://fathomchurch.org/give)

or click the link at the top of the screen marked “Give” and give online.

- Third, the staff and elders are here to pray for you, and we are committed to continue this. So, if you have any prayer needs, please click on the screen and submit a prayer request, or go to **SLIDE** [fathomchurch.org/prayer](http://fathomchurch.org/prayer)
- And finally, we always end with singing praise and worship to our God. Singing is an unbelievably important part of our gathering, and even as we are scattered in this season, let’s continue to worship through song together.

So, I’m going to read the Words of Institution from the Apostle Paul, we’ll take communion, and then we’ll sing:

## **1 CORINTHIANS 11:23–26 – WORDS OF INSTITUTION**

### **SLIDE Communion 1**

[23] For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

### **SLIDE Communion 2**

[25] In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

### **SLIDE Communion 3**

[26] For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Love you church, let's sing together.

## BENEDICTION

Well, thanks church for gathering with us. We will be online next Sunday, as well, same time.

- Academy last call

If you're on our email list, you have an email waiting for you in your inbox, with all the links from this morning's service.

I'll leave you with this benediction from the book of 1 Thessalonians:

### **SLIDE 2 THESSALONIANS 2:16–17**

[16] Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father,  
who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace,  
[17] comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.

Love you, church. Have a great week!

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<sup>i</sup> Osiek, Caroline, and David Blach, *Families in the New Testament World*.

<sup>ii</sup> Scazzero, Peter, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader*.

<sup>iii</sup> Chandler, Matt, *Singles*.

<sup>iv</sup> Garland, David, *1 Corinthians*.