

The Church & Singleness *The Sanctity of Singleness*

“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, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” (John 1:12-13)

For a long time, the Church has diligently taught and held high the “sanctity of marriage” – the unity of a man and woman reflecting the Oneness of God. Such a precept is worthy of weight and attention. Marriage speaks to the union of Christ and His church and creates an environment where loving, believing parents can disciple and encourage their children toward faith in God. However, we see in *John 1:12-13* the teaching of the new covenant of a spiritual family, the increase of the kingdom of God through spiritual regeneration and not just growth through childbearing. This is a critical shift to consider. It calls us to ponder the value we place on marriage and the lesser value sometimes placed on singleness. In the spiritual sense of God’s new covenant, singleness and marriage have equal standing in His sight. His focus is on His spiritual family (*Mark 3:31-35*). In this context then, it is good to consider for a moment not just the “sanctity of marriage” but also the “sanctity of singleness.” Similar to marriage, the sanctity of singleness can celebrate oneness, fidelity and covenant – not with man, but with God. Singleness therefore has great value in God’s eyes.

Scripture abounds with examples of believers who were single. Paul, Mary, Martha, Lazarus, Anna, Jeremiah, Elijah and Daniel are a few individuals who were likely single. Jesus Himself 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 should be seen as a great honor, not something to be dreaded or avoided.

Similar to marriage, Satan has attacked God’s design for singleness. Without careful Biblical attention being paid to the sanctity of singleness, some inaccurate views can be propagated. Included in these inaccuracies could be:

1. Singleness is something to be feared.
2. Singles have less value than their married counterparts.
3. There is something wrong with the individual that doesn’t receive a marriage proposal.
4. Singleness is a phase of life and should be temporary.

This article will endeavor to encourage us by asking eight self-reflecting questions regarding how we view the singles in our lives.

1. **Does my attempt to encourage singles have the opposite effect?** The comment “You’ll be next” when directed to a single at a wedding reception may have the opposite effect, leaving the individual feeling hurt or discouraged. The single may be:
 - a. content in his/her current state of life.
 - b. currently in the marriage proposal process and thus feel undo pressure.
 - c. desiring marriage but feeling little control over their marital status.
2. **Have I kept up with my single friends?** In a new couple’s excitement of engagement and beginning a different phase of life, single friends can sometimes feel left behind. Oftentimes, single friends are excited for the new couple but can feel disappointed as their relationships change. While a degree of change is inevitable, it is important to maintain communication as much as possible with single friends, taking a continuing interest in their lives.
3. **Do I overlook mature, gifted singles for church responsibilities?** Church offices, Sunday school, committee membership, and other aspects of church all can benefit from capable single involvement. We should strive to see the value and potential in our singles.

4. **Do I relegate certain responsibilities only to singles?** Babysitting, running errands, visiting elderly, and service projects can frequently be delegated as responsibilities to be fulfilled by singles. Assuming singles have more time and fewer responsibilities can often be a false generalization. Without the support of a spouse, single individuals often lead very busy lives as they balance work, family obligations and household responsibilities on their own.
5. **Do I overthink my invitations to singles when I host gatherings?** Will they feel comfortable? Do I invite only an even number? Do I invite people for the sole reason they will inevitably bring blessing to the gathering, regardless of marital status? Invites to singles can be a great encouragement to all those involved.
6. **Do I view all singles as the same?** Singles hold many different titles and exist in many different life stages. Some are doctors, mothers, executives, college students, et al. Singles vary in maturity, responsibilities, and life callings just as widely as everyone else. They are no more a homogeneous group than married couples. We should remember singles in our church family are not one and the same, realizing the life of a 40 year old working single may vary dramatically from a 20 year old single college student or a 55 year old widow. We should be careful to not have the most defining label in one's life be "single."
7. **Am I sensitive to the general support singles need?** Singles go through periods of loss, questioning and needing affirmation. They also have a need for support, just like married individuals. And often singles can feel alone during these times without the benefit of a spouse or close confidant to truly share their heart with. One example is our church's proposal by faith process. While this has been a blessing to many, the proposals usually discussed are those that have led to engagement. Confidentiality around this process is critical, but it can also create an environment where individuals who have given or received a "no" can feel shame or confusion if they try to reconcile these disappointments on their own. There is the hope this would draw an individual closer to the Lord, but unfortunately, this is not always the case. The individual may feel like they are the only one to have this experience and could develop bitterness toward God for not following through on the dream or expectation of having a spouse. Being able to openly share emotions with elders, parents, mentors or close friends while trusting that confidentiality will be maintained can be very helpful. Be willing to help create this environment of friendship and sharing as God gives opportunity.
8. **Does the term "single" mean anything more to me than marital status?** The word single occurs twice in the Bible (*Matt. 6:22, Luke 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 purpose in our lives.

If we do not take time to reflect, the sanctity and blessings of singleness can all but be lost. We need to hold on to a healthy view of singleness which is laid out for us in the New Testament covenant with our Lord Jesus Christ. We understand like none other what and how God's family is grown, "*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, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*" (*John 1:12-13*). Our spiritual relationship with Christ as His brothers and sisters will last into all eternity in a fashion our earthly relationships as husband, wife, and single do not (*Luke 20:34-35*). Where then is the place which the single should be able to truly turn for encouragement, support and value in this world? Only the Church. May we do our part together to make this a reality.