

SLIDE #1

Today again, we're going to "Talk About Sex". But this time we're going to talk about those who don't have sex. If you listen to our Bible reading from 1 Corinthians 6 & 7, you might be surprised at all the instructions Paul gives for singleness and abstinence. I'm going to skip several verses in these two chapters to keep us more focused on singleness but feel free to read it in its entirety later on. It's all good. We just have limited time.

Starting at 1 Corinthians 6:15

¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶ Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." ¹⁷ **But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit.**

¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. ¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

Now to chapter 7 where Paul refutes a few quotes that he's received in a letter from the Corinthians.

⁷ Now for the matters you wrote about: [quote] "It is good for a man **not** to have sexual relations with a woman." [endquote] ² But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband.

⁵ Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. ⁶ I say this as a concession, not as a command. ⁷ I wish that all of you were as I am [single, unmarried, probably a widower]. **But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.** ⁸ Now to the unmarried (or widowers) and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do. ⁹ But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

Then we skip to v.25 entitled Concerning the Unmarried

²⁵ Now about virgins: I have no command from the Lord, but I give a judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy.

[When Paul speaks like this, he's speaking as an apostle without knowing that his words would become part of the Bible. He is giving what he considers godly counsel. And that counsel through the work of the Holy Spirit has now been declared to be part of the Bible, the inspired Word of God. So we read on at v.26:]

²⁶ Because of the present crisis (growing persecution), I think that it is good for a man to

remain as he is. ²⁷ Are you pledged to a woman? Do not seek to be released. Are you free from such a commitment? Do not look for a wife. ²⁸ But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this.

Let's skip vv.29-31 and pick it up at 32

Here's his point:

³² I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs—how he can please the Lord. ³³ But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife—³⁴ and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband. ³⁵ I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but **that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.**

³⁶ If anyone is worried that he might not be acting honorably toward the virgin he is engaged to, and if his passions are too strong and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. They should get married. ³⁷ **But the man who has settled the matter in his own mind, who is under no compulsion but has control over his own will, and who has made up his mind not to marry the virgin—this man also does the right thing.** ³⁸ So then, he who marries the virgin does right, but he who does not marry her does better.

³⁹ A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord. ⁴⁰ In my judgment, she is happier if she stays as she is [single]—and I think that I too have the Spirit of God.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Linda's testimony.

Now, before I begin my sermon, I want to invite a familiar member of our church up here to share her story of being single. You probably know her but I'll let her introduce herself. We thank her in advance for her vulnerability with us all. We cherish this gift.

Dear Family of God,

We heard last week that sex is God's gift to married couples and Paul makes that clear in some of the verses we read earlier too. However, we should not overlook the truth that **not** being married is a higher honour in the Bible than we often attribute to it.

I will just start this sermon by saying **to** everyone who is single that the church in general and even this church specifically has all too often exalted marriage to the point that it is sold as the best of all lives for a Christian. A good Christian girl should grow up and marry a good Christian boy and they should have good Christian children, at least a dozen or so 😊. Well, the dozen part is an exaggeration, but you get the picture. And I hope that everyone who is married is thinking, "Wait a minute; marriage is a good life."

But what if I told you that being single is also a good life? Yes, even a good and God-pleasing life! This is an important biblical teaching to affirm and also to act on. Today, then, I'm going to give some biblical backing for an exalted view of singleness and then some practical ways we can bless our single members.

The Biblical Value of Singles

The passage we read from First Corinthians brings a new light to discipleship that was not really present in the Old Testament. Singleness is given high value in the New Testament whereas in the Old to be unmarried and without children was to be "not blessed." Think of people like Sarah, the wife of Abraham, who could not conceive. Think of Hannah, the prophet Samuel's mother. These women felt like they were incomplete or cursed because they did not have children. They were undervalued because of this. Their culture considered them along with their husband deficient and incomplete, if not cursed by God.

So when we get to the New Testament, it should not be lost on us that Jesus exalts women, just as he tends to exalt all who are down and out in the world. Among his followers during his ministry years are the 12 male disciples. But many women are listed as followers and supporters of Jesus. Some of the men and women were married but some were single. Whether single or married, they had equal callings in the work of the Lord. However,—as Paul suggests in 1 Corinthians—the singles could devote themselves to the work of the Lord without being distracted by obligations to spouse and family.

Paul's conviction about singleness seems to have been heightened by the fact that persecution was a growing. He clearly has that in his heart as he writes in v.26:

1 Cor 7:26 Because of the present crisis (growing persecution), I think that it is good for a man to remain as he is (single).

However, singleness doesn't automatically make one a better disciple of Jesus. Paul's point is that it gives a Christian the opportunity to be a more devoted disciple. Discipleship is the key here for Paul. He writes in v.35,

1 Cor 7:35 I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.

It appears that Paul was married at some point but that his wife had passed away. So he could speak with experience as a married man and as a single man. And, clearly, he suggests singleness as preferable for the sake of the gospel and particularly because of persecution. He did indeed give his life fully to the work of the gospel. He never had to worry about his wife while he was out on many dangerous missionary journeys. He constantly risked his life for the love of Jesus without having to be concerned about who would take care of his family. His undivided devotion to the Lord helped him serve the Lord and his Church better. Hence his words to the church in Philippi are:

Phil 1:21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me.

Don't get me wrong. I'm absolutely delighted that I'm married. I actually don't relate to Paul on this score at all. I happen to personally think that I'd be less of a pastor and preacher if I was not married. I'm thankful to be married to Patsy. She is a

distraction but a good one. I don't know if I would have survived almost 30 years of ministry now without her. I do know she encourages me and gives me valuable feedback on my work. She's a good sounding board for me. She takes good care of me, making sure I eat well and get exercise. But, above all, she's my best friend and co-worker for Christ. In fact, she helps me love Jesus more.

And I think that's Paul's point, not about a spouse but about Jesus. We hear in different ways as we read 1 Corinthians that Paul is not against marriage. Rather, he's saying there's a higher calling in life for those who are willing to embrace it. Paul could have said, "Let's Jesus be your spouse!" Again, not to take anything away from marriage, but human relationships are temporary whereas our connection to Jesus is permanent and eternal. Obviously, not everyone is going to or should choose not to be married in this life. The continuation of the human race—according to God's design—depends on people getting married and having children. And that's a good life on so many levels. But Paul is arguing that **it's not the only good life** possible. A single person who is devoted to Jesus will have a very fulfilling life.

Please understand that Paul isn't saying, "Choose singleness and that's it." No, he's saying you should—if you feel called by God—choose singleness so you can devote more of your life to serving and loving Jesus. It is honorable to forsake marriage in order to focus on Jesus and his kingdom without distraction because that's what it'll be like in eternity when Jesus is our all in all.

Some married people right now are thinking, "Really?!" One writer—very helpfully, I think—put it like this:

... the things we value in this life are valued because they are a foretaste of the things we are made for. It is as if I have a particularly glorious painting of the mountains, that I am totally smitten with. I love looking at the snow-capped peaks, and the majestic grandeur of the mountains themselves. I LOVE this painting! But now we are moving. And I am told that I cannot take this painting with me for some reason that makes no sense at all to me. I just can't have it. I am inconsolable. I HATE the idea of moving to this new place where I can't have my mountains.

The part I don't comprehend is that my new home is in Western Wyoming. Or in Montana. Or in the Alps. [As Albertan we can add "or in Banff or Jasper!"]. I have had to leave my picture behind, but the exchange is that I will have the real thing.

Marriage is a picture of the real thing—a life single-heartedly devoted to Jesus. So those who choose singleness in order to pursue Jesus are actually pursuing the real thing. They are pursuing a relationship that will never be taken away from them and a kingdom that does not spoil, fade or perish. Marriage is a good part of creation but following Jesus with all of our heart is the highest calling of every Christian.

So I'm not saying marriage is bad. God says it's good. But the Bible is saying that being single for the sake of being a more devoted disciple of Jesus is a noble choice. And it's one that the church—all of us who are disciples of Jesus—must take seriously and support.

Practical Ways to Value Singles

Now let's switch gears. Maybe you're married and think what I've said is crazy. Or at least not for you. That's fine. I've probably been called worse things than crazy. 😊 And the truth is that Jesus does enable us to do things that some people think are crazy. You tell some people that you give 10% of your money to the church for the love of Jesus and they'll call you crazy! Tell them you give 5 hours of your time each week to serve others in some capacity and they might think you're crazy. You pay extra money to send your kids to a Christian school... some people would say that's crazy. You abstain from sex till marriage and lots of people in our society will think you're crazy.

Now thinking about practical ways to value singleness, I want to invite us all into a life of craziness, if you will. Craziness in the name of supporting single people as part of our church family.

Paul's words in our reading encourage people to consider singleness for the sake of Jesus and the gospel. But not everyone who is single has chosen to be single. Often singleness has chosen them. They may have had desires and dreams of marriage but God had other plans that include living as a single person.

Whether a person chooses singleness for the sake of Jesus or is single for other reasons, no one should be alone. Paul wasn't suggesting that single people would be without community and not experience love. We are not created to be alone. We can choose not to marry or we simply end up not finding a spouse. But every person still needs community and we are encouraged by God to ensure we value every member of the church. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul speaks of the church as a body—the Body of Christ. He explains that every person has a role to play, every person fits in and belongs in one way or another. And that needs to be the case whether a person is married or single, young or old, black, brown or white, heterosexual or LBGQTQ.

This is the challenge of our day. More people are single than in the past. More young adults are staying single longer than in previous generations. More people are coming out as LBGQTQ and if their situation requires celibacy, we need to be the body of Christ for them in a special way. More people are living longer. That means many of our seniors not only lose their spouse and become widowed but their time of being single again can be longer than it used to be. That requires special attention as well.

Without being too exact about it, if you really stop and think about it, a huge segment of the church is single people: all our children and young people as well as young adults until they get married. Then there are people who were married but are no longer, whether because of divorce or the death of their spouse. Just our single seniors alone total over 80 folks here at Trinity. Singleness is not some abnormality that we can ignore. A large segment of the church is made up of single—unmarried—people.

One dear woman's words from about 25 years ago still echo in my mind: "Alone is alone," she would say when I visited. But singleness should not mean alone-ness.

I heard a single man recently say, "If there's one thing I would love from the church, it's knowing there's a place I can go once a week to have dinner with a family or

a group of people.” He’s longing for connection and genuine fellowship over a meal. He doesn’t want to have to call for an invitation. He wants to feel like there’s a place where he is welcome. So just think about that for a moment. How could we answer that call to help this person know he’s important to us and belongs among us?

Let me give a few suggestions.

1. If you’re a person who loves cooking, make it known that every Tuesday—for example—you’ll have a meal for whoever wants to drop in. I’m sure you could ask them to let you know in advance so you can plan. But you get the picture. Just open your heart, open your doors, open your kitchen and you can be a huge blessing to just one single person or maybe more.

This is something you don’t even have to do by yourself. You can partner with others. Have the meal at a different place from week to week or maybe the same place. Maybe one person cooks, another sets up, and everyone can help with clean up. You could even do this here at the church. The idea is that we give single people a place to feel connected consistently. A place that fills a need in their life so they don’t feel alone in this world and especially in the church. They are connected and loved.

2. Another option is our small groups. I had a great meeting last week with our shepherding elders and small group leaders. You’ll notice in the bulletin that you have an opportunity to jump in next week and try a small group for the weeks of Lent. Small groups are a place to belong and to seek Jesus together. They are a great place for singles to plug in and for married people to make sure singles feel included.

Obviously, when singles are included, you don’t make your Bible study about being a good spouse or raising kids. That has its place, of course, but not in a group where you’re including single folks.

Stick to the thing we all need from a small group: a growing relationship with Jesus Christ! We need fellowship and community that helps us know God’s will for our lives and encourages us to live for him. We need a group that will help us become all that Jesus has died and risen to help us enjoy. In short, we need a group that loves Christ and loves one another and helps us become the best Christian we can be.

3. A third practical and important thing we can do is normalize singleness. Instead of saying, “We can’t wait for your wedding day,” parents can say, “Our deepest desire is for you to be devoted to Jesus, whether you are married or single.”
4. Finally, we can continue to encourage sexual purity—living by God’s standards—for everyone in the church. Whether married or single, we all must practice self-control in sexual matters but also in the rest of our life. We must support our singles in this when it’s tough for them. We must be grace-filled and loving toward one another, recognizing the struggle that it can be for

some people. Again, I think small groups can play a big part in helping us support one another for sexual purity, for overcoming loneliness and just overall help in living for the glory of God.

In conclusion, church, it's good to remember that our Lord Jesus never got married. He knew the struggle of being alone, even abandoned. Hebrews 4 tells us that he understands and is able to sympathize with us in all of our struggles. Moreover, he has made it possible for us to belong to him and to another. He forgives our sins. Hallelujah. But he also helps us in our weaknesses and struggles, whether single or married.

And a big way that he does this is through the Church. In Christ we are all brought into the family of God, we are sons and daughters of God and brothers and sisters in Jesus. On top of that, together the Church is the Bride of Christ. He is our loving and ever faithful Groom. He loves us with selfless and all-giving love. He draws us to himself in love and gives us to one another to help us know his love and enjoy the fellowship or the communion of the saints through our church family.

In fact, in the prayer Jesus prayed—recorded in John 17—before going to the cross, he said, “Father I pray that all who believe in me will be one!” (Jn 17:20) Congregation, may we do all we can—in the power of Jesus—to make each and every member of the church know the loving embrace of Jesus and the unity he gives to us. Oneness in him. May we give thanks for our single members and all the ways that they serve Jesus and us. Think back to Linda's story and all that she has contributed to the body of Christ. Let us ensure that we honour and support each person as a dear, valued and loved part of the church.

SUNDAY WORSHIP

February 27, 2022 10am

GOD CALLS US TO WORSHIP

Welcome & Announcements

Opening Prayer

* Call to Worship

* God's Greeting

* Gathering Songs: *You're Worthy of My Praise*

Holy God, We Praise Your Name

LUYH 540

OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD IS RENEWED

Prayer of Confession

Assurance of Pardon

Song of Thanksgiving: *Yet Not I But Through Christ in Me*

Children's Message

* Children's Song: *O God, You Are My God*

LUYH 743

Wee Worship Children Dismiss after this song

GOD GIVES US HIS WORD

Congregational Prayer & Prayer for the Word

Elder Mary vanRyk

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; 7:1-2, 5-9, 25-40

Testimony of a Single Believer

Linda Rosendal

Sermon: ***Let's Talk About Sex – Part 2***

* Song of Response: *Who You Say I Am*

CELEBRATING THE LORD'S SUPPER

Confessing our Faith: *The Apostles' Creed*

on screen

Eating & Drinking as a Body of Believers

Thanksgiving from Psalm 103

on screen

* Song: *Lift Up Your Hearts Unto the Lord*

LUYH 844

RESPONDING TO GOD'S GRACE

* Giving Our Tithes & Offerings to God:

1. Trinity Ministries

2. Nick & Jocelyn Frey (Mission Aviation Fellowship)

GOD SENDS US IN HIS STRENGTH

* God's Will for Our Lives

* God's Parting Blessing

* Sending Song: *Holy Is the Lord*