

Renewed Singleness and Dating
All Things New #7 | 1 Corinthians 7:32-38
February 13, 2022

Pre-Sermon Remarks

- Renewal of all things! Today, singleness and dating.
- Happy Valentine's Day. I swear I did not do this on purpose.
- Heads up for parents: some talk of sexuality today. Never gratuitous, but frank

PRAYER

Introduction | Why talk about singleness and dating?

Especially in a church where such a large percentage of the people here are married

1. Young people are all currently single
2. Delayed - for some, that season has lasted longer than you thought
3. Specific calling - more on that in a few minutes
4. Death: unlikely to die at the same time, so 50% chance of being single again
 - a. Side note: both my grandmas have been in dating relationships since widowhood
5. Divorce: sadly, some of our marriages may not make it. Let's beat the statistics, but reality

Personal acknowledgement: I am the worst person to talk about singleness and dating

- Met my wife at 14 yrs old, married at 18 | Nate Bargatze quote

Big idea: No matter your station or season in life, pursue wholehearted devotion to Christ.

- *Paul in 1 Corinthians 7: Married? Single? Widowed? Don't try to change your life.*

³⁵ I am saying this for your own benefit, not to put a restraint on you, but to promote what is proper and so that you may be devoted to the Lord without distraction.

Renewed Singleness

1. Singleness is not a deficiency | 1 Corinthians 7:38
 - a. All throughout this passage, Paul's writing sounds striking
 - i. ³⁸ So, then, he who marries his fiancée does well, but he who does not marry will do better.
 1. In line w/ Jesus' teaching in Matthew 22 (like the angels)
 - b. Shocking to both the religious and the irreligious
 - i. Religious: elevation of marriage beyond God's communication | Gen 2
 - ii. Irreligious: deepest longings of the human heart are found in romance
 1. Marriage was practical, romance was with a lover
 - c. Selfishly single? Possible. But selfishly married? Also possible.
 - d. Jesus' earthly life and ministry lived as a single, young man. Was he deficient?
2. Singleness is a gift from God | 1 Corinthians 7:7
 - a. If the last one was a corrective to those who are married, this might be a corrective to those who are unmarried

- b. ⁷ I wish that all people were as I am. But each has his own gift from God, one person has this gift, another has that.
 - i. **Sam Allberry** I once received a gift from a local friend so bad that it meant having to leave it at a thrift shop in another town to avoid the risk of the giver coming across it and realizing what I'd done.
 - c. Later in 1 Cor, spiritual gifts listed, but we don't often loop in singleness
 - i. Representative lists in Romans 12 and 1 Cor 12
 - ii. Temporal gifts that are given just for a season?
 - iii. Freedom from the difficulties/distractions of married life (1 Cor 7:32-35)
 - d. Again, this is revolutionary thinking from Apostle Paul
 - i. To be unmarried back then was to be vulnerable
 - ii. To be unmarried now (or at least uncoupled)
 - e. All spiritual gifts are given for the building up of the body of Christ
3. Singleness may be a calling from God | 1 Corinthians 7:24, Matthew 18:11-12
- a. ²⁴ Brothers and sisters, each person is to remain with God in the situation in which he was called.
 - i. For most people, it's just a phase. But for some, it's a calling.
 - b. Specific ministry endeavor | 1 Corinthians 7:6 (I wish all were like me)
 - c. Sacrificial obedience | Matthew 18:11-12
 - i. Humanity and marriage teachings | historic, orthodox understanding
 - ii. Recognition that people experience different desires
 - iii. Some are called to forego marriage and full expression of sexuality

Matthew 18 ¹⁰ His disciples said to him, "If the relationship of a man with his wife is like this, it's better not to marry." ¹¹ He responded, "Not everyone can accept this saying, but only those to whom it has been given. ¹² For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb, there are eunuchs who were made by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves that way because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who is able to accept it should accept it."

Bekah Mason At the height of the purity culture movement, I was a high school student terrified by my attractions and wondering when God was going to give me a miraculous healing followed by a husband and kids. Same-sex attraction was condemned as something that separated me from God, no matter how much I loved Jesus.

Instead of finding support for a probable lifetime as a single Christian, I consistently faced people who were well intentioned but determined to just find me a husband. Yet I stayed, despite loneliness, misunderstanding, and conversational homophobia. I stuck it out because of my deep conviction that my life as a celibate gay Christian was just as much a walking picture of the gospel as any of the marriages I encountered at church.

Even today, I experience these same tensions in the church. What has changed, though, are my expectations for how God meets my human need for support and relational intimacy. Instead of

longing for marriage, I embrace the deeply connected friends in my life and intentionally cultivate those relationships for a lifetime of love and support.

[I]n a world motivated by the twin mantras of “follow your heart” and “live your truth,” who better to demonstrate a countercultural lifestyle than those who could easily find love and acceptance in both progressive churches and secular culture at large, yet choose to remain faithful to God’s design?

By way of example, a friend of mine recently relayed a comment he received from a teen at his church. The student thanked him for talking to the youth group about his sexuality and commitment to celibacy. “You’re the first person I’ve met in church who is really giving something up for Jesus,” he said.

- For those of you who experience same-sex attraction and desires, we want you to know that you are not a freak, unlovable, or a problem to be solved.
- We want our church to be the kind of church where we can all bring our minds, hearts, and desires into the light and find others who will help others follow Jesus in obedience.
 - For some, that might include a specific calling to be unmarried and chaste

Renewed Dating | Personal Preparation

1. Pursue godliness | back to our big idea, the goal of any season of life is devotion to Christ
2. Pursue self-awareness | Rom. 12:3 *don’t think too highly of yourself, but with sober judgment*
 - a. Ps. 52:5 *Why are you so downcast, o my soul?*
3. Pursue friendships | more on this next week, but there is a strong sociological link between healthy friendships and healthy marriages. **Cross training.**

Renewed Dating | Getting Started

*No one-single right way to begin the romantic relationship.

- Arranged marriages might be the most “biblical”
 - Matchmakers (people) and dating services have their place
 - NYT “It’s Nice to Hear You” takes cues from shows like “The Dating Game” in which contestants get to know their prospective partners without seeing them. It follows three couples who correspond once a day for 30 days via voice memo, without exchanging photos or other identifying details. “You’re not being distracted by what someone looks like or what’s in their background,” Heather Li, the show’s creator, said. “I think it’s harder to prejudge someone if you don’t have as many data points.”
 - Probably best for romance to grow out of friendship
1. Begin with the goal in mind |
 - a. Prepare yourself financially
 - b. No casual hookups, no aimless dating
 2. Don’t settle, but be realistic
 3. Involve friends and family | community project
 - a. But also “leaving father and mother”

Renewed Dating | Leveling Up

1. Build on spirituality and friendship
2. Regularly reassess the relationship |
 - a. Practical wisdom: 3 month cycles
 - b. How long to date or be engaged?
3. Embrace the tension | Paul's burning with passion

Engagement and Marriage

If we are to pursue wholehearted devotion to Jesus, we need to know two things:

1. No matter your current situation, the future is incredibly bright
2. No matter your season or calling, Jesus understands and cares

John 14 ¹ Don't let your heart be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. ² In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? ³ If I go away and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am you may be also.

Sam Andreas Given what a bridegroom had to do to prepare a life for his intended, this is basically a marriage proposal...Jesus said his words on the evening before he was going to pay the *mohar*, or bridal price, with his blood...In Jewish custom of the time, several years might separate the betrothal from the marriage as the groom prepared the rooms. We are now living in that time of waiting before Christ's second coming, his return to get us for the "marriage" of heavenly union with him.

...It may be uncomfortable to think about Jesus speaking this way to a group of guys in a closed room. But Jesus is ever one to be free with his metaphors. Soon after, he takes to calling them orphans. Just as God is a father to orphans and a husband to widows, so also he is a fiancé to single folks. If you allow him to be that, he is enough for you. If he is your ultimate date, you can date well. If he is not, you are liable to lack the inner strength to treat your dates as they need to be, or to be treated by them as you need to be.