

# G P S

## For Grandparents, Parents and Seniors

By Rick Shrader

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### The Five Phases of Parenting (Phase 2)

**Note:** This series will consist of five phases: Created-parenting, Pre-parenting, Parenting, Post-parenting, and Grand-parenting. Each of these phases will have four sections.

#### Second Phase: Pre-Parenting (series articles 5-8)

##### Section 1. The Single Stage—Purity (article #5)

“But I say to the unmarried and to the widows; it is good for them if they remain even as I am; but if they cannot exercise self control, let them marry” (1 Cor. 7:8-9).

##### What About singleness?

Elisabeth Elliot wrote, “Single life may be only a stage of a life’s journey, but even a stage is a gift. God may replace it with another gift, but the receiver accepts His gifts with thanksgiving. This gift for this day” (*Let Me Be a Woman*).

A universal situation. We all start out in life single. We are born into a family situation to teach us how to live with other people. Our pre-adult years allow us to observe married life and later make a life’s choice ourselves. Most will choose marriage and family life and fewer will not. The single life comes to people in various ways. Some will choose the single life permanently, some will experience the pain of divorce and become single again, some will lose their spouse to illness or tragedy at various ages of life, and older married people will lose their spouse and find themselves alone at the end of life. There are more “singles” around than we realize. However, the decision to remain single for life is unique among these.

Biblical examples. Jesus was single and Peter was married. We know Paul as single though some believe he could have been married at one time. In defense of his single tent-making ministry, Paul said, “Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?” (1 Cor. 9:5). Yet Paul remained single, writing, “I suppose therefore that this is good because of the present distress—that it is good for a

man to remain as he is: Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife” (1 Cor. 7:26-27).

Singleness as a gift. Paul again writes, “For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that. But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am” (1 Cor. 7:7-8). Jesus also said, “There are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of God’s sake. He who is able to accept it, let him accept it” (Matt. 19:12). God may give this “gift” to a few men or women, yet it does not make one superior or inferior. It is in many ways a difficult path but one that can hold many rewards in the Christian life.

##### God’s Will for Singles.

Christopher Ash wrote, “I know which ‘gift’ I have by a very simple test: if I am married, I have the gift of marriage; if I am not married, I have the gift of being unmarried” (*Married for God*). Ash’s point is simply that God has given us the circumstance we’re presently in and, until He changes it, this is His will for now. However, though a married person should not seek to be unmarried, an unmarried person may indeed seek God’s will about being married.

Single as an option. Paul wrote, “He who is unmarried cares for the things that belong to the Lord—how he may please the Lord” (1 Cor. 7:32). Paul is not placing one above the other, he is merely stating the facts. A single person is free from marriage responsibilities and can do things the married person cannot, or, as in verse 35, “that you may serve the Lord without distraction.” But he also warns, “Nevertheless he who stands steadfast in his heart, having no necessity, but has power over his own will, and has so determined in his heart that he will keep his virgin, does well” (vs. 37). That is, for the Lord’s service he will not marry his virgin girlfriend. A preferable view on “his virgin” would be “his betrothed” (ESV, NIV, HBSB note), rather than “daughter” (always in italics). The Greek word “virgin” (*parthenon*) refers simply to a single person as in

verses 25 and 34 (see a longer explanation of this issue in Gordon Fee in *First Corinthians*). The single person must determine that he (or she) has the will-power to remain unmarried and can offer his or her celibacy as a sacrifice to God in undistracted service (vs. 35).

Marriage as an option. Paul also wrote, “But he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he may please his wife” (1 Cor. 11:33). Here again Paul is simply stating the facts. Most of us chose to be married and serve the Lord with a believing spouse (“only in the Lord” 7:39). This advantage in life is well explained in Ephesians 5 as a life that mirrors the Bridegroom and His bride the church. As there are advantages to the single life, there are advantages to the married life. We may remind ourselves again that we start out single in life and may end up single. God allows for remarriage after the death of a spouse for the very reason that a partner in marriage is a good thing (Rom. 7:2). If singleness is not your gift, “Let him do what he wishes; he does not sin; let them marry” (1 Cor. 7:36).

Seeking God’s will. Can a single person ask God which path he or she should take in life? I believe so. “He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the Lord” (Prov. 18:22). John MacArthur said, “If it is God’s will for you to be married, he will provide a spouse in His perfect timing. If it is not His will, He will give you grace to live a single life” (*The Divorce Dilemma*). These decisions can’t be made too early in life. It will take the young adult years, when the temptations in life increase, to see what your gift may be. If you are asking whether to remain single, your question to God will be “what?” If you are asking whether to become married, your question to God will be “who?” Paul concluded by writing, “And this I say for your own profit, not that I may put a leash on you, but for what is proper, and that you may serve the Lord without distraction” (1 Cor. 7:35).

### Set Apart in Singleness.

God said, “It is not good that man should be alone” (Gen. 2:18). This was for several reasons: we need help in life; we desire companionship; but also because God made us sexual creatures with the physical ability to reproduce. In fact, God commanded Adam and Eve to multiply and fill the earth. Yet, because we find that singleness may be a gift from God, it could be your desire to live without the advantages of married life.

The headship of Christ. A marriage is a combination of the husband as the head and the wife as submissive to her husband. But a single person has only himself or herself. It is important therefore to remember that we all have Jesus Christ as our Head, and that we are all submissive to Him (1 Cor. 11:1-3). A woman who chooses not to marry must rely independently on her submissiveness to Christ without the advantage of a husband as her intermediate head. Elisabeth Elliot, again, wrote that though a woman is

made to be a wife, “the special vocation of the virgin is to surrender herself for service to her Lord and for the life of the world.” (“The Essence of Femininity”).

Purity to Christ and one’s future. Whether a single woman or man, and whether single by choice or situation, the single person must be pure in body and spirit. A human being must eat and sleep, but a human being doesn’t have to have a sexual life. This is why singleness is a gift from God so that a person has the “giftedness” to refrain from those desires. This includes the proper desires toward the opposite sex and the illicit desires toward the same sex (contrary to some today who argue for that attraction). God cannot bless, lead, or work through any person who is not pure in this regard, whether married or single. “Now she who is really a widow, and left alone, trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day. But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives. And these things command, that they may be blameless” (1 Tim. 5:5-7).

Neither life is essential. A Christian may choose singleness or marriage without sinning or being a lesser servant of God. The biblical examples, especially of Jesus, Peter, and Paul, show us that either life can be blessed. In fact, in our heavenly life, though we will know our earthly loved ones, including our beloved spouse, we will not be encumbered by the necessity to marry (Matt. 22:30). However, our earthly journey has choices with limitations. The choice to remain single may limit a man in ministry and yet may enhance a woman in missionary service. A man who works as a traveling man, perhaps an over-the-road driver, must know his limitations. A woman who lives alone must be especially careful and protective of her living situation. Widows and widowers must decide if they can live alone in their elderly years. They must also decide whether remarriage is wise for them. The single mother has other lives to consider than just her own.

The body of Christ, whether local or at large, is blessed to have many single people in it, perhaps more today than ever before. Timothy’s church in his youth was blessed to have both Lois and Eunice in it as single parents (or divided households). Timothy himself was an example of purity as a single minister (1 Tim. 4:12). Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, and other women such as Mary Magdalene, were great helpers to the Lord. There were many others including some of the Lord’s disciples. These serve as examples of how the church can be blessed by the life and ministry of singles in its midst.