

Singleness Redeemed



Discussion Aids

The single individual models the New Testament Covenant in a unique and powerful way. This example of Christ-likeness is frequently overlooked. Moreover, many singles often feel less than equal to their married counterparts. Singleness Redeemed is a set of discussion aids meant to challenge our thinking on singleness and encourage us toward a biblical understanding.

These discussion aids are intended to supply help, hope, and encouragement to our singles. Fourteen real and relevant heart issues are topics for discussion. We endeavor to redeem these topics by viewing them through the lens of scripture.

These discussion aids are designed for use within mentor/mentee relationships or small groups of individuals.

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Labels

Labels can be harmful. They tend to categorize. They paint with a broad brush. With one stroke, everything is said. The danger of labeling is in the details—the details that go unnoticed. The problem is compounded when the term loses meaning by its overuse and misuse.

1. Does the label “single” ring with positive, negative or neutral overtones? Explain.
2. How is the term “single” painting with a broad brush?
3. What are the negative effects when using “single” as a label?
4. What are qualities about yourself you wish people knew but “single” seemed to sum it up for them?
5. Do you try to avoid the label when you’re in casual conversation? How does it make you feel when people categorize you as “single?”

Redeeming Labels

“The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!” *Matt 6:22,23*

The word single occurs twice in the Bible (*Mt 6:22, Lk 11:34*) and is derived from the Greek word *haplous*, which means “clear, sound and whole.” Both *1 Cor. 7:32-35* and *Matt 6:22* speak to having a spiritual vision that is fully fixed on God, not divided by other cares or concerns. It is good for all of us, married or single, to consider how “focused” our lives are on God and His purposes in our lives.

6. Does the label “single” (using the *haplous* definition) ring with positive, negative or neutral overtones? Explain.
7. In some sense, how is this definition the opposite of the current and popular understanding of the term “single?”
8. One can be “single” (marital status) and not “single” (*haplous*). To what degree are you “haplous?”
9. In what way does your “single” marital status allow you to be “single (*haplous*)” (*1 Cor 7:32,33*)?

Modeling

We are to model Christ. The name Christian insinuates this. This reflection of Christ should shine through all facets of our life. The union of a husband and wife mirrors Christ and the church. Unity of the Trinity is exemplified in the oneness of marriage. This can lead singles to question their ability to model Christ.

1. Which marital status most closely models Christianity? Married, Single, or Both equally?
2. Describe ways Biblical marriage exemplifies Christianity (*Eph. 5:22-33*).
3. Do you see your singleness as incompleteness because of the inability to mirror Christ in this way? Why or why not?

God has used marital status and family dynamics to model Him and His message. Consider the following examples:

4. Hosea's marital calling - What example/message was Hosea called to convey by marrying Gomer (*Hos 1:1-3*)? Why was this a powerful model of the message?

5. How was Ezekiel supposed to respond to the death of his wife? What example/message was Ezekiel supposed to convey by this (*Ez. 24:15-18*)? Why was this a powerful model of the message?

6. What was Jeremiah's singleness supposed to convey (*Jer. 16:1-4*)? Why was this a powerful model of the message?

Redeeming Models

"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, or of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." John 1:12,13

The New Testament Covenant departs radically from the Old Testament Covenant on the issue of marriage. The Abrahamic Covenant depended on marriage and children for propagation. Hence, great despair came on all those who were virgin (*Judges 11:36-40*) or barren (*1 Sam 1:9-12*). Jesus introduced a radical shift of covenantal propagation that was spiritual (*Matt. 12:47-50*).

7. In what ways does singleness embody and present the New Testament Covenant of Jesus Christ in a way marriage does not?

Purpose

What is my use? What am I here for, if not to care for a spouse and children? Purpose seems easier to define for the married. It automatically befalls the parent and the spouse. It can be more elusive if these statuses are absent.

1. As a single, do you struggle with life purpose? When is this struggle most present or acute?
2. Do you get a sense from married couples that you are less respected because you are single?
3. If the church was asked which of the two marital statuses (married or single) have contributed more effectively to society and the church, which would get the majority of votes? Explain.

Redeeming Purpose

“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour.” Phil. 2:21, 22

Scripture abounds with examples of believers who were single. Paul, Mary, Martha, Lazarus, Anna, Jeremiah, Elijah and Daniel are a few Bible characters who were likely single. Corrie Ten Boom, Amy Carmichael, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Mother Theresa were single. Most impressive was Jesus Himself who chose to live a single life, building a family of brothers and sisters in the Lord versus building an earthly family. Living life singularly for God

Singleness Redeemed

4. Choose a person in the list above you most admire. How was their life purposeful and facilitated by their singleness?
5. While most of us would not consider ourselves to be a Paul or a Mother Theresa, Mary, Martha, Lazarus and Anna were more unassuming singles. How was their singleness purposeful?
6. Is your singleness facilitating a purposeful life? Why or why not?
7. How can your singleness help create a more purposeful life?

Legacy

Who will carry my name? Who will inherit my possessions? Who will celebrate my memory? The fear of being forgotten with a lost legacy can be a very real fear (*1 Sam 24:21*).

1. For many, the inability to leave a legacy is a death of a dream. A dream to be grieved. Do you struggle with this loss?

2. What type of legacy did you want to pass on?

Redeeming legacy

“For thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep my Sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off.” Isaiah

56:4, 5

Isaiah prophesied of a time when everlasting names would be the legacy of the single. This was no doubt a startling message for Old Testament Covenant holders. It is also a startling message for New Testament holders. Fortunately, this prophesy is realized in the single New Testament Covenant holder.

3. How should we think of legacy in the New Testament Age?
4. Whose everlasting name do we adopt?
5. We join Christ’s legacy and share in His inheritance (*Eph. 1:13-20*). In what way does singleness reflect this New Testament Covenant in a way marriage and children do not?
6. What can you do today to ensure the legacy you desire is passed on to others?

Barrenness

Be fruitful and multiply (*Gen 9:7*). Children are a crown, reward and heritage (*Ps 127:3, Pro 17:6*). Many can relate to Hannah's grief of infertility (*1 Sam 1*). Men and women alike grieve the inability to bare children.

1. Do you struggle with this loss? When is it most painful?
2. Who are other Bible characters who struggled with this loss/difficulty? What can we learn from their example?
3. How do you cope with this loss?

Redeeming Barrenness

“Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord.” Isaiah 54:1

Isaiah prophesied of a time when children would be born of the barren. This message mystified Old Testament Covenant holders. Today this prophesy is brought to fruition in the physically barren New Testament Covenant holder. The single or barren Christian can still be a spiritual father or mother of many spiritual children.

4. Name a spiritual father and/or mother to you.

5. Paul acts as a spiritual father to Timothy (*Phil. 2:22*). What children especially need spiritual fathers and mothers (*Acts 16:1*)?

6. Prayerfully consider if there is someone in your life which you could become a spiritual father/mother to. What will you do to follow this opportunity?

7. Do you have the New Testament vision for children? How can you groom this perspective?

Companionship

Scripture says “*two are better than one; (Ecc. 4:9).*” Many singles mourn their solitude. Watching married couples confide, comfort and enjoy one another can be difficult. Who is there for me?

1. Do you mourn the lack of intimate companionship? When is it especially painful?
2. Think about a close companion in your life in whom you can confide hurts and share joys. If one does not come to mind, prayerfully consider who might begin to fill this role.
3. What makes forming these relationships difficult as a single?
4. Do you have a person who holds you accountable to Christian living?

Redeeming Companionship

“Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants.”

Phil. 2:25

Paul cared a great deal for Epaphroditus. He had a special connection with him. They had a multifaceted relationship that connected on a number of levels, such as, brother, friend, teammate and beneficiary. Jesus had companions also. He entrusted His companions to build His church. Christian companionship is rich, deep, meaningful, powerful and effective.

5. Are you loyal to your friends?
6. Do you view your Christian companions as brothers and sisters, friends, fellowsoldiers and those that minister to your needs? How are these different aspects of our relationships (family, friends, fellowsoldiers, servants) distinct and important?
7. Evaluate if you provide the above relationships to others? How do you do so?

Redeeming Loneliness

“Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going.” Matt. 26:45, 46

This text bleeds of loneliness. Jesus, in His final hours, wanted companionship in the garden. After three failed attempts to be accompanied in prayer, Jesus resigned to be alone. And alone He was until the cross was won. In so doing, loneliness is exchanged for aloneness and absence is exchanged for presence.

5. Jesus found aloneness to be life giving (*Matt. 14:23*). God used Elijah’s aloneness to teach and encourage him in his ministry (*1 Kings 19:10*). Are there aspects in your life where you have found aloneness to be settling and refreshing? Explain.
6. How do you develop this spiritual discipline?
7. According to *Heb. 13:5*, is the believer ever lonely in Christ? Record and apply this scripture to memory.
8. God surrounds the lonely in families (*Ps. 68:6*). What family has he surrounded you with? What lonely people has He called you to be a family to?

Unrealized Dreams

It is not uncommon for singles to carry significant hurt and disappointment because marriage has not occurred. For years many look forward to and imagine life with a spouse. No doubt this unrealized dream is painful - a pain you likely bear alone.

1. Do you wish to be married?
2. Does the thought of never getting married grieve you?
3. How do you cope with this disappointment?
4. Does *Psalm 13* represent your heart? Which verse(s) stands out to you?

Redeeming dreams

“And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.” Luke 22:62

Where was the kingdom? Where was my loyalty? Where was my strength? Peter mourned for more than his betrayal of the Master. He would soon begin to reel from the death of a dream. A death so final it would send him back to fishing. Dreams are hard to give up. As believers, however, we give them over. God in His sovereignty weaves a reality of His choosing (*Rom 8:26-28*). We are prompted to not give up on them but rather to give them over to Him (*Is. 64:8*).

5. King David had his dream to build a temple redirected (*2 Sam 7:1-13*). What was God’s sovereign plan? How did God provide?
6. Jonathan surely had to give up his dream to become king (*1 Sam 20:31*). What was God’s sovereign plan? How did God provide?
7. The disciples never realized their dream of over throwing the Roman rule with Christ as their leader. What was God’s sovereign plan? How did God provide?
8. Does God have your best interest at heart? Does He love you?
9. In what ways could His plan, which is different from yours, be better?

Redeeming contentment

"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Phil. 4:13

Phil. 4:13 is the Christian mantra which helps us take on the most intimidating challenges. In a sense, David quoted this verse before facing Goliath. Paul, however, penned this verse when facing discontentment. Furthermore, the verse speaks less about challenges we wish to face and more about the challenges we find ourselves facing. Does your source of discontentment taunt you as Goliath did David? If yes, then *Phil. 4:13* is for you.

3. What difference does this shift in meaning make in your life-less about challenges we wish to face and more about the challenges we find ourselves facing (*Phil 4:11-12, 19*)?
4. Through what circumstances, have you learned contentment in your life?
5. Is a life of contentment, apart from circumstances, possible? Why or why not?
6. What is required to attain this life of contentment?

Expectations

Expectations are hard to control. We believe our vacations will be magical, careers fulfilling, houses lovely, churches perfect, friends never failing and marriage full of bliss. Yet expectations seem to be one more opportunity for disappointment or resentment if not measured realistically.

1. Have your expectations ever let you down? Which ones? How so?
2. Do you have a tendency to over romanticize elusive dreams? Which ones?
3. What are your expectations for singleness? Have they been met? Exceeded?
4. What expectations for marriage do you have?

Redeeming expectations

“My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him.” *Psalm 62:5*

Woven into the fabric of expectation is faith. An unseen, unrealized benefit attached to a hopeful circumstance. The apostle James reminds us that when it comes to matters of this world, we “*know not what shall be on the morrow (James 4:14).*” Therefore, expectations which do not disappoint must only rest in God.

5. What does *Heb. 6:13-19* teach us about God and his character?

6. As a response of expectation being placed in God, the psalmist in *Psalm 62:5* waits only upon God. What does waiting in the spirit of this verse look like in your life?

7. The prophet Jeremiah relays God’s thoughts towards us as being full of good expectation (*Jer. 29:11*). Do you believe this? What evidence is there for or against your belief?

Redeeming Future

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.” Jeremiah 29:11

If your future is uncertain, you are in company with the greats. Abraham was asked to pack his bags and set out for nowhere in particular. Moses settled into a life as a shepherd when God called him to an unpredictable journey with the children of Israel. Having served under three different kings, Daniel most likely held his future plans loosely. Esther gave up the certainty of her future when she went in before the king. *“The just shall live by his faith (Hab. 2:4)”* was penned in the minor prophets and quoted multiple times in the New Testament letters. If our futures were completely clear, how would we live out this verse? Yet God delights in promises of certainty. Heaven, God’s peace, and His presence are all promises of certainty for the believer. We live in the tension between certainty and uncertainty.

3. What wisdom is there in God having us live in the tension between certainty and uncertainty?
4. Do you have a good balance between these two? On a continuum between certainty and uncertainty, which way do you tend to error? Why?
5. Jesus points us to the flowers of the field and the birds of the air when instructing us on our care for the future (*Matt 6:25-34*). What lessons do these teach us?
6. What is one thing you can begin to do to better manage living by faith in the uncertainty of the future?

Decision Making

How do I make decisions? Do I move ahead without him/her? Am I in a holding pattern? Decision making can be paralyzing no matter what our marital state. For the single, without someone to naturally counsel together with, this difficulty can be compounded.

1. On a scale of 1-10, how difficult is decision making for you? What is most difficult about it?
2. Explain how you discern God's prompting in decision making.
3. Are your decisions shrouded in "if I get married?"

Redeeming Decision Making

“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes.” Proverbs 3:5-7

As we consider decision making, a few basic truths are important to consider here. First, making decisions is an indispensable part of character formation. Second, decision making is an act of faith and wisdom. Third, God’s will does not imply ease and bliss. Fourth, a believer who makes a poor decision may suffer hurt, but will not be on God’s “plan B.”

4. Truth 1: God is more interested in the person you are becoming than the set of circumstances you inhabit. How does this change the way you view decision making?
5. Truth 2: By faith in God we appeal to the wisdom of His ways and by faith in Him we step out in decision (2 Cor. 5:7). How do you sort out faith and wisdom in decision making?
6. Truth 3: Seek the peace of obedience not the peace of comfort. What are the differences between these two? Does the peace of obedience come before or after decision?
7. Truth 4: God can redeem all for His glory and our good. Why is this important to understand in decision making?

Loss

Many people become single again through loss. Death and divorce are painful circumstances. They can leave us despondent, grief stricken or wounded. We understand Habakkuk who said, “*O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! (Hab. 1:2)*”

1. Singleness has been thrust upon you again. What challenges has this posed?
2. When is your pain most acute? What is similar or different from your previous time of singleness?
3. Have you felt out of place in community? In what communities has singleness been the most difficult? Why?
4. What do you most mourn about your marriage?

Redeeming Loss

“The Lord God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds’ feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places.” Habakkuk 3:19

Habakkuk mingled desperation with assurance, questions with resolve and exasperation with peace. To the soul who has reason to cry out, Habakkuk is a model, example and mentor. God has broad enough shoulders to bear our complaints and a tender heart to lovingly entreat us. Listen to God’s wise responses to His children who have suffered deeply.

- *“I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe... Where have ye laid him? Jesus wept” John 11: 15, 34, 35 - Spoken to Martha, sister of the departed Lazarus.*
- *“My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” 2 Cor. 12:9 – Spoken by Christ directed towards Paul who had cried out by reason of his “thorn in the flesh.”*
- *“What doest thou here, Elijah? Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest...” 1 Kings 19:13, 15 – God’s gentle commission in the still small voice to the depressed Elijah.*
- *“Hast thou an arm like God? Or canst thou thunder with a voice like him?” Job 40:9 – Spoken to faithful, suffering, repenting Job.*
- *“Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.” Matt. 11:6 – A relayed message from Christ to the discouraged and greatest prophet John the Baptist.*

5. What lessons or encouragement do these examples provide?
6. What is required for you to say with Habakkuk *“The Lord God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds’ feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places”*?

Redeeming Need

“For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need... But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”
Matt. 6:32, 33

Let us make a list of those that were touched and ministered to by Jesus. The Leper (*Matt. 8*), Samaritan woman (*John 4*), adulterous woman (*John 8*), Syrophoenician woman (*Mark 7*), Mary Magdalene, the blind, the dumb, the lame...the list goes on. What is the common denominator? They all had open and profound needs. Let us now make a list of those most rebuked by Jesus: Scribes, Pharisees, lawyers, religious leaders. What is the common denominator? They held no self or societal recognized needs. God knows your needs; the kingdom of heaven is nearer to you.

4. Which of the above groups do you see yourself in – the needy or the affluent?
5. Why do you think the needy group benefited the most from Jesus (*Luke 5:31*)?
6. Consider the Beatitudes recorded in *Matthew 5:1-12*. Explain how this blessedness bore itself out in practice? Watch Christ come down from the mountain in *Matt. 8:1-4* and His immediate interactions.
7. Can you give any testimony to God’s provision in your area of need? Explain.
8. How does God want you to view your needs?

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