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## SINGLE LIKE JESUS

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### Part 17 of 1st Corinthians

Pastor Mark Driscoll | 1 Corinthians 7:8-9, 25-38 | May 07, 2006

A brush of idealism paints the 1st-century church as a nostalgic example of community and perfection. The congregation in Corinth, however, was anything but ideal. Rather than sharing their possessions, the Corinthians would sue each other to get more stuff. Rather than eating meals together, the Corinthians would cut in line during communion to get drunk off the wine. And rather than communal singing, the Corinthians had communal sex. I'm A.J. Hamilton with Mars Hill Church in Seattle. In this sermon series, Pastor Mark Driscoll teaches on the letter known as 1 Corinthians, which the Apostle Paul wrote to untangle the many moral and theological knots the Corinthian church created.

In addressing their sin, Paul provides some of the richest theological sections of the entire New Testament. After listening to the following sermon, e-mail any questions or comments to [feedback@marshillchurch.org](mailto:feedback@marshillchurch.org). To automatically receive Mars Hill audio programming, subscribe to our podcast available at [marshillchurch.org](http://marshillchurch.org). And now, here's Pastor Mark with "Single Like Jesus", the seventeenth sermon in a series, "Christians Gone Wild: 1 Corinthians."

Well, we will get into singleness today – unmarried people. This is why it's a huge deal at Mars Hill. Probably half or more of the people who attend our church are unmarried single people, so when I'm talking single, I'm talking probably the majority of our church. Which is very unusual, because nationally young people don't go to church, single people don't go to church, and single young people don't go to large churches – most churches of our size, it is very rare to find a lot of unmarried singles attending that church. Well, at Mars Hill we are largely singles. There are lots of marriages – a couple hundred a year – but there's still a high percentage of singles in our church because of the city that we are in.

Seattle has the fifth highest concentration of unmarried, college-educated singles in the country. Tens of thousands of non-Christian, unmarried singles have come to Seattle in the last decade. Some of have come here for an education, because we are America's most educated city – though we hide it very well – and also some who have degrees come here looking for a job opportunity in the tech industry, hoping to play guitar on the side and break the Commandments. And so they all come here with varying causes and motivations; some of you, that's how you got here. Now, nationally, when we move from our church to our city to our nation, nationally about half of American adults are unmarried singles.

So this is a growing number, because people are waiting longer to marry. In 1960 the average man was 23, the average woman was 20, upon marriage; today the average man is 27, the average woman is 23. And so people are waiting longer to marry – but is that because they love Jesus and are maintaining their purity and using all of their time to memorize verses? No. Because they're all having sex – a new F-word is fornicating, for some of you, and that is sex before marriage. We dealt with that last week. And what singles tend to do is wait longer to get married but have sex until they get married, to the degree that 41 percent of all women will have cohabitated – shacked up, lived with a boyfriend – before marriage at some point in their life; 4 out of 10 women.

So 9 out of 10 people will marry; 4 out of 10 women will cohabit before they marry – that percentage is actually much higher in Seattle. Our national average for cohabitation – living together, sleeping together – is much higher; 250 percent higher than the national average. Some of you may be shocked to hear that that is a problem with God. It is. I get banged on this week in *The Stranger* because they're saying, "Pastor Mark says you're not supposed to have sex before marriage." And it's not shocking that *The Stranger* isn't all that Biblical in its view of sexuality, so we do love *The Stranger*, but they are strange, so we agree with them. So what was have is a city of young, not Christian, single, unmarried, horny fornicators.

Now, a couple of weeks ago when I talked about it, some of you said, "Well, what" – I got e-mails – "What counts as fornication? What counts? What is that?" Okay, all you Clinton voters; let me make this nice and simple for you. You freaking know what it means, right? You're like, "Uh, does this count?" Yeah. "Even if it's a midget?" Yeah, that counts too – it all counts, all right? Dang freaks! There is to be no sexual activity. "Uh, what about if there's not a person?" Look, knock it off, you know – just knock it off. There's nothing, all right? I mean gee whiz. So you're not supposed to have any sex till you get married, and sex is for marriage.

So we're gonna be talking about sex and marriage and singleness and all of this, and there's two things I want to establish up front. There is a theological issue to consider – that being marriage – and there is a practical issue to consider – that being if and when you should marry for practical reasons. So theologically we'll state in Genesis chapter 2 that it is not good for a man to be alone, right? Why? Because men are weird. You dudes wear like black pants and white socks, and you have what color leather couch? Black – with what? A large television. That's all your furniture, right? You wear sports jerseys all the time. No product in your hair. There's like a lot of reasons why it's not good for a man to be alone.

It's not good for the man to be alone, Genesis 2 says, so singleness is not ideal. God made a woman to come along and fix the man, and then we also see in Hebrews 13 that marriage is to be honored by all, single and married. We see in 1 Timothy 4 that anyone who discourages marriage or tells you

marriage is bad and you shouldn't get married, that's an evil thing – that is a demonic lie. So theologically, the Bible elevates marriage, it embraces marriage, and marriage is to be honored and to be preferred. But that is just the theological issue. Practically, there are seasons, reasons, why you may not want to get married right now, or may want to wait for a while to be married.

We will all be single at some point. Some of us are single until we're married. Some of us will be divorced or widowed, then be single again. Singleness is an issue for everyone, and singleness is to be preferred under certain conditions, for certain seasons, for certain purposes. And so we must in addition to being theological, we must be practical. So we pick it up in 1 Corinthians 7:8; Paul has this hip, cool, trendy, young church, just like you guys. I mean these people were so cool, just like you are so cool, and the gals were hot and smart, and the dudes were, you know, as hot and smart as a dude can get. And they were all sleeping together, living together, dating, making out, friends with benefits, booty calls – they were doing that in Corinth.

And here's what Pastor Paul has to say: "Now to the unmarried and the widows" – meaning chapter 7:8, those who have never married, those who were married but their spouse died, unfortunately – "it is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than burn with passion." What's he saying, bottom line? If you cannot remain sexually pure, you need to hustle up, grow up, get a job, get married – quick, today, hustle! What are you doing here? You gotta get married. You gotta hurry up, right? "To burn with passion" – now, here's what that means. You'll be (buzzes) frustrated, right, burning with passion.

And that will lead you into sexual sin, and then you'll burn in hell. And this is exactly what dudes mean when they look at a lady and they say, "She's hot!" Yes, and if you touch her, you will burn in hell. It's even hotter than she is. Hell is hotter than she is, but she's the gateway to hell. She's hot, you touch her, and then it'll be real hot. That's what's going on. So you need to ask yourself, first thing: Am I good at virginity? Some of you are like, "No. That's my girlfriend, and no." Well, then, perhaps you should think about marriage, pursue marriage. Now, marriage is for men, not boys; it's for women, not girls. So you gotta grow up, get a job. You gotta love Jesus, you gotta be responsible, right?

You've gotta overcome whatever addictions you've got. You've gotta have your own act together, and then if you are a person who says, "I am not gonna make it virgin – hah! Virgin – that's not gonna happen for me," then you've gotta work yourself toward being married. And the sooner, the better, if you're just gonna get yourself in all kinds of sexual sin and trouble. Some of you say, "Well, but I'm supposed to have self-control." You are supposed to have self-control, but if you don't have self-control you need to work toward marriage. Some of you dudes – you should see the dudes. The dudes are like, "Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Uh-huh." They're like bobble-heads, just everywhere in the church today dudes are like, "I got it. Yeah, it's cool. "

So if you are the porn addict – right, now it got all quiet. If you are the porn addict – dudes are like, "I don't know, is it" – no, put your hand down. If you are the porn addict, you know, you're saying, "Man, I'm frustrated." Well, you know what, you need a wife. You don't need to be looking at porn; you need to be looking at a wife. And if you're sleeping with your girlfriend, if you're hanging out in chat rooms talking to people you shouldn't be talking to, if you're going to singles bars hoping to make out with somebody and say, "Well, at least I didn't have sex," you're not supposed to do anything sexually with anybody. You should take all of that energy, all of that frustration, all of that desire, all that passion, and work toward marriage.

That's what you should do, because God is not against sex; he is for marriage. That's what he's for. Now, I met my wife when I was 17. I was married at 21. Why? I wasn't gonna make it to 22. That's why, if you want the truth. I was sexually active, I met Jesus, and then I wasn't. And somebody asked me, "Do you have the gift of chastity?" I was like, "Chastity? Who's she? That's like a stripper name – who's Chastity?" They said, "No, chastity is when you don't ever need to be with a woman." I was like, "That's a gift? Not to me – that's a curse! I don't have that gift. I don't have that," right? So I stopped having sex, and then I walked with Jesus and was clean and pure, got married at 21 between my junior and senior year in college.

Why? I wasn't gonna make it to 22. I was not gonna make it. I had a gal that I loved, I had dated her for years, and needed to make her my wife. Loved Jesus, took my hands off her, went through the premarital class, pastor signed off on it, parents signed off on it, all good, thank you Jesus, got married. That was 13 ½ years ago. My lovely high school sweetheart, still together today, and I like being married. I was built for marriage. I'm a married dude. I'm not a single dude. This week I was single – I was in Orlando all by myself with my male assistant, you know, and so it's two dudes. It was like the weirdest trip of my life. It's like, okay, "Want to go to the beach?" "Not really," you know? "Not really." "Want to go out to eat?" "Not really, no. No." Watched a lot of movies – it was weird, like having a roommate. We just kept looking at each other saying, "Well, it stinks being with you." "What a coincidence – it stinks being with you, too." Because he's got a wife, I got a wife, neither of us are Brokeback, and so neither of us was having a good time. So we just sat there thinking – man! He was married young, I was married young, we're built for marriage, man. I'm built for marriage. I like having a wife. I like being home with my wife. I like having kids. I dig that. That's what I'm into. I'm into being married. I'm into being a dad. I really like that.

I couldn't be single. And so some of you dudes need to be honest and say, "You know what, I just don't think I'm gonna make it." Well then, grow up, get a job, get a Bible, get a gal, and get to the altar and get 'er done – amen. What happens, though, is if you don't accept that, you end up being sexually active, getting yourself into all kinds of sin, hooked up with the wrong people, lots of frustration. And you know what, this is the world we live in now, to where sex is just assumed to exist before marriage.

At the turn of the century – 1900 – 92 percent of brides were virgins. By 1960-65, brides, it fell to 43 percent were virgins, and by the 1980s it was down to 14 percent. So what we're seeing is people have sex, don't get married, wait longer to marry, disobey God's commands to be holy and pure. And what Paul is saying here is this: your first priority is holiness, meaning don't have sex before marriage, and if you know you're not gifted with singleness and able to be chaste, then grow up and move toward marriage, and exercise your desires in a holy way in the context of marriage. He then moves on, though, to talk about practical matters and wisdom in verse 25.

“Now about virgins” – so if you’re here and you’re a virgin, this verse is for both of you. “Now about virgins” – I thought that was a good line – “I have no command from the Lord” – Jesus didn’t talk about this question. The church wrote Paul questions. He’s giving them answers. This one, Jesus never talked about, so he’ll talk about it. “I have no command from the Lord, but I give a judgment as one who by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy. Because of the present crisis” – underline that, highlight that, emphasize that, make note of that – that colors everything in the chapter. Many single people, many singles groups, will take 1 Corinthians 7 and say, “Paul said it is good not to marry. Marriage is junior varsity. Singleness is varsity. Go singleness!” Right?

That’s not what he’s talking about, right? That’s not what he’s talking about, because again, all the way through Scripture, marriage is ideal. Marriage is to be honored. Marriage is to be preferred. Being alone isn’t good. You get into lots of trouble. What he is saying here is that they live in a culture that is in the midst of a crisis. So you can’t take a particular recommendation and make that a universal principle when we’re not living under the same crisis. They’re living under a crisis. It may be one of two things, or both. One, persecution under the Roman emperor Nero was likely just commencing around this time, meaning Christians were being slaughtered and murdered.

Also, there was a famine that had been prophesied in Acts 11:28 that would occur around this same time, where there would be food shortages resulting in riots, starvation, poverty, social upheaval, and death. There is a crisis. It may be the persecution, and it may be the famine; it may be a combination of both. We don’t know, because this was 2,000 years ago. But it would be no different than today, you’re living in the Sudan, and there is no fresh water, there is no food, there is genocide, and you are Christian. It may make sense for you to not get married and have kids, because what they like to do is murder the husband, rape the mother, take the daughters, sell them into prostitution.

Take the Christian sons, sell them into slavery. That’s happening in various parts of the world. And what Paul is saying is when you’re in a crisis like that, right – there is a war, there is a famine, there is persecution that is violent – then under those conditions you’ve really gotta ask, “Is this a good time to get married, to wave the Jesus flag, and have some kids? Is this the best time for that?” It doesn’t mean that getting married, waving the Jesus flag, and having kids is bad, but under certain conditions it might be very arduous, and you may be committing yourself to real disaster.

Here’s where he goes on: “Because of the present crisis” – verse 26 – “I think it is good for you to remain as you are. Are you married? Do not seek a divorce” – just because hardships comes – financially, culturally, whatever it may be – that’s no excuse for divorce. “Are you unmarried? Do not look for a wife. 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. What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; 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; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.”

There’s a lot there – let me unpack it. First thing, some people say that Paul here erroneously is predicting the imminent end of the world; that the early Christian church, they will say, had this sort of eschatological pessimism whereby they thought the world is coming to an end. Jesus is coming back any day now, there’s no need to get married, make babies, plant gardens, build a house, think through five generations of how your legacy can affect the kingdom, because Jesus is coming back any minute and the world is coming to an end. There has been a fearful aspect of Christianity from the beginning; people who read the newspaper, see something bad, and assume that the end of the world is right around the corner.

That is exactly wrong. That is not what Paul is talking about. Paul is not here predicting the end of the world. 2,000 years later, we know that the end of the world has not yet come. What he is predicting, though, is a complete social upheaval in their culture in their day. The world that they live in was about ready to undergo cataclysmic alteration; that this powerful Roman government was going to go into decline. That the famine was going to cause social upheaval, riots, poverty, and complete reorientation of their culture. Additionally, the persecution that was forthcoming under Nero, where Christians were slaughtered and murdered en masse publicly, was going to change everything.

The world they were living in was just about ready to go completely upside-down. And Paul says this is the present crisis, and let me just emphasize that issue of present. He’s saying that in that moment, everything is about to change. Therefore, practically, if you were a Christian thinking about getting married, you must factor in the cultural context of the day. You must factor in the world you’re going to be married in and raising your children in, and you must practically ask, “Is now the best time for me to get married, or if I can, would it not be most advantageous for me to wait?” What that means is that there are seasons of life where singleness is the best route for those who can remain sexually pure and not get into sin.

Famine comes. Disease comes. A plague comes. A natural disaster hits. War breaks out in your nation. There are places in the world today where people are starving to death and getting shot, and Christians are getting murdered for their faith, and we don’t live in that world. Our big issues are cholesterol and fat. We’re not starving to death; we’re eating to death. We’re not running for our lives; we’re just sort of in a sedated state of food and alcohol and entertainment. We don’t live with any sort of immediate danger that the world could come to an end. Most of us don’t have that kind of immediate concern.

And what Paul is talking about is those people who live with those kind of imminent dangers and social upheavals. And there are many places in the world today that exactly what he is speaking of is exactly what they are experiencing, and these verses make perfect sense. But for us, it is a little different. Now, let me principally say that he is saying that it is not a sin to marry, even under hard circumstances like I just mentioned. But even though it’s not a sin, you must accept and acknowledge the fact that it will be more difficult than if you were single. If you are a guy who’s gonna be killed, that’s one thing. If you’re gonna leave behind a widow and orphans, that’s a whole ‘nother matter.

And what that means practically and principally for us is this: that you will need to look at your life. And first you must determine theologically, should I marry? Has God called me to marry, and does God want me to be married? That’s the theological question. The practical question is: is now a good

time? Is now the best time? When would the right time be? And so practically they had a very obvious social dilemma on their hands. For us it may be this: you are single, and you're in college, and the question may be, is now the best time for me to marry – practically? Should it be preferable for me to finish my degree before I get married?

Some of you most definitely would say, “Yes. I need to devote myself to my studies, and work and knock out my degree, because then I will have an opportunity to feed my family. So yes, I should finish my degree before I get married.” It's not a sin to get married in college; it's just harder. Take it from a guy who was married in college. It's not a sin, but it is harder to be a student and an employee and a spouse. Some of you may say, “You know what, I just got out of college, and I've got a mountain of college debt. And right now, before I get married and start a family, I really want to pay off my debt.

So I'm gonna live really cheaply, minimally – maybe even move back in with my parents or crash at a friend's house for a few years. And I'm gonna work two jobs, and I'm not gonna really worry about building a relationship. I'm gonna make money, and I'm gonna knock out my debt, so then I can get married, and then I can have kids, and then my life won't be dogged around by this huge debt that I've got.” Some of you may say, “Well, I just started my career, and early on in my career it requires massive investment of time. I have to work long hours. I have to travel in order to start my business, in order to start my career. And now is not the best time for me to marry.”

Some of you, your spouse died, and you're not done with your grieving process, and it's not the best time for you to marry. There are good, practical reasons. Some of you may say, “Right now I'm sick, and my health isn't good, and I don't feel like right now I need the additional responsibility of marriage. I need to get healthy first.” Some of you may be brand new Christians saying, “I need to get to know Jesus before I marry anybody. I gotta get to know my Bible. I gotta get over some sin. Maybe I've gotta get over drug or alcohol addiction, or sexual addiction, or maybe I just need to grow as a Christian. Maybe my transformation and my salvation was so great that I feel like a whole new person.

“I don't even know who I'd want to be married to now, because what I used to want isn't what I want now. Maybe I need to take a few years, grow with Jesus, read my Bible, pray, mature in my faith, and then approach the issue of marriage at that time.” See, what I love about your Bible is that it holds a high theological standard of marriage; that marriage is good, to be honored. It is a gift. It is a glorious thing. But it's also very reasonable, very practical, and says, “You know what, you've also gotta look at your life and ask, ‘Is this the right time? Am I in the right circumstances, that I should be pursuing marriage?’”

And what he's saying is if you love Jesus, and the person you're marrying loves Jesus, and you're not having sexual sin – living and sleeping together and such – and ultimately – we believe in courtship here at Mars Hill. Dating is where “I try you on, didn't like it, so I break your heart and move on to the next one.” Our view of courtship is you only really pursue someone if you're very interested in them, and their dad approves, and their mom approves, and their friends approve. And this is the way it works for you guys – you don't just get a gal.

You gotta go through her dad and his gun, and her brothers and their guns, and mom, and then her friends and her church and her theology. And this lady is insulated by all these layers of love and affection and defense. And so if you're a guy who wants to pursue a gal, what we say is, “Don't make an end run against all those layers of protection and love. Honor them. Honor the father. Honor the Lord. Honor the mother. Honor the siblings. Honor the friends. Honor the church. Honor the pastor. Honor the Lord. And be an honorable man.” But what he's saying is it's a good thing to marry, and it's no sin for any man to pursue a woman if he's a Godly man, she's a Godly woman, and he's pursuing in a Godly way.

But there may be seasons where a man says, “Not right now,” or the woman says, “Not right now.” This is altogether wise and reasonable; wise and reasonable. Some of you are single, and you have very good reasons. And just because you're at Mars Hill, we don't want you to feel pressured toward marriage. I want to take that burden off of some of you. A lot of people here get married; a couple hundred a year. You look around and go, “Everybody's getting married – I'm not getting married.” And you gals, you hit 30 – (whistles) then you're like, “I'm 30. I'm single. I'm freaking out!” Well, it's okay; it's okay, right?

You don't want to just be married; you want to be married to the right guy at the right time for the right reasons in the right way. And you can get married to the wrong guy, with the wrong reasons, in the wrong way, at the wrong time, and that's not gonna be holiness or wisdom. So some of you have very practical reasons to wait, and for you gals, you have the most practical reason: no dude has asked. That's a huge variable. If I guy doesn't want to marry you, you pretty much aren't getting married, right? That's a huge variable. So what he's saying is, first, be holy, whether you're single or engaged or married. And then also be wise if you are single about when and how you should work toward marriage.

Then he moves on – verse 32 – talks about in addition to be holy and being wise, he talks about single unmarried people being devoted. “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. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world – how he can please his wife – and his interests are divided.” Okay. Single men, you need to know this: when you get married, things change. How many married men would concur with that? All of a sudden – how many of you married men used to have a hobby? You used to have a hobby. You say, “I was a good bass fisher, and now I vacuum awesome.” Things change. Things change, right? Things change.

When you're a single guy, your time is more flexible, your money's more flexible – you're a single guy, right? You can see this. When you get married, your time changes – I don't have a hobby. I have a wife and kids. That's what I got. You don't have extra disposable income. You single guys have extra disposable income; you do. You do. Now, you don't spend it on furniture, but if you get married, you will, right? How many of you guys, you had extra money, you got married, and all of a sudden you started buying stuff you didn't even know you need. You're like, “I need that? What is that?”

“That's a skirt.” “What's it go on?” “It goes on the table.” “Didn't we just buy a skirt?” “We did. It goes on the bed.” “Well, didn't we have other skirts?”

” “Those go on me,” the woman says. You’re saying, “That’s a lot of skirts, and those cost money.” And she says, “But we have to have a skirt on the table.” “Table? Why do we need a table? I can hold the beer between my knees. I don’t need a table.” I know dudes who live on camping gear. I know single – they’re single. I’ve never met a single woman who lives in a tent in an apartment. I’ve never met a single woman who lives on a camping mat in a sleeping bag, cooking on a Coleman stove – but I have met a lot of single guys who live that way.

Because then if they need to move, it takes about five minutes, and everything fits in their car. That’s it. It’s easy. All their furniture folds up, and off they go. If you’re a single guy, it’s different. When you’re a married guy, money – it goes different directions. There’s a lot of products. Facial products, hair products, skin products, scented oils – crazy stuff you didn’t even know existed. All of a sudden you’re buying it; you’re buying it. Not only that, you will be buying new clothes for yourself with her counsel. She will say, “I’m tired of seeing you in the Ding-Dong T-shirt with no product in your hair wearing sweats, and you’re gonna get some clothes. You’re gonna get shirts with buttons.” You’re like, “They have those for men too, buttons? I did not know.”

You will know. You will dress nice. You will all of a sudden get a blow dryer and a comb and a brush and a toothbrush, and you will get breath mints, and you will use them, and things change. How many married men, everything changed when you got married? Everything changed. When you’re a single guy, you kinda come and go, do as you please. Your schedule’s your own. Your money’s your own. Your place is your own. You do as you please. Married – totally different; you’re asking this question: “Sweetheart, how can I love and serve you?” That’s it. That’s it, and that’s your job, right? That’s your job, so everything changes.

So what he says is you gotta think about this when you’re single. You’re a single guy. A lot of single guys are like, “I want to get married.” Do you? Do you want her to decide where you live, and do you want her to decide what you wear, and do you want her to decide what your house looks like, and do you want to give her certain, you know, discretionary income to go out and buy things you don’t think you need? You want to live with a woman? (Evil laugh) “Well, I want to sleep with one. Do I have to marry them?” Oh – we got you there! Yeah, we did. Yeah, we did. Gotcha there, big guy! All right.

The end of verse 34: “An unmarried woman or virgin” – and technically, they’re supposed to be the same, but sometimes they’re not – “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.” How many of you ladies, since getting married you realize it’s not just you and Jesus – you got this dude you gotta love, serve, help, encourage him? And it takes time, takes energy, takes money to support your man. Just like the man has to take time, energy, money to support his woman. That’s the way it goes.

Marriage is about sacrifice and service and looking after the other. What he’s saying is this: you single ladies – do you really want to get married – really? Think of a man in your house all the time. Think of what he smells like. Do you want that? But let’s say you’re a gal likes to keep a nice clean house, and you meet a guy who likes to work on motors – in the kitchen. Do you really want a transmission in your sink?

Do you really want a dude in your house? I mean, see, there’s a lot of ladies here that have this sort of idealized concept of a dude. They think, “Oh, I’m lonely; I would like a husband.” And then they meet a dude, and they’re like, “I could not live with that. That would not work.” You gotta be honest about whether or not this is gonna work for you, and you gotta be honest going in, not idealized, not naively hopeful, overly optimistic. But a married woman, he says, is bound to her husband, the pleasing of him. Verse 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.”

Okay, now, let me say this: when it comes to ministry – particularly church-based ministry – oftentimes there are things that married couples and married people are just best suited to deal with. That’s why in 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1, senior leadership is supposed to be married men. A lot of issues we deal with are marriage, children, family-type issues, so as a married guy, I can talk about marriage, and I can talk about kids and life as a family. If a single guy was a pastor he couldn’t really give you a lot of advice about that. So there are things that practically married people are better at counseling and leading through.

This includes Titus 2, where it says that older married women can help train younger women; you know that they have certain knowledge to impart. So generally speaking, there are certain things ministry-wise that married people are most capable of handling, but there are also other ministry responsibilities, opportunities, that single people are far more strategically capable of handling. For example – I’ll give you some examples. Let’s say for example there is a closed Muslim country that desperately needs Jesus. Should I go, with my wife and five kids, or should I have a single guy go and lean over the plate and take one for the team?

I should send the single guy, right, because if he’s there, and they capture and kill him – which is what they do if you preach the gospel in a Muslim country – at least he doesn’t leave behind a widow and orphans. There are lots of ministries like that. There are ministries in this church that are altogether held together by unmarried people. Most of the parents, quite frankly, don’t work in our nursery with our children at any of our sites. Mostly it is unmarried people who work in our nursery, because they will go to one service, they’ll serve at another. Many of the unmarried people actually run our Sunday event at this church. Why – because they can.

It takes 200-300 volunteers to run one service here at Mars Hill Ballard. What that means is some people are here for 2-3 services. Some people are here all day. You can’t do that if you’re like me, and your oldest kid is 8 and your youngest is 3 months, and there’s five of them, and they all need lunch and a nap, right? You can’t be here all day because you gotta go home and watch the kids. If you’re married, you can’t just say, “Well, I’ll give away my Sunday,” because it belongs to your spouse and your family. There are ways that unmarried people have discretionary time and money to give to God’s service of kingdom work that married people just don’t have that kind of discretionary ability to give their life away.

Some of you who are unmarried – I know many of you – you work 20, 30, 40 hours a week in volunteer work of ministry. You may work at the soup kitchen, homeless shelter, street kids. You may volunteer here all day on Sunday. You may lead a community group, come in and volunteer in the office, work behind the scenes. You take large amounts of your life, and you give it away to help others meet Jesus. Paul is saying that that is wonderful, glorious and good, and that things will change once you get married; that your time is more reduced.

Your freedom is more reduced. Your finances are more reduced. What you need to make as a single man is totally different than what you need to make as a husband and father of four or five children. And this is not to denigrate being a husband and father, or a wife and a mother. This is to say that you need to look at your life right now and say, “Is now the best time for me to be married? And if I’m not married, and God hasn’t brought along someone for me to marry, what things should I be doing as an unmarried Christian with my time and my money and my gifts and talents and abilities that I am free to do, that other married people aren’t free to do?”

And even if I should someday marry, I will never have this opportunity again; to travel, to do missions work; to volunteer for ministry; to be heavily involved in people’s lives, to the degree that oftentimes married people cannot.” I want you unmarried people not to see that God has cursed you, and you’re in a holding pattern until you get married. God has blessed you to work on you and to mature you in faith, and to use you for kingdom service in this state of singleness. For some of you, it will go on forever. Statistically, less than 10 percent of you will remain single forever. But as long as you are single, you need not get bitter and angry and curse out God.

You need to ask God, “God, in this season, what is it that you have to teach me, and what is it that you have me to do,” knowing that you have been given this wonderful opportunity of freedom that the rest of us just don’t have who are married. And again, this is not to denigrate marriage or children. I love being married. I absolutely love my kids. But to be honest with you, there are times when it gets in the way. There just are. Now, I love – I was gone this last week. I’ll tell you a story. I was in Orlando preaching at conferences, and preached seven services at a church, and just preaching all week.

And the whole week I’m gone, I’m missing my wife and kids, and my kids are missing me, and my wife’s missing me. I’d call to talk to my kids and my wife would say, “Ashley” – my oldest daughter – “she can’t talk to you.” “Why?” I’m freaking out – “why?” We’re super-close. She said, “Ashley says if she hears your voice, she’ll cry all week, and she’ll just be distraught.” So my daughter’s home missing her daddy; desperately missing her daddy. Okay, that’s the way my kids are. So every time I need to go preach the gospel, I’m always conflicted, knowing that I have divided loyalties. I also have a wife and children to factor into my decisions.

So this last week I get an invitation to go speak at a conference in Chicago. 3,000 teenage kids will be there, and they want me to come preach the gospel and invite the kids to meet Jesus, and hopefully hundreds of kids will get saved. But I’m looking at it going, “Well, it’d be a Friday and a Saturday. Friday night’s date night; Saturday’s family day; Saturday night is family movie night. That’s my life. Can I give away a date night? Can I give away a family day? Can I give away a family movie night?” I’ve got conflicted interests. I would love to see hundreds of high school kids meet Jesus. At the same time, I don’t want to neglect my wife and kids.

See, that’s exactly what Paul is talking about. Some of you are single – you don’t know that. If there’s a need, you just go do it – get off work and go do it. Go teach the Bible Study. Go do the ministry. Go do the counseling appointment. Go do whatever it is you need to do. Once you’re married, it’s different. Now, get this too: there are benefits to being married. There are benefits to being married, right? And there are benefits to being a dad. I love being a dad. I love, love, love being a dad. Here’s my favorite thing: I come home, and Tuesday night – this is my cool thing – we all seven of us lay in the king size bed in my bedroom, and we all snuggle up and watch American Idol.

Now, I don’t love American Idol, but my two older kids are into it, and they’re praying for Chris to win, so vote for Chris, because if he doesn’t win my kids are gonna freak out, and I just can’t handle that. So vote for Chris. But I mean when Paris went this week, I mean my daughter, I mean it was terrible. I mean we had like an hour counseling session just to bring her back. I’m like, “It’s okay. She’ll still get a record deal.” “Are you sure?” “Yeah, I’m sure. She’ll be okay.” “They’re not gonna vote off Chris, are they?” “Oh, no, honey. We’re praying to Jesus. He’ll get ‘er done.”

But I love snuggling up with my kids and being all together and watching them happy. See, there’s great joys in my life from being a husband and father. There’s great joys in my life from doing ministry. But sometimes the two are conflicting. So Paul says if you are single, if you are unmarried, you don’t have those divided loyalties. And that may not be a curse; that may be a blessing for you and for others. I want to state this as clearly as I can. If you’re at Mars Hill, you’re single, you’re unmarried, you’re not junior varsity. You’re not in a holding pattern. You’re not waiting till God would bless you. God is already blessing you.

God has this opportunity for you to draw near to him and to be used significantly in kingdom work, one way or another, in this church, in other ministries, in other ways and areas, to serve. And some of you may be single for a season. Some of you may be single for a long season. Some of you may be single forever. You need to be okay with that, knowing that marriage is wonderful, but it also comes at a high cost of time and energy and freedom in ministry. Now do you get this? And I want to make this plain, too. If the singles left Mars Hill, would this church exist? No. Over half of our people are single.

I don’t know what percentage, but a large percentage of our budget is given by people who are unmarried. Hundreds and thousands and tens of thousands of volunteer hours are given every year to this church, many of them by unmarried people. We have unmarried people in this room that give 20, 30, 40 hours a week free of charge to this church to do ministry. They work a simple job. They keep their life uncluttered and uncomplicated. They make the minimal amount that they need to survive, and they give their time away to others, and you and I are blessed by that.

So we want to honor that. We want to acknowledge that. And even you parents, when you go back there to pick up your kids when we’re done, know

that the vast majority of people who are watching them are unmarried. And they're gonna serve at one service, maybe two, go to a third. They're gonna give half their day off so that you can sit here and go to church and have someone else love your kids. So married and single are both viable. Marriage and single are both honorable. Marriage and single should be put together and not drawn apart.

There shouldn't be a competition about which one of us is really mature. The issue is be holy, be wise, be devoted to the Lord, single or married; doing the piece that God has given you, while appreciating the other pieces of the body of Christ.

And his last point is this: you gotta be reasonable. And this is for dudes. This is the dude rant at the end. I'll get some water. We'll begin in verse 36, and if you are a dude, and you don't know what you're doing, and you don't know what to do with women and courtship and marriage, and you're just lost, lost, lost, you need to download the teaching that's related to singleness and covenant on the website. And you need to go to the men's advanced in a couple weeks, because we'll figure it out for you. "If anyone" – verse 36 – "thinks he is acting improperly toward the virgin he is engaged to" – so there is a dude who was seeing a gal; he put a ring on her finger; they're engaged to be married; but he won't set a date. "Well, I don't know. I'm not sure. We'll talk about that." How many of you ladies have been in perpetual holding patterns, just hovering above the runway, waiting for the dude to set the date?

"I love you." "Where's my ring?" "I love you." "Where's my dress?" "I love you." "Where's my reception? Where are my bridesmaids? Where is my cake?" "If anyone thinks he is acting improperly toward the virgin he is engaged to, and she is getting" – what – "along in years" – right? "I'm running out of eggs – hustle! Hustle!" Because ladies start feeling this about 30 – I don't know what it is. About 30 (whistles) ladies change; start freaking out. "I'm 30. I'm still on the shelf. Nobody's picked me. The expiration date is near. I'm freaking out and running out of eggs. Somebody pick me quick!" At other churches – I know that doesn't happen here.

"If anyone thinks he is acting improperly toward the virgin he is engaged to, and she is getting along in years" – right? She's got a cane, she's like, "Are we gonna go on a honeymoon at some point?" "Yeah." "And he feels he ought to marry her, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning." A dude should do what – a dude should do what, dudes? A dude should do what he wants. What does that imply? A dude knows what he wants. Okay, this is why women hate you, right? This is why. I'll just make it clear. You don't know what you want, so you're like, "Hi, you want to date?" "Yes." "Oh, I don't know. I'm afraid of commitment. My parents got a divorce. I'm insecure. Hidey-hidey-ho!"

"What do you want?" "I don't know." "Then how can I do that?" That's what she's wondering. You need to know what you want. "I want a wife." "I don't want a wife." Just pick a team, and if you don't want a wife, don't date her. It's very confusing. Very – "I want to date you." "Do you want to marry me?" "I don't know." "Well." A dude needs to figure out what a dude wants to do. Do you want to be married? Do you want to be single? Do you want to be married soon? Do you want to be married to her? Do you want to not be married to her? Or do you want to be married down the road? Just freaking figure it out, okay? Just figure out what you want to do.

Some of you dudes, you just lack confidence. You lack courage. You lack clarity. You lack vision. And you don't know what you're doing. And maybe some of you meet a nice gal, and you don't know what to do with her. You're like a dog chasing a fire engine, and he actually got one, and then he doesn't know what to do with a fire engine. You're like that with a girl. "I got one! I got one!" "What are you gonna do with her?" "I have no idea – I don't know what I'm doing." You know, you gotta have a plan. You gotta figure it out, man.

And some dudes, too, they don't know what they want, so they lack courage, confidence. Some of you dudes just lack initiative. I've heard dudes in this church, "I cannot meet a nice girl." They're everywhere! Look! Look! Get up and do this! They're everywhere! What in the world! "I cannot meet a nice girl." That's like being in a doughnut shop, saying, "I cannot find a doughnut." There are thousands. I mean it's just crazy, and some dudes will meet a girl and they're like, "Well, I believe in courtship, and I don't believe in dating, so I don't know where I should start because we're not in courtship." You gotta talk to her at least – you gotta start somewhere! "Hi." Start there. And don't do it like this. I mean some of you guys come in your Star Trek outfit, and you're freaking action figures in each hand, and you walk up to her, and no product in your hair, and you don't look her in the eye. You're like, "If you would think about praying about thinking about being a friend of mine who did have a platonic relationship, I would think about praying about thinking about" – dude, that is the shortcut to the freaking friend zone, I tell you right now! She ain't looking for that. You walk up. You get a shirt with buttons, right? You shave. You bathe. You floss. You get socks that aren't white.

You walk up to her, and you say, "Hello." And you say it deep and dudely, manly, and look her in the eye. "Hello, daughter of Eve." She wants a little freaking confidence. She doesn't want to date the Star Trek guy, the jersey guy, the no product in his hair, belches louder than all the other guys. She doesn't care. So a dude's gotta be a dude. He's gotta say, "You know what, I'm fit for singleness." You say, "Okay, cool. Then don't flirt with her. Don't call her. Don't talk to her. Don't lead her on. Don't confuse her. Let her go. Somebody else will love her. Don't mess with her heart."

You say, "I want to get married." Okay, great. Then get a job. Grow up. Memorize some verses. Stop looking at porn. You know, get it together, and then go after a gal nicely. Respect her. Respect her dad. Respect her friends. Respect her church. Respect her Jesus. Get them all on your team. "Hello." And love them, and then go get married. And if it's not the right time, then don't start dating and flirting until it is time and you're ready. Know what you want, know when you want it, and then get off the bench, gentlemen, and run onto the field, and get it done. That's it. And so many dudes just lack confidence, courage, and clarity, it's unbelievable.

It's the least attractive thing to a woman. It's the least attractive thing. She wants a guy who knows what he's doing. Now, let me say this, dudes: the last thing you want to do, however, is make a long list of things you are looking for. You need two things – three things on your list – I just added one – three things. She's breathing – check. Okay, that's huge; you want a living woman. Two, she loves Jesus – check. Three, she will put up with me. If you can get those three, there is only one woman that meets those three criteria. You should have no more than those. Dudes are like, "I want one who

can rock climb, and who can drive a stick, and who can” – what is wrong with you?

You don't want a woman just like you. So many dudes make a list of what they want, and they want a woman just like them. You do not want a woman just like you. If my wife was just like me, one of us would have to die. That's how it is. I don't want a woman like me. The last thing I want is me. I've lived with me – it's terrible. That's why I'm trying to get somebody else. You don't want to make a long list that is like, "I'm like this, and I like this, and I do this, and I'm into this, and I got a harmonica, and I'm left-handed, and that's what I need." No, you don't. Living, loves Jesus, will put up with you – okay, that's it. After that, all details.

I'll tell you what – right now people are like, "But I like to wakeboard, and I like to snowboard, and I like to go rock climbing, and I like to duh-duh-duh-duh." When you get married, and you have five kids, and you're working a job, and she's pregnant, you're not climbing any rocks. You're going home. All right – had breakfast today, feeling good, nice to be home. I'm just telling you dudes, though, man. I mean a Mars Hill man is supposed to be a man. Shoulders straight, head high, verses memorized, Bible in hand, on a mission, knows what he wants. You want to get married? Great – go for it. Mature, grow up, be responsible, be ready.

You don't want to get married right now, then don't be flirting and breaking hearts. And if you don't want to ever be married, or you don't see that as God's intention for you, then great. Then love the women in the church like sisters – like Paul says, love them like sisters. But don't flirt; don't lead them on. Just wear a button that says, "I have the gift of singleness," so that we all know. This is a great job. Verse 37: "But the man who has settled the matter in his own mind" – right, he knows what he wants – "who is under no compulsion" – he's not already engaged, with a date set, saying, "Well, I don't know" – should've figured that out beforehand.

"Who is under no compulsion but has control over his own will" – he is not gonna be sexually active. He is not gonna be running around committing sexual sin – "who has made up his mind not to marry the virgin," saying, "Nice gal. I don't want to marry her," or, "I don't want to get married right now," or "I don't want to get married at all." Just tell her, lovingly, nicely, cleanly – but be honest and be up-front. "This man also does the right thing. So then, he who married the virgin does right, but he does not marry her does even better." Here's the deal: gentlemen, it all rides on you. You will need to initiate. The woman will respond. You will need to propose. She will accept or decline.

You will need to honor her father, and her family, and her church, and her Lord. And then you will have the right to get to know her. And it is up to you, men. And you must first ask theologically, "Do I believe that I am called to a life of singleness, or do I think that I am going to burn in hell because I can't help myself. I'm a guy who has certain desires." You gotta be honest and answer the theological question. If you believe that you're not gonna make it, you're not built for singleness, you're not built for chastity, you're supposed to be a husband and a dad and a dude, then the dude needs to figure out what the dude wants to do. And practically, the dude needs to ask, "When should I get married?" Second thing the dude must ask, "Who should I marry?"

And then pursue that woman at that time in an honorable way moving toward marriage. That is exactly what Paul is talking about. And you're free not to marry or to marry, but you're not free to be confused and be sexually active but not married, or to be engaged and dating and courting but not intending to marry, or to be engaged and courting but not moving toward marriage. All of which highly frustrates the ladies because they feel that they are in this powerless position whereby if you don't make up their mind, they are just confused and wasting time with you. And so do the ladies a favor and be a man about it, and figure out what you want, and get it done. That is all that Paul is saying.

That is all that Paul is saying. And you are free to marry or not. You are free to marry when, theologically and practically, it makes most sense for you. You are free to marry any woman who loves Jesus, and that her father approves, and that, you know, the pastors at this church give you a green light that you should be married. You're free – there's lots of freedom. But don't exercise your freedom to break women's hearts. Don't exercise your freedom to touch women's bodies. And don't exercise your freedom to do anything less than be holy, wise, devoted to the Lord Jesus, and living a reasonable life with reasonable expectations of others. Amen? That's the deal. I'll pray. It's all quiet now.

It's all quiet now. Dudes are like, "This stinks – I knew it." Ladies are giving their boyfriends the elbow – "That's why I go to Mars Hill. I knew he'd get you." Here's what we're gonna do now: we're gonna respond. Some of you already feel convicted. You say, "Man, I'm dating somebody I shouldn't be. I'm sort of leading somebody on that I really have no intentions with. Physically I've crossed a line and I shouldn't be doing or should not have done what I did. Emotionally I said, 'I love you,' and she's now running toward the altar, and I was an idiot, because I don't think it's gonna work out." You know what, this is where we repent.

We accept and acknowledge and confess our sins to Jesus, who lived without sin. And Jesus was single and unmarried. The Bible says he was tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin. Did he feel lonely? Sure. Did he feel tempted? Sure. Did he ever sin? No. Did he have relationships with women? Sure. Were any of them improper, inappropriate? No. Just friendly, like brothers and sisters. So for those of you who are single, you look to Jesus to realize what singleness is supposed to look like, ideally. And any time we fall short of that, we call that sin, and we confess that to Jesus who died for our sin and rose for our salvation.

And we live a new life empowered by God's grace and formed and instructed by God's Word as Christians. When you become a Christian – and some of you need to become Christians today – and some of you are Christians and need to live as Christians. When you become a Christian, your sex, your friendships, your dating / courting relationships, your marriage, your schedule, your budget – all of that belongs to Jesus. And all of that is to be done in worship of Jesus. So you don't just come here on Sunday to worship God; you leave here, and how you men treat women, and how you women treat men, and how you conduct yourself sexually and physically and financially and with your time, that is all part of your worship of Jesus Christ.

So we ask you to repent of sin, trust in Jesus. When you are prepared, if you are Christian, to partake of communion, which is remembering Jesus'

body and blood, shed for our sin – takes away sin, forgives us, gives us a fresh, clean start. And then we'll sing and celebrate. We'll give our tithes and offerings. If you're a non-Christian or first time visitor, don't give. We're glad to have you. And for those of you who are unmarried and serving here, giving here, participating here, sincerely, I want to on behalf of the elders say thank you. Mars Hill does not exist apart from some holy and devoted unmarried people who make this thing work.

And so Lord Jesus, I pray for those who are married. First of all, that they would not see themselves as necessarily more mature simply because they are married. That they would not have a haughty condition; that they would have a humble condition. That they would open their home and their table and their life to have friendships with unmarried people; to encourage, to walk with unmarried people. God, as they go to pick up their kids I pray that they would thank the unmarried people who watch their kids and have given hours of their day so that they could come to church.

And God, I pray for those of us who are unmarried, whether it's a season or it's a lifetime. Lord Jesus, may we not see it as a curse, but as a gift, and as an opportunity to grow in you and to work with you. And God, I pray that the unmarried people in this church would look at the ministry that has happened through this church, and that they would see that you have used them in a significant way in a city that is largely not Christian, that is largely not married, that is largely not sexually pure. That they are setting an example; they are raising up a standard; and they are doing the kingdom work in the least church city in the country, and that God is blessing the labor of their hands.

May they be encouraged.

And Jesus, please forgive us of our sins. Cleanse us of our unrighteousness, and allow us to be a holy people we pray in your good name. Amen.

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