



## Singleness

### ***On being active and included in the body of Christ***

Singleness. I Often think there should be some kind of thunderclap after that word. This word and what it entails has caused unnumbered tears from the people of God. But while there are prayers and sermons for children, mothers, fathers, seniors, spouses and young people, I have yet to hear a sermon on singleness. It is very possibly the most forgotten aspect of Christian living within the church.

### **Christ and the church**

When we talk about singleness, as in everything, we need to start with Jesus and what He has done for us. Christ's death removed our sin, ended our separation from God, and changed forever our status to one another. This one of the first things that Nancy Wilson touches on in her book, *Why isn't a Pretty Girl Like You Married? ... and other helpful comments*. Because of Christ's reconciling work, singles are not on their own: *"Our individualistic culture wants to label unmarried people as singleness, but in the covenant community of God, there are no singles. God call us family."*

Our Trinitarian God is not individualistic. God does not save us and then declare "every man for himself ". We are family. Just as every family contains members of differing ages and abilities and is not complete when someone is missing, so it is with the family of God. You need the church and the church needs you. You do not become a member of the church after marriage vows, you become a member at your baptism — married and single we are all parts of the body, which is something we would all do well to remember.

With that thought in mind I would like to discuss some of the struggles in the rest of the Church can face these things together. When on Member of Christ body hurts we all hurt (1 Corinthians 12:26), so this is important for all of us.

### **Feeling incomplete**

Singleness can struggle with not meeting their own and other's expectations. People in our churches typically get married in their early twenties so this is the expectation we place on ourselves and others. Then, when marriage isn't part of the picture, we wonder what's wrong with us, and start to realize that others are probably wondering the same thing. This combination of our own and others' disappointment means that some questions and statements can impact us quite painfully.

*"How can it be that a nice young man like you still hasn't found a wife?"*

*"This will be good practice for when you're a mom."*

*'Maybe if you weren't so picky you wouldn't be alone.'*

For a long time I felt (and sometimes still feel) like I wasn't meeting everyone's expectations for my life, that I was not on par with the rest of the world. It wasn't until I realized that I didn't need to meet the expectations of others — my only requirement being to live before God as He commands — that I started developing a gracious attitude towards things some said that used to bother me (I still have a long way to go). Jesus' blood makes us complete — through Him, we now measure up to God's standards. And since this is so, then why does it matter what requirements others place on you?

This is why we need to forgive others' thoughtless comments. Some people are sincerely clueless and don't realize that questions like "Why are you still single?" hurt. Pray for a gracious spirit every morning when you get up, smile, and respond with kindness. And tell your hurt to God.

The rest of the Church can do better here. Comments like "Why isn't a nice man like you married?" rarely come across as a compliment, but rather a reminder to your single friend of what is not there. He would probably like to be married, but God has written his story a different way. We get it that you want us to be happy. Thank you. But reminding us of what we are missing is not helpful. Rather than say such things please *encourage singles where they are at now*. Did a single someone bring you a meal after your baby was born? Instead of saying how lucky her future husband will be, express your thankfulness and compliment her cooking.

## **Loneliness**

Singles struggle with loneliness, which is partly their own fault and partly everyone else's.

"How is it my fault? I can't help being alone!" you ask. Well, you are part of a church family, so go fellowship with them! Not just with the other single people around your age but with the widows, children, older people, married couples — all of them. As a member of the church you are responsible for its edification and well-being. Don't be self-centered. Don't presume others need to reach out to you first. Be hospitable by inviting people into your home (yes, single people can invite entire families over for Sunday lunch) and by being willing to go to their homes, even if it means going by yourself. Be brave.

But what about the rest of the Church? Remember, a single person cannot be his or her own companion. Being on their own all the time is not healthy or wise (no lone rangers), so the Church body needs to embrace singles. Embrace them in your hearts, conversations, homes, and families. This means being interested in each other and not envying each other. The single person may need to ask a young mother if her new baby is sleeping through the night and the young mother may need to ask what the single person did on the weekend.

One thing that has greatly endeared my pastor's family to me is that when my brother (who I lived with for almost two years) got married, my pastor told me that I should feel free to come over, whenever. Some times during the week can be more lonesome than others. Ask. Maybe Friday nights are hard — try to get together and do something.

## **Being known**

Now, being lonely as a single person is not just about sitting at home alone on a Saturday night with a bowl of popcorn, a Hallmark flick, and a box of tissues (though that can be part of it). It's also about no one knowing you. This is something we tend to forget. God gave Eve to Adam as a helpmate because he was alone (Genesis 2:18) and she not only helped him physically but also spiritually and emotionally. Single people don't have that. Our souls get lonely.

This is a struggle that I don't believe will leave us until we reach Heaven, which is actually a good thing. My soul's loneliness has caused me to reach out to God more than any other reason. God understands your heart and He is closer than you can imagine — so bring all the sorrows and struggles to Him. He is the only One who can fill up the lonely hole in your heart to overflowing. *Preach His promises to yourself even when the emotions don't agree.*

I understand that everyone has this kind of loneliness to one degree or another, but with singles it can be a bit different. If you are married, you have your spouse to relate to in a deep way. With single people, it's the feeling that no one has your back.

Not every day is a lonely one, of course, so don't assume the singles you know are in dire need of a heart to heart chat over a cup of cocoa. Just be aware that the struggle is there. Please pray that Jesus will be the One who fulfills us and that we would be content in Him.

## **Grace is key**

It doesn't matter what church you attend, it's going to be full of sinners. That means there will be people who annoy you and hurt your feelings, and you will do the same to others. So before you jump into the mix after the service, take a deep breath and pray for grace. Then decide to be interested in others. Rejoice in their joys and try to understand their struggles. Ask questions. Care about their lives.

While on the subject of fellowship, let me put in a quick plug for hospitality. The commands of the Bible are given to the Church, and so hospitality is a requirement for single and married persons alike. This is where singles need to be brave.

Inviting people into your home is intimidating. I recommend that you have more than one family over at a time. I know, that's more people to seat and feed — but the more people there are, the more they can talk amongst themselves while you prepare the food or do whatever you have to do.

Going to someone else's home also requires you to be brave. Since I moved out of my parents' home, I have done a lot of things by myself, from sitting in church to going to weddings, and these things can be very daunting. Something I do is remember that Jesus is with me and I am not alone. I talk to Him in the middle of an awkward conversation and smile with Him at a young family's craziness.

## **Where we end**

One day the entire church — made up of countless generations and people of differing age, mental ability, race, and marital status — will comprise the Bride of Christ at the marriage supper of the Lamb. The church, this wonderful thing we call family, our Lord calls His Bride. As we look forward to His return may He grant us the grace to live together in unity and love. And may He bless us with joy as we seek to serve each other and our King.

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