

singleness

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Introduction

“If singleness/celebracy is the Lord's idea of a gift, it has all the charm of a lump of coal in the toe of your Christmas stocking.”

The Door, Dec 1990

Being single is not an ideological stance, with marriage as the ultimate status in life.

35 % of adults in the churches are likely to be single - but are still regarded as babysitting resources, and better able to serve because they have more time.

Singleness: A Snapshot

Vital statistics and trends

In 1951, 1 in 10 adults were single. (General Household Survey 91)

More than 1 in 3 British adults are single pushing the singles population to over 18 million. (Office of Population Census survey 91)

By 2020, 1 in 3 adults will be living alone. Most women will live on their own, and more women will remain childless on current trends. (Government prediction)

In 1991, 48% of men 16-44 years were single against 39% women.

35% of adults attending evangelical churches are single. Inner City 42% (Singularly Significant 1992)

While 30% cite loneliness as a drawback, 53% say living alone gives a sense of achievement and 60% say they enjoy their freedom. (Mintel Survey)

As 1 in 4 marriages bite the dust, more people are becoming single in middle life.

Sainsbury's cannot sell enough single prepared meals - CTM. Sales of little individual half loaves are growing.

Reasons - changing working environments mean more responsibility and personal investment for individuals, greater opportunity for career rather than family, longer hours, more choice to work.

NOTES ...

Teenagers attitudes: More positive and confident about relationships - You do not have to lose your independence with a partner - expect financial independence, but also friendship.

Housing policies - women can be financially independent rather than being married for security

The Media Myth

Our society is very relationship orientated: magazines all talk about how best to have them, your ideal man or woman. TV and films have this macho guy that must be able to pull the girls, to have sexual conquests. Enormous pressure put on (young) people especially to be sexually active, to have a partner etc.

Single people are bombarded with everything about being sexually active and in a relationship - it is so important for their identity and acceptance. Forgiveness for thinking that the issues of singleness in our society are more often about sex than anything else.

- little room for a Christian! or so it seems.

The relationship has been put on a pedestal, and that can create a lot of pressure for people who are single, or married.

Defining Singleness

What does single mean? “One, alone, unwanted, free, young.” The Oxford Dictionary definition is “one only, not double, one by itself, unmarried, lonely, unaided.” Ask around and people have very different words to describe singleness.

Singles are a diverse group and can include:

- single, never married, with no sexual experience
- single, with a history of cohabiting or other sexual relationships
- single, never married, with a child or children - lone parents
- single but previously married, now separated, divorced or widowed

Some are single by choice or calling = **voluntary singleness**

Others by circumstance and social reasons = **involuntary singleness**

Within these groupings, each individual may be at different stages in their perception of singleness.

Single people often feel their value is undermined - the gospel goes to the heart of this search for value and identity.

A new definition in the gospel: in Jesus we see the perfection of singleness.

He came to show a new way, redeeming marriage AND singleness so that both can show God's glory to a fallen world.

JEREMIAH: told not to marry and his life was a prophetic statement (Jer 16 1-15)

EZEKIEL: was widowed (Ezek 24 15-19)

DANIEL: was appointed a palace eunuch (Dan 1 3-6)

In the New Testament, JOHN THE BAPTIST prepared the way for JESUS

God chose to make God known, contrary to prevailing culture, as a SINGLE person.

Fully man and fully God, tempted in every way, yet fulfilled - not half a person.

Jesus - the most famous single person - the best role model - was;

- free to care
- free to love and show emotion
- relaxed with single people and with women
- related to men and women with purity and gave them their dignity
- welcomed affection and touch

Jesus and Paul spoke on singleness as an equal status - a single person is not half a person but a whole. In 1 CORINTHIANS 7 Paul clearly believed and promoted marriage and singleness as valid and equal. Paul states his preference for singleness and affirms the life of celibacy.

“Single adults are intimacy starved rather than sexually deprived” - example of David and Jonathan - intimacy does not have to be erotic.

Putting The Pressure On

Society: if you don't want a relationship...

1. There must be something wrong with you – frigid
2. You're gay
3. You're mad

...basically, marriage is the norm and there is something WRONG if you are not married - pointed questions from aunts/mums.

Marriage is a statement that you are settled down and stable - men at work.

Bridget Jones - great story and happy to be single, but still desperate to find a man.

Church:

Church can be very marriage and family orientated.

Services are often “family” orientated - which is good for a while, but what about some meetings without the children? Sunday meetings often revolve around kids and parents - does not meet everybody's needs.

Stereotypes and roles in church and leadership: Alpha magazine reported prejudice to single ministers reinforcing the myth that marriage = success.

Alpha magazine have reported that single people have been denied leadership roles because they are single - excludes Jesus and Paul!

Caring For Single People

If you forget everything - remember this - teach and encourage single people (as with all people!) to be whole, secure in who they are, and not afraid of how others perceive their situation. Secure foundations in God are a critical part of enjoying life, and living it to the full.

I don't want to say to God that I was afraid to live the life he gave me to the full, because I was waiting until I got married to feel secure and affirmed as a person, before I could move on. (God may have to help me, and so will my friends...!)

The Churches survey shows we still have a big task ahead relating to the role and significance and perspectives of single people within church.

Things we can do as leaders:

Change our attitudes - single people are not sex mad! Of course be careful and safe in our relationships, but do not alienate and starve people of love, affection and discipleship because we are afraid that they instantly fall in love with you!

Develop and release single people in leadership and influence, role models

Releasing single people into demanding careers in the workplace **without unhelpful pressure** to attend meetings (an issue of workplace as well as singleness)

Care and support, not just mothering because they have no partner

Friendships, same and opposite sex - very important - meaningful touches!

More teaching on singleness, as well as marriage - family is not mum/dad/kids - inclusive church - breaking stereo types.

Address key issues - singleness, sexuality, intimacy, friendship, security.

Think through the language we use - weddings: classics like "this couple have found completeness in each other...are now a family, have reached the end of their journey etc".. Some phrases re-inforce the inadequacy of singleness by mistake.

Be aware of social pressures upon single people

- Loneliness : isolation
 - low self esteem/value
 - pressure to marry and live 'happily ever after'
 - who to bring to a party/event, or who to go on holiday with
 - obvious pressure points - weddings, valentines day
 - not feeling part of 'family'
 - suspicions aroused about the individuals' sexual orientation if they remain single

Give space for single people to form relationships with the opposite sex without the gossip trail 'marrying them off' after the first week! or watching their every romantic move. 'Older' single people need to be understood slightly differently to 'younger' single people. If you are 40, single and longing to be married, then this needs more attention perhaps than an 18 year old in the same situation.

Single Lifestyle

1. Be happy with who you are

Jesus went to a lot of trouble so that you could be whole, acceptable and free to live your life to the full. - so live it!! don't be moaning single type, that spends all their time looking at themselves and picking their life apart! - only have themselves to worry about!

Being single does not mean that you cannot relate to people married, or with children - get stuck in to all aspects of community and evangelism!
2. Friendships are one of the most important parts of your life

Some have developed a low priority for eating and entertaining - making new friends, or feel that they cannot entertain on their own.

Lack of accountability and discussion on your life - single people do not have someone to tell them off, or bounce ideas, or get feedback or laugh at them when they are daft!!
3. Don't wait until you are married to invest in your life

Make good friends, have a nice house (rented or otherwise) - to buy nice food, to have candle light dinners with your friends etc
4. Get involved with other "families"

Muck about with their kids, don't feel that babysitting is the only option
5. Be yourself

Nothing attracts people more to Jesus than you do.
6. Satisfied with life

Not all things in life are ideal, and we need to come to terms with that - and not get stressed and disillusioned - I am not saying it is always great to be single - whatever you're status, live life to the full and serve God.

Truly part of community. Playing a full part and not marginalised.

Session Impact Form

How has this session impacted my understanding?

What parts of my character and attitudes have been challenged?

What issues do I need to deal with and pray through?

What practical action / changes can I make, in consultation with my discipler, in terms of my lifestyle / life?