

Q. Does God see choosing singleness to be equally as good as marriage?

A. Years ago, if a Christian never married, his or her spiritual brethren might consider it mildly unfortunate, but they usually stayed polite enough to stay out of the person's personal life. Now, however, "celebrating singleness" has become so trendy that many Christian writers and preachers are advocating staying single. Whether someone marries or not is that person's private business, but false teaching is potentially damaging and ought to be exposed.

Instructions that misrepresent the Bible regarding singleness can lead people—usually impressionable young believers—to make decisions they may later regret. No matter how preachers and Christian writers try to distort Scripture to sound as if singleness without compelling circumstances is a plan for your life that is on a par with marriage, the Word of God really says otherwise: "It is not good for the man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18). Period. Full stop. Right through the New Testament, except for very unusual circumstances most of us will never experience, the Bible never strays from that position. Yet, because singleness is so promoted as a fabulous lifestyle, many who hear the propaganda question the Bible's stand.



Various circumstances may cause some people to not marry and others to lose a spouse. All can live fulfilling, God-glorifying lives. Paul learned to be content in whatever state he was in (Philippians 4:11). So should we all. But are those who teach singleness as a choice that is equal to or even better than marriage going too far?

1 Corinthians 7

But what about what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 7? Didn't he say, "it is good for a man not to touch a woman"? Yes and no. Actually, Paul, in 1 Corinthians 7:1, was quoting "it is good for a man not to touch a woman" from a letter the Corinthians had written to him. In the verses that follow, he addresses the subject they raised: "But, because of sexual immoralities, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection owed her, and likewise also the wife to her husband" (1 Corinthians 7:2-3). If you think that doesn't sound like singleness, you're right. It's marriage. Rather than not touching each other, men and women are supposed to marry.

Later, Paul gives his opinion, not commandment, that he believes that if they have the self-control, it is better for the unmarried to remain so. But he admits that, if they don't have the self-control, they had better marry. And let's admit it; most people don't have that self-control. Later, in verses 25ff, Paul appears to explain his opinion as based on the "distress that is on us." By this, he is speaking of severe persecution. Although he expressly allows marriage for those who want it, his opinion was that changing our state—marrying, separating, buying, even weeping and rejoicing—sets our minds on worldly things, which is an unnecessary distraction from the kingdom of God when the time is so short. Notice that Paul's reason was so that those who were facing possible martyrdom could focus what remained of their lives on the kingdom of God. He had no other possible reason for singleness in mind. Those who use 1 Corinthians 7 to advocate singleness today, unless they are specifying an area of the world where there is great persecution, are taking Paul out of context.

Jesus

Jesus spoke of being a eunuch for the kingdom's sake (Matthew 19:10-12). But being a eunuch for the kingdom was not the normal course that Jesus expected for someone's life. Jesus clearly said it was not for everyone, but that being able to do this was a gift: "Not all men can receive this saying, but those to whom it is given" (verse 11). And it had one reason and one reason ONLY. That reason was to sanctify your life to the furtherance of the kingdom of God.

So, if you want to solemnly dedicate your life to the preaching of the Gospel, living a self-sacrificing life of peril and poverty as did Jesus and Paul, entirely focused on the one goal of getting the Gospel to the

lost, and you believe that God has given you this gift so that you will have no desire for or temptation to have sexual intimacy, then you go right ahead and plan on being single. If, on the other hand, you want to remain single with any other goal in mind, then, sorry, the Bible does not support your choice.

If you are planning your future as the breezy life of a single person—this is how I will be self-fulfilled, this is how I can find myself, this is how I can live the life I want, this is how I can reach my career goals, this is how I can have the stuff I want—you have your head on cross-threaded. I advise you to take it off, align the threads with God's will, and try again.

But, you might ask, if it's okay to plan to stay single for the Gospel's sake, why not for other reasons? The answer is simple. The Bible doesn't give other reasons for planning to be single.

But, argue some famous preachers who ought to know better, Jesus didn't marry, and, thus, He set an example to follow. Excuse me, but Jesus' life wasn't typical in many ways, and, therefore, we cannot just live the way He lived. Jesus' physical life met the rare criteria for singleness we just discussed. Jesus dedicated His life to His ministry, and His life was a road to the Cross. Marriage would have been a distraction from the Gospel-centered focus for which He came. And He knew He would die an early and violent death. Thus, Jesus' singleness cannot be held up as an example for the average Christian.

"Choosing" Vs. "Circumstances beyond Your Control"

Notice that all through this article, I've used the words "plan" and "choice." I'm not talking about circumstances beyond your control. The reality is that there are some guys whose marriage proposals will always get turned down, some gals who will never be asked, and some folks who have physical or psychological or developmental disorders that make marriage questionable and maybe even out of the question. Related to this, some have been scarred by very bad home lives as children. These are things that have happened to these people. Some of these may be overcome; some may not. But these things have nothing to do with the self-absorbed, planning-to-be-single-and-free attitude I'm talking about.

There are those who preach that singleness is not a trial to be endured but a gift to be celebrated. By placing the poles of the dichotomy as far apart as possible, they create a straw man. Singleness is not the

equal of being starved, dressed in rags, and enslaved to hand pull barges up the river (cue "Song of the Volga Boatmen") (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KfsWoNpHg2s>). Yet, neither is it a gift (as we've seen, the gift is the rare ability to be single and dedicate your life fully to the kingdom of God). Neither is singleness something to be celebrated as if it were an academy award.

Singleness is not a superior or even an equal choice to marriage; it is not something to desire for any reason other than focused dedication to the Gospel. That's because, rather than the joyful lifestyle choice presented in so many books, singleness is merely a circumstance. Unless you've chosen it because you have the gift to devote your life entirely to the Gospel, or unless you have some mitigating circumstance, if you have consciously chosen to be single, your choice is not biblically supported. Singleness is something that happens to you for reasons that maybe God only knows and which you can learn to live with and still have a fulfilling life. It is not something to desire.

God and Your Private Life

"But what right has God to interfere in my private life?" you ask. Every right: "Or don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Paul wrote the above verses in the context of talking about fleeing sexual immorality. Let's face it, many who plan to stay celibate while single don't succeed. Celibacy is not the way God made us. Remember again, it was our Creator who said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him" (Genesis 2:18). He did not make men and women to be independent units putting their selfish desires first. Those who hype singleness are speaking contrary to the natural order that God has established. In the world, we can expect selfish fads to be popular. Such things ought not be promoted amongst believers.

God made humans to be teams of two close-knit people of the opposite sex working together through life and supplying each others' physical and emotional needs. This includes sex, but goes far beyond it. It encompasses the hand that reaches out during a social engagement, the conversations that go late into the night as your minds become one, the times when you're snuggling together and saying nothing, the nursing through sickness, the coaching through

the birth of a child, the support through trial, the word of correction fitly spoken, the long walks hand-in-hand, and—after 35 years of marriage—I could go on and on.

Before closing, I want to be sure that you understand that I am not talking about condemnation for the choices you make. If you are a believer, you are not under the law and you are not under any condemnation. What I want to leave you with is an admonition not to be swayed into a trendy choice now that you may regret later. From the beginning, God made men and women to pair off in marriage. Don't be so quick to give it up for a life of me, myself, and I.

Peter Ditzel