

2 – *Single in the Family*

11.12.2017 1 Corinthians 7:7-8, 17, 31-35 Bland Mason

BIG Idea: Being single means living out your purpose today.

INTRODUCTION

- Last week we started a series on singleness. We highlighted that 50% of CoaH adults are single and we live in one of the highest concentration of young adult singles in the country. We talked about some of the attitudes toward singleness – on one hand many churches have given the subtle or not so subtle message that singleness is not God’s plan and you if you end up 30 or older and single something is wrong.
- Last week we focused on the idea that singleness magnifies Christ and his kingdom in a unique way. And the reason it does is because the Kingdom is ultimate. All other types of relationships are secondary to the kingdom of God. This means singles have the ability to magnify that in a special way.
- One CoaH put it this way when asked what the purpose of singles in the church: “To paint a picture of a diverse, forever family not related by blood. To me, singleness is a beautiful picture of the NT church -- one where people can be adopted into the family no matter where they came from and live transformed lives not about themselves.”
- If you are married and this is your first Sunday, you might be thinking, “We visited the wrong week.” BUT let me encourage you that this message and this series is just as much for married people as singles. Married couples in Jesus’ family are to think rightly about their single brothers and sisters and to press into being family with them.
- My vision would be to see CoaH as a place where singles of all ages have close relationships with people of all kinds – young, old, married, singles, parents, youth, etc. That will only happen if we all see singleness the way God sees singles – as an essential part of the family of God.
- That was our focus last week. Today I want us to look at what singles in the family are to do. What would Jesus have you to do as a single person and how can married people be a part of that?
- **BIG IDEA: Being single means living out your purpose today.** Let’s turn to 1 Corinthians 7...

1 Corinthians 7:7-8, 17, 31-35

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.*

¹⁷ *Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him.*

³¹ *For the present form of this world is passing away.*

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.*

- Paul is helping us to see the beauty of living the single life. He calls singles to do 3 things here: contend for contentment, serve with undivided devotion, and keep hoping in Jesus.

1. Contend for Contentment

- Let me say right off the bat that contentment is not “giving up” or saying that as things stand today they are “awesome.” That is NEVER the biblical vision of contentment. Contentment means resting in God in the midst of your circumstances, whatever they may be, and trusting that he has you there right now.

1 Cor 7:7 *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.* (The Message) *“Sometimes I wish everyone were single like me—a simpler life in many ways! But*

celibacy is not for everyone any more than marriage is. God gives the gift of the single life to some, the gift of the married life to others.

God says it's a gift. God has set you up so that you are maximally positioned to fulfill your purpose. But learning to see your situation as a gift means walking by faith doesn't it? Faith says, "This isn't the story I'd have written for myself but it is what God has written for me today." It is saying, "Today, God's gift to me is singleness."

- Being content is challenging for many singles, even when they recognize that God has them single now. Unfortunately circumstances around them often don't encourage contentment. When asked, "What is the worst thing about being single?" one CoaH Single wrote: "a) Expectations/pressure, i.e., the societal expectation that a romantic relationship is the source of true happiness and fulfillment (or specifically in a church context, marriage is an "ultimate goal" of sorts). I feel significant pressure from parents, friends, peers, society, and ultimately myself to either be in a romantic relationship or be actively looking for one. b) Loneliness."
- Often times culture as a whole and even the people around singles make comments about being in a romantic relationship that creates pressure. Sometimes pressures around them can push single people into a deep personal struggle that they don't feel free to really talk about.
- Because this pain is real, contentment is something you have to fight for. You have to believe that your contentment is not based on right circumstances but a right relationship with God.
- The Apostle Paul spoke about finding our contentment in Jesus. Philippians 4:11–13 *Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*
- So, despite what some professional sports Athletes do with Phil 4:13, it is in the context of finding contentment in whatever circumstances you are in because of Jesus.
- In another place, Paul shares about suffering in weakness and highlights the upside down nature of the kingdom. 2 Corinthians 12:10 - *For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.* (ESV)
- This means as a single, when you are weak and feeling lonely and disconnected you CAN be strong in Jesus. He becomes your peace and contentment, while your circumstances scream that you should NOT be content.
- This will require you to ask the question, "What is keeping me from being content in Jesus TODAY?" Maybe it's a false view of your situation as a single, like you are being punished or aren't good enough for marriage. Maybe it's an idol of marriage that you have built. Maybe it's worry about the future. If you are single or married, I just want to challenge you what is keeping you from being content in Jesus TODAY?
- We have to contend for contentment. Secondly, Paul calls singles to...

2. Serve with Undivided Devotion

- In our culture the purpose of singleness is supposed to be "self-discovery" and in some church circles the purpose of your singleness seems to be to find a spouse. But the Christian vision of the single life is much higher and more beautiful. Paul would say the single life is a life of "self-sacrifice for the sake of others."

- Your singleness gives you a unique ability to work hard for Kingdom Causes. This is Paul's point in vv.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.***

- Paul says that the single person can focus on the “Things of the Lord” and “how to be holy in body and spirit.” Being holy means being set apart for God.
- ILL – when I’m at Fenway before a game I occasionally get to see the game balls. They are carefully protected and maintained. There are lots of ball around the park. There are balls in the batting cages. There are balls in the bullpen where guys throw. There are balls on the field during batting practice. BUT NO ONE touches the game balls. You don’t get to just toss them around. They are SET ASIDE for a special purpose.
- Paul says single people have the ability to be set apart in a unique way for God. In v.35 he says they can have an “undivided devotion to the Lord.”
- This is NOT about whose life does a better job of glorifying God. This is about the practical realities of Christian service. Single people are in a position to serve God and people in a single-minded, undivided way. As I mentioned last week I have to consider Teresa and my kids if I want to serve in a new way but the single person doesn’t have to consider a spouse and their needs.
- We had 2 amazing single ladies give 6 weeks in China this summer. I can’t go for 6 weeks. Very few if any married people can do that and even if they do, they have to work through it with their spouse to make that decision.
- Some of our families are considering foster care of adoption but so are some of our singles. The single person can step into that without the consideration of a spouse. This is the opportunity the single person has to serve with an undivided heart.
- Many of you singles are serving in awesome ways. Whether it is stepping up in CoaH kids, the welcome ministry, serving through our relationship with Brookline Housing, volunteering in the community.
- One CoaH single: “there are many singles who are incredibly involved at CoaH and help run and execute various ministries, and volunteer at the events, and shouldn’t have more piled on them. I think that's one reason being married or married with children scares me, because I don't want it to change my heart for the church and serving.”
- For the singles who do serve, “Thank you!” I would encourage those of you who maybe aren’t leveraging your singleness to serve, how can you serve others? Ask Jesus to help you to see his purpose in your singleness today.
- ILL – One of the enemies of this contentment and undivided devotion we are talking about is the Entertainment/technology. Research is showing that social media breeds discontentment in your heart. As we see someone on Instagram with their awesome life – they’ve got an awesome spouse, an awesome job, an awesome home, awesome friends, eats at awesome place and even their dog seems awesome, research shows we experience jealousy and discontentment with our life. The clincher on the whole thing is the other person’s perfectly curated life is a LIE. Even if it is perfect today, it doesn’t last. No one gets through this life unscathed by brokenness.
- Not only can it keep you from being content but in general our phones can also distract us from serving. If you are single you can even more easily distract yourself because you may not have someone to say, “Hey, you’ve been staring at your phone for the last five hours.” You can binge watch an entire season of a show in one night. Being in the DR last week was great... I experienced the same thing in Haiti a couple of years ago... no phone, more present in the moment. I saw people, smelled the air, took in my environment. More present in conversations. I NEED to make some changes in how I relate to my phone. It is distracting me and I feel like I’m not the only on here.
- Serving Jesus requires devotion and for the single person you have the opportunity to have an undivided devotion.

3. Keep hoping in Jesus

v.31 - *For the present form of this world is passing away.*

- Paul is helping to remind us that this world is not ultimate. Marriage is not ultimate. Children are not ultimate. The kingdom of God is ultimate and everything else is in the process of passing away. For the single person this means that the greatest hope you should have in your heart is not marriage (though it is not a bad hope), it is the return of Jesus. And in the meantime, Jesus has given you a privileged opportunity to make a kingdom impact that transcends having a spouse or even children.
- Isaiah 56:3-5 [3] *Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD say, "The LORD will surely separate me from his people"; and let not the eunuch say, "Behold, I am a dry tree."* [4] *For thus says the LORD: "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, [5] I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.*
- Those who are in a covenant relationship with God discover to their everlasting joy that their heritage isn't in this world. Not children, or a family, or anything temporary. But it's an eternal prize. Best part. He'll give it "in my house and in my walls" eunuchs were not allowed into the temple or "house of God" or inside the walls. They were a part of the covenant community but they couldn't come inside.
- But God promises a day when they will stand in his presence and receive something better than sons and daughters. They will be highly honored by God. Even if their society wrongly considered them second-class citizens. God sets up a monument. A monument tells everyone. Look what my servant has done. THIS is a person who deserves to be honored.

ILL - I think of Louie and Shelly Giglio – who lead the Passion Movement – have never had kids. If you were to ask Louie and Shelley they would share with you that they are fixing their hope on Jesus and the promise that they are doing something even better than having children. And as this world passes away and the Kingdom of God overtakes the kingdom of man once and for all, and the promise God gives is that Louie and Shelly will be honored with an everlasting name better than sons and daughters.

How can married help singles contend for contentment, serve with undivided devotion, and hope in Jesus?

- When I asked singles at CoaH one of the things they highlighted was married people inviting singles into their lives and homes. They know our marriages aren't perfect and our kids can be difficult and our lives can be messy but they want in on it all. I think this is something married people can do.
- ILL - One idea that has stuck with me for several years is more than just having each other over but actually sharing our homes as an extended family. Steve Timmis, executive director of the Acts29 church planting network, which we are a part of, planted a church in Sheffield, England around 25 years ago. I was talking with him a few years ago and he shared that it is actually pretty unusual for married couples to live by themselves. Many of them have a few singles that live with them. This is what his daughter grew up in. When she got married she asked her dad if she and her husband could take the first year to just live alone. He said "of course!" Steve found out they had someone move in with them after only a few months.
- Years ago a CoaH couple invited a CoaH single to live with them. It was a year but it was an amazing experience for them as they really shared life together. Teresa and I had a CoaH single live with our family for 6 months a few years and are talking about what we will do when Sarah leaves for college in a couple of years.
- ILL – this type of living – where unrelated people live together and try to create community is actually on the rise in New York. An article last year in the New Yorker, called "Happy Together" highlighted how many people are stepping into this arrangement. My thought is, what if the church did this? I'm not saying everyone must do this but simply, how would it impact us as a church if in 5 years if married couples and singles shared their lives by sharing their homes?

John 17:20–23

“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.”

COMMUNION

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