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For Grandparents, Parents and Seniors

By Rick Shrader

The Gift of Singleness

Singleness is a unique time in life that we all experience at least once. We all start out single until we decide to get married. But even married people may end their life single if their spouse dies first. There are other situations where a person may be single also. The Bible is not silent on this unique time of life.

The biblical picture

Though the Old Testament gives a more negative view of singleness, the New Testament gives a far more acceptable view. Uniquely, Jesus, John the Baptist, and Paul were single (Paul's marital background is less known) whereas some apostles were married as well as the Lord's brothers (1 Cor 9:5). Jesus referred to some men who "made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of God's sake" (Matt 11:11-12). Many consider this to be a "self-imposed renunciation of marriage." The apostle Paul mentions a "gift" of singleness given to some by God (1 Cor 7:7).

Single as youth

We enter our teen years single having become aware of our God-given sexuality as male or female in His image (Gen 1:27). Good and godly instruction during these years teaches us that purity is God's will while we are single and a precious gift to give to a spouse if we get married. Even if we do eventually marry (as most do), these single years present a number of admonitions. 1) We shouldn't seek only to be married, nor "take any plane that is leaving the airport." 2) Being the right person allows us to find the right person. 3) Learning to resist temptations of the flesh and worldly allurements is good for singleness and marriage. 4) Finding accountability in family, good friends, church, and Scripture is at the core of our faith.

Single my choice

Both the decision to remain single and the decision to marry should be made confidently in God's will. The decision to remain single may be made for a few reasons. 1) Paul says one may remain single during times of distress (1 Cor 7:26) or simply because it is good "for a man not to touch a woman" i.e., not to have sexual relations (7:1) during this time of life. 2) Even if one is waiting for a mate, self-control is a biblical imperative (7:8-9). 3) Singleness may be God's gift, "For I wish that all men were even as I myself, but each one has his own gift from God" (7:7). This is a specific giftedness God gives a man or a woman to remain single for life in order to serve God in a greater way than if married. Just as newlyweds surrender their virginity to one another, a single person surrenders his/her virginity to the Lord for service. It is a unique gift.

Single not by choice

Churches are full of people who have found themselves single but not by their specific choice. 1) As we have mentioned, all young people are single until they get married. We are usually busy instructing and mentoring them for later life. 2) There are many more divorced people in our churches than ever before. There are biblical places for them to serve. It is a good probability that if this person has remained faithful to church, divorce was probably not his/her desire. 3) We always have widows and widowers in church. We have great examples in Scripture of widows (Anna in Luke 2, a widow for 84 years) and a whole chapter given to their ministry and care (1 Tim 5).

Serving God in any capacity is the greatest gift of all. "And His mercy is on those who fear Him From generation to generation" (Luke 1:50).

The Shrinking Ministry

This is the third part (of three) of an article I wrote last year and didn't print. Many good reasons for this problem have been offered and a number of good solutions suggested. In previous sections of this article I had mentioned various sources. Here I add my own suggested solutions to the list. Here is part three.

Are there solutions? Taking the four sources I've mentioned, there are some 19-20 "reasons" (many overlapped) given for the decline. Also, from these sources there are some 17-18 "solutions" offered. Space does not allow me to list them but they are easily accessible. I will add a few of my own. 1) I concur with the need often mentioned for better mentoring of young men and more intentional presenting of the "call" of God to ministry and the "surrender" of a man to God's call. Kroll added the "burning of the bridge" behind a man who answers God's call. This is a proper emphasis for youth camps and mission trips, but why not for our pulpits and classrooms as well? 2) Here is a suggestion that always has many opinions: With so many churches on the verge of closing or giving up, I believe we need to be more open to accepting men of varying educational backgrounds for varying levels of ministry opportunities, even godly and intelligent laymen. There are many churches and ministries where a seminary education is necessary, but there are many ministries where college level or institute level preparation would be welcomed. After all, most of our theological schools started as Bible institutes (including Spurgeon's and Moody's) when other schools could not supply the need and then grew into their current status. Today, a young man accepting a position in a needy church can easily further his education online while gaining valuable experience. 3) We have many good and qualified men serving in associate roles who could and should move on to leadership roles. I realize there are many obstacles for such a man and his family including finances and location, but the churches have needs and these men are able to fill those needs. I know of single men and women who have moved to far-off locations just to find a church to which they could be of some help—and they are warmly welcomed. 4) There are many small rural churches that are being ignored by young men due to various reasons. Perhaps it would require a by-vocational situation for a while (not always) and would bring little or no personal recognition. Perhaps a man would have to be more traditional

than he would like. I believe these churches afford a great place to learn to preach, administrate, love people, marry them and bury them. After all, isn't that ministry? In addition, these situations allow a man to study, grow, even continue his education and these churches would love to have them. 5) It has been observed by others that we are already seeing older pastors staying longer in their ministry than they had planned. Some are also coming back into ministry or taking a part-time ministry role to help a church. Some are serving as the interim pastor to help a church until they find a permanent pastor. 6) I have read of two or three rural churches sharing a "circuit-riding" pastor. A man may be able to preach at one church in the morning and another in the afternoon or evening. This isn't best but it may keep a church going until a more permanent person can be found. Some state representatives have done this already from time to time. 7) All local churches should, and I believe want to, raise up their own young men to eventually come into a pastoral position. Circumstances, however, become the overriding factor in the ability to do this, even if the desire is there. Yet, strong Christian families should be purposeful in raising their children so that God may work His will and calling in their lives.

In Addition:

All of our fundamental and conservative churches and ministries need to re-evaluate where we came from and why we are here. The church at Ephesus was scolded by Jesus for leaving her first love. The solution was to remember, repent, redo, or else be removed (Rev 2:5). There was no more strategic church in the first century than Ephesus. However, in 30 years, with such leadership as Paul, Timothy, and John, it had lost its way and needed to go back to the basics. The pull from culture today is worse than it was then. Churches and movements often lose their way in a generation or two. Perhaps it is time for us to remember where we came from, repent of where we are headed, and redo our purpose before we are removed due to ineffectiveness. Some churches may need to change from some older ways, and other churches need to return back from newer ways that have hurt more than they have helped. One thing is for sure, the local church of the New Testament is God's method. There are good reasons why the basic format has been blessed by God for hundreds of years.