

Sermon – Singleness
Sunday November 6, 2024

We're in a series on Biblical Sexuality. This is a delicate and often emotionally-charged topic. We live in a world where there are so many diverse messages and opinions around this topic. In some ways, it would be easier to avoid talking about it.

But we believe it's important to understand what the Bible teaches on it. Sexuality is a profound part of who we are. You and I are created as relational beings in God's image, so we need to understand God's design and purposes for our sexuality.

- Pastor Steve kicked off our series by exploring key aspects of what the Bible teaches on sexuality.
- Last week Pastor Andrew talked about marriage.
- Today, we'll be talking about singleness.
- Next week Pastor Steve will be exploring at what the Bible teaches on same-sex sexuality.
- And then Pastor Kevin will wrap up our series by talking about the challenges young people face when it comes to sexuality.

Just a few comments before we get started.

1. First, this is a PG-13 kind of series. So if you happen to have kids with you right now, this would be a good time to make any adjustments you feel you need to make.
2. We're dealing with big topics in this series so our messages will be longer than usual. But don't worry, we've adjusted other parts of our worship service so you'll likely make it home by dinner.
3. We know these messages have generated a lot of discussion – which is good. And we want to encourage you, When you talk, keep your conversations gracious and respectful. These topics can be deeply personal and sensitive for many people. So even in areas where people don't see eye-to-eye, we encourage you to maintain a posture of humility. We make space for people so that we can learn from their stories and perspectives - so let's seek to listen more than we speak.

Finally, I just want to share my heart. When I found out I'd be preaching in this series and on the topic of singleness I was really nervous. I know many of you here are experiencing pain around your sexuality and singleness. I also know that being married with children, there are things I don't understand or experience.

So I want to thank you for all your prayers and for your understanding. Like the other pastors, I've poured in lots of time studying for this, more so than for any other message I've preached. I've prayed. I talked with many single people to hear their stories and perspectives and to get feedback on this message.

And my heart is that you would be encouraged today; that God's love would draw you closer to him, that God's love would lead you into a journey of learning and healing. And if anything I say causes pain or makes you want to walk away from God, please know that's not my intention; it's just the limitations of my perspective and ability as a preacher. So if there are any ways I can learn and grow, please send me a message.

So with that, let's get started!

How many of you have heard the term soul mate? What's a soul mate?

A soul mate is the person you believe you're destined to be with. Someone with whom you share a deep and natural connection. Someone who perfectly understands you, complements you and completes you.

Now where did this idea come from?

Many people trace it back to the philosopher Plato. In his work *The Symposium*, he explores themes of love and beauty. He writes about how human beings used to be a big round blob with four arms, four legs and two faces. These beings became too powerful however, so the gods decided to split them in two.

That's why human beings now are incomplete. That's why we yearn to find our other half, our soul mate so that we can be whole again.

At least, that's the myth Plato wrote two thousand years ago. But it's not like we actually believe it right? It's not like we believe our lives are incomplete and empty until we find the one... right?

If that's true, then do we seem to believe that romantic love is the key to happiness?

- We hear about it in all our songs.
- Movies portray single people as desperate to find love.
- One of the most famous movie scenes is in Jerry Maguire where he expresses his love with these three words – "You complete me."

We seem to think that if you're single, you're incomplete. Our society excludes singles from activities. We make them feel less than. We pressure them to conform to society's expectations.

Now how do you think this make single people feel?

In preparing for this message, I talked to a number of people who shared things like:

- It feels like life is a ladder and everyone's trying to climb to the top to get married. Meanwhile I'm left here at the bottom still single.
- I know in my head that I'm complete but I often feel inadequate.
- Being with couples and families sometimes reminds me of the things I don't have but I want.

The message the world tells us is, Romantic love is the key to happiness. But the message single people hear is: There's something wrong with you because you're not in a relationship.

Is that the message we get from the Bible? In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul says,

I wish everyone were single, just as I am. Yet each person has a special gift from God, of one kind or another. (1 Corinthians 7:7)

What's Paul saying here? He's not saying, If you're single, your life is empty because you don't have a spouse. He's not saying, If you're single, there's something wrong with you – and by the way you should

meet my friend who would be a perfect match. What does he say? He says, If you're single, that's a good thing. And I know because I'm single too; singleness is a wonderful gift from God.

Some people have said that singleness is a gift no one wants. Some people have said that singleness is a gift they wish they could return.

But what does Paul mean when he talks about the gift of singleness?

Many people think he's saying that singleness is a spiritual gift. A spiritual gift is an ability God gives certain people to accomplish a task. So people assume that the gift of singleness is an ability God gives certain people to be single. And if you have that gift, you're called to live a life of singleness.

But is that what Paul means?

- Because what if you're single but you don't have that gift?
- Or what if you have that gift but you want to be in a relationship?
- Or what if you have the gift but you still find being single hard?

Here's the thing. This isn't what Paul means at all because the gift of singleness isn't a spiritual gift. How do we know? Because whenever Paul describes a spiritual gift, he actually calls it a spiritual gift.

For example, in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul talks about spiritual gifts like the gift of wisdom, knowledge and faith. But here, when Paul talks about singleness, he doesn't call it a spiritual gift, he simply calls it a gift.

He does this in other places too. In his other letters, he talks about the gift of grace, the gift of eternal life and the gift of answered prayers. Like singleness, these things are all good gifts.

So what *is* Paul saying here? He's saying that the gift of singleness isn't a spiritual gift that enables you to be single. The gift of singleness is singleness itself. In other words, **Singleness is a good thing. It's a blessing. It's a good gift from a good God.**

But how do you know if you have the gift of singleness? Well, if you're single, you have the gift of singleness. If you're married, you have the gift of marriage.

What Paul is saying is that whatever your status, that is God's gift to you. Both marriage and singleness have their unique blessings and challenges.

But Paul wants us to know, Even though you hear this message all around you, Marriage isn't better than singleness. If you're single, there's no ladder you need to climb, no status you need to graduate to, no soul mate you need to find. **Singleness and marriage are equally important and fulfilling life stages.**

But here's the problem. Throughout history, most societies have valued marriage over singleness. Why is that?

In the ancient world...

- High mortality rates meant that having children was vital for families to thrive.
- In an agrarian society, labour was essential so having children was vital for ensuring economic stability.
- Family lineage and inheritance were also important, so having children was vital for continuing the family line and passing down property to future generations.

All this was true for the people of God in the Old Testament. But they also had another reason to believe marriage was better than singleness.

You see, They believed that being married and having children was a sign that God had blessed you. The bigger the family, the bigger the blessing. So if you were single or you didn't have children, what did that mean? It meant God hadn't blessed you.

But where did they get this idea?

- They looked at the passage in Genesis where God said, It is not good for the man to be alone. (Gen 2:18).
- And the passage where God blesses Adam and Eve and commands them to, Be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1:28)
- And passages like Psalm 127 that says Children are a gift from the LORD; they are a reward from him. (Psalm 127:3)

Based on these passages, they concluded that Marriage and children are a blessing from God and singleness is a curse. But it goes on.

Right after the Fall when Adam and Eve disobey God and introduce sin into the world, God foreshadows his plan to defeat sin. He says,

¹⁵ And I will cause hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike^[b] your head, and you will strike his heel.” (Genesis 3:15)

The key word here is “offspring”. God is saying that one day he will defeat the enemy through the offspring of the woman. Now the word offspring, is it singular or plural? In English, it can be both and it's the same in Hebrew. Offspring can refer to a singular offspring or a collective offspring.

Keep that in mind, we're going to come back to it later.

But throughout the Old Testament, people believed that God's plan to save the world involves the collective offspring of the woman. In other words, God was raising up a people through whom he would accomplish his purposes.

It started with Abraham. In Genesis 12, God calls Abraham and establishes a covenant with him. He promises to bless him with many things including what? Offspring. Offspring who would become kings and nations, offspring who would one day bless the world.

These covenant blessings are extended to his son Isaac and then his son Jacob. This family of 70 people would later grow into a nation of 2 million people by the time they leave Egypt. And it's then that God re-establishes his covenant with the nation of Israel. Now something else happens that would reinforce this belief that marriage is better than singleness.

“If you listen to these regulations and faithfully obey them, the LORD your God will keep his covenant of unfailing love with you... ¹³ He will love you and bless you, and he will give you many children... None of your men or women will be childless... (Deuteronomy 7:12-14, NLT)

Now, God doesn't just seem to be saying, I will bless you if you have children. Now he seems to also say, If you keep my commands, I will bless you with children. And if you don't, I won't. The blessing of children now seems to be conditional on their obedience.

So let's recap how the Israelites viewed marriage and family. They believed that:

- Having children was a sign that God has blessed your life.
- Having children was a sign that you've been obedient to God.
- Having children was a sign that you're a valued member of the community.

Can you see now why marriage and family was the ultimate goal? Can you see now why if you were single or barren, you would be shamed and isolated?

This was the common view.

- That's why the prophet Jeremiah whom God had commanded not to marry, openly expressed feeling depressed and isolated.
- That's why women like Sarah, Rachel and Hannah fell into deep anguish when they couldn't bear children.
- That's why when Jephthah's daughter, in the book of Judges learns that she will be executed - she laments not because she will die, but because she will die never have children.

This was the thinking in the Old Testament. Fast forward now to the New Testament. Paul is speaking to these same people who've been conditioned by 2,000 years of believing that singleness is a curse. And what does he tell them? He tells them that singleness isn't a curse, it's a gift! This means that being single:

- Doesn't mean God isn't pleased with you.
- It doesn't mean God hasn't blessed you.
- It doesn't mean your life isn't fulfilling.

Singleness is a good thing. It's a blessing. It's a good gift from a good God.

But how can Paul say this... what's changed?

Well remember the word offspring? Throughout the Old Testament, people interpreted it to mean collective offspring. That God's blessings would ultimately be fulfilled through producing offspring and descendants of Abraham.

But remember, offspring can also refer to a single person. And that changes everything. Paul is saying that now the ultimate promises and blessings of God don't come through the physical offspring of Abraham. They come through a single offspring - Jesus, the Son of God.

God gave the promises to Abraham and his child.^[1] And notice that the Scripture doesn't say "to his children,^[2]" as if it meant many descendants. Rather, it says "to his child" —and that, of course, means Christ. (Galatians 3:16)

What does this mean? It means that God's blessings aren't conditional on being a physical descendant of Abraham. It means that God's blessings aren't conditional on being married and having children.

It means that God's ultimate promises and blessings come through Jesus. This means:

- You're blessed whether you're married or you're single.
- You're blessed whether you have kids or you don't.
- You're blessed whether you're in a relationship or you're not.

Why? Because through Jesus, you have been blessed regardless of your relationship status.

And because we are blessed not because we're descendants of Abraham by blood but because we're members of Jesus' family through faith, our blessings aren't just physical blessings. The blessings we have in Christ include spiritual blessings as well.

Paul tells us in Ephesians 1 that we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing (Eph 1:3). These blessings include:

- Being adopted as God's children (1:5),
- Being redeemed and forgiven through his blood (1:7)
- Being sealed with the Holy Spirit (1:13-14).

In Christ, you have been blessed with every spiritual blessing.

Turn to your neighbour and say, You are blessed!

Singleness is a good thing. It's a blessing. It's a good gift from a good God.

But I want to acknowledge that being single can be hard. I want to address two challenges that many single people face.

The first challenge is loneliness. A number of single people I talked to told me:

- I wish I had someone to talk to at the end of the day. Someone who understands me and supports me.
- It's hard seeing friends date, then get married, then have kids. It's not that I'm not happy for them, it's just that sometimes I feel left behind.
- It can be hard connecting with people with families. I feel like I have the time but they're always so busy.

We often think single people are only those people who've never been married. But single people also include people who are separated, divorced and widowed. They all struggle with the challenges of singleness in different ways. Some people told me:

- After my divorce, people in church don't know what to say, so they avoid talking to me.
- People I knew and hung out with don't reach out to me anymore.
- I feel a sense of shame because it feels like I failed at marriage.
- It's hard raising kids by myself and supporting my family on one income.
- Losing my partner of decades has been hard. I miss her and think of her all the time.

Loneliness is a major struggle for single people.

Another major struggle is sexual temptation. Should Christian singles be having sex?

Our sexually-charged culture would say, Yes! They would say that sex is a basic need that must be satisfied, just like hunger or thirst. They would say that you can't have a truly satisfying life without having sex.

But is that what the Bible says?

Genesis 2:24 says, **a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. (Genesis 2:24)**

Two weeks ago, Pastor Steve talked about the boundary of sex. He says:

...the phrase "the two shall become one flesh" points to sexual union, and particularly, the act of sexual intercourse between a husband and a wife.

So Jesus takes us back to the beginning of creation, and reminds us that God's design was for sex to take place within the boundary of marriage— a relationship meant to last a lifetime.

In other words, the gift of sex is to be enjoyed within the boundary of marriage. Therefore Christian singles are called to live a life of celibacy and sexual purity.

But many Christian singles have confessed, how much they struggle with this. They've said, in our sexually-charged culture, I'm constantly bombarded with images and temptations. I often wonder, What am I supposed to do with the sexual desires God gave me if I'm not supposed to do anything with them?

These are real and honest struggles. To address this, we need to ask, What does it mean to be a sexual being?

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27)

God created us to be sexual beings. The Vatican's Declaration on Sexual Ethics declares: [Our sexuality] is seen as a force that permeates, influences and affects every act of [our] being at every moment of existence. This is part of our sexuality – and sexual intercourse is only a part of it.

Our God-given sexuality encompasses more than just sexual intercourse. New Testament scholar Preston Sprinkle says that it's the dynamic behind all human bonding. It drives our desire for intimacy and belonging. It points to our deep longing to know and be known, to love and be loved.

Being a sexual being means we were created to experience wholeness and intimacy through our relationships with others. This is about more than just sex. This means that if you're single, despite what the world says, you can express your sexuality and flourish as sexual beings without being married and having sex.

How do we know this? We know this because Jesus is the perfect embodiment of human flourishing and joy. And yet was Jesus ever married? Did Jesus ever have sex? No. Jesus lived a life of celibacy *and* thrived in his sexuality. So the good news is that **Our God-given sexuality can be expressed in God-honouring ways without having sex.**

I'll be taking about that later. But I do want to recognize the very real temptations Christian singles struggle with. For those who are struggling with sexual brokenness or temptation, there is help.

If you scan the **QR code on the screen, you'll find our Sexuality Resource page.**

<https://cornerstonechurch.ca/christian-sexuality/>

This site features lots of helpful resources including:

- The Journey Course that can help you find freedom from sexual brokenness
- Porn blocking software and accountability tools
- Recommendations for Christian therapists who help people with sex addictions

There are lots of great resources here so we invite you to check them out.

So in a world where single people can feel stigmatized and incomplete, where they can struggle with loneliness and sexual temptation, how can single people navigate the pressures and challenges of being single?

I'd like to share 3 ways single people can thrive in their singleness.

First, **Embrace your Identity in Christ.**

As we said before, Jesus was never married, Jesus never had sex, Jesus never had kids. Jesus was single and he honoured God in his sexuality. Jesus is also the perfect image of what it means to be fully human. He perfectly embodies human flourishing and joy.

What does this mean? It means that you don't need someone to complete you. Because you're already complete in him.

Happiness isn't ultimately found in marriage, happiness is found in Jesus. Yes, you've been created for relationships. And for some, this includes the gift of marriage. But the ultimate relationship you were created for isn't marriage; it's your relationship with God.

Our deep longing for intimacy reflects our longing to have someone who knows us completely and loves us unconditionally. Isn't that what we're all searching for? Do you realize you can't even experience this with a spouse? You can only experience this with Jesus. Because only Jesus knows you completely so only Jesus can love you perfectly. So if you're single:

- The idea that you're missing out on happiness is a lie.
- The idea that God is holding out on you is a lie.
- The idea that you can't make a difference is a lie.

So what's the truth? The truth is:

- In Christ, you are completely known,
- In Christ, you are completely loved,
- In Christ, you are complete and lack nothing.

Marriage can never validate you. It's a good gift but it can never ultimately fulfill you. Because only one person can do that. And that person is Jesus.

Marriage is a sign. It points to the relationship between Jesus and the church, his bride.

But singleness is a sign too. It points to the sufficiency of Jesus, who is our Ultimate Spouse. Who is our all in all. Who gives us grace that is sufficient for all our needs. Do you believe that?

Single people, you have a great opportunity to lean into this. One person told me, Sometimes I feel lonely, but I've learned to lean on Jesus. I actually know him now in deeper and richer ways. And I've experienced his love in ways I wouldn't have if I weren't single.

So remember, you are complete not when you find a spouse. You're complete now because Jesus, the ultimate spouse has found you. So embrace your identity in Christ.

Second, **Make the most of your singleness**. Everyone starts off single. Some stay single longer. Some stay single all their lives. But regardless of how long or short your season is, Paul encourages us in 1 Corinthians 7 to take advantage of it. Because there are advantages to being single.

- Single people can have more time to focus on serving the Lord.
- Single people can have more flexibility to develop friendships and pursue other interests.
- Single people can have more freedom to grow in their faith.

Single people can also make a great impact. Jesus and Paul left a huge spiritual legacy- and they never married or had children.

I've seen single people at Cornerstone make a big difference in people's lives.

- I've seen them serve faithfully.
- I've seen them build into others.
- I've personally been blessed by my friendships with single people and my kids and family have been blessed by them as well.

Singleness is a gift. So until God calls you out of singleness into marriage, he calls you to steward that gift to the glory of God.

- So deepen your walk with him.
- Be a catalyst for change
- Advocate for justice.
- Serve the community.

God's plan for you is so much bigger than any relationship you can have; so make the most of your singleness.

Third, **Cultivate meaningful relationships**.

Our culture places so much emphasis on romantic love so we often think, If I'm not in a romantic relationship I can't experience love. But that's simply not true.

Both Jesus and Paul had meaningful relationships with friends and family. And while David was married, he describes his friend Jonathan's love for him as even better than romantic love.

So just because you're not in a romantic relationship doesn't mean you can't have meaningful relationships. So cultivate your friendships.

- Put yourself out there and be open.
- Practice vulnerability and authenticity.
- Get involved in a small group community.

Embrace your identity in Christ, make the most of your singleness and cultivate meaningful relationships. Doing these things can help you thrive in your singleness.

Now I want to say a word now to the church. According to Jesus, the church is meant to be the primary spiritual family for believers. These relationships are more important than even our biological ones.

Because as a family, we walk together, we pick each other up and we help each other to thrive. How can we do that with our single brothers and sisters?

First, **Pay attention to our words**. Language is important. Our comments can unintentionally imply to singles that they're less than.

For example, saying things like, *Don't worry, you'll find someone eventually, or, You'll understand once you're married* – is not only condescending, it communicates the message, *You're not complete until you're married*.

And without realizing it, we reinforce the great fear many single people have that their lives aren't fulfilling because they're not in a romantic relationship. So we make them feel more discouraged and isolated. We make them feel like there's no safe space for them here.

We don't want to do that, so let's pay attention to our words.

Second, **Pay attention to our actions**. A common example people shared with me was being set up. You know like when a friend who's in a relationship tries to set you up with someone they know? And it's not that the people I talked to don't appreciate the heart or they're not open to being set-up.

It's just that when people they don't have a relationship with try to set them up with their friend's, cousin's neighbour who's a great catch because they have the amazing quality of also being single!

One person I talked to said, It makes me feel like a project. Like my singleness is something that needs to be fixed instead of celebrated. Like my identity is defined by my singleness instead of all the other wonderful things that make me special.

We don't want to send that message, so let's pay attention to our actions.

Third, **Make space for single people in our lives**. Every person I talked with said that loneliness was a struggle. And it's no surprise. We're designed for intimacy and connection. Even married people can still feel lonely. That's why Jesus has called us to be a spiritual family to each other.

- So let's be more inclusive as a church family.
- Let's create environments where singles feel welcomed.
- Let's help them to know that they are an important part of our family.

How do we do that? Talk to single people. Build relationships with them. Invite them to hang out with you and/or your family.

Sometimes we might feel awkward talking to someone who's divorced because we don't know what to say. But a divorced person I was talking to said that it's awkward for him too and it's more hurtful to be ignored. So maybe you could acknowledge the elephant in the room and say something like, Hi, I'm sorry I don't know what to say. But I care about you and I'm here for you if you want to talk.

Sometimes we might feel awkward inviting someone because we're not sure if they'll accept. But one person told me, Don't let my singleness disqualify me from being included. If you're not sure, just ask; don't assume I don't want to be included. If I'm not up for it, I'll tell you but at least I'll feel included.

Sometimes we might feel awkward because we think a single person might not feel comfortable in a family setting. But everyone I talked to said that they appreciate intergenerational relationships. Being with families actually means a lot to them. One person we had over for dinner said, This is the first time I've been part of a family dinner.

One person talked about an experience she had last Christmas. After our Christmas Eve service, all her friends left to have dinner with their partners or families. But she didn't have anyone to celebrate with.

But one family came up to her and asked, Do you have plans? Do you wanna join our family for dinner? She said, They had no idea what a blessing this was. The next day, another family invited her over for Christmas dinner. She says: "It just meant so much to get taken in and not need to be alone – especially over the holidays. Hospitality means so much and I appreciate how well and intentional Cornerstone people have been in treating me like family."

Jesus has called us to be family so let's do our best to show love and hospitality to our single brothers and sisters.

Let's pay attention to our words, let's pay attention to our actions and let's make space for single people in our lives.

Jesus said, I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. (John 10:10)

Jesus doesn't give us this life by giving us a spouse. Jesus doesn't give us this life by giving us the gift of sex. Jesus doesn't give this life by giving us children. How does Jesus give us this life? By giving us himself.

Because true life isn't found in marriage. True life isn't found in having sex. True life isn't found in having kids. True life is found in Jesus – the one who loves us, who died for us and who calls us to be family to each other.

Singleness is a good thing. It's a blessing. It's a good gift from a good God.