

SINGLEHOOD THAT GLORIFIES GOD

Living With Eternal Purpose

INTRODUCTION

Subjects such as dating, engagement, and marriage are generally more apt to be discussed by young people than singlehood. Perhaps this is because more people marry than stay single, and perhaps also because most young people want to get married. But it means, unfortunately, that sometimes people find themselves in situations they never have given much thought to, and just as unfortunately, situations which nobody else has given much thought to either.

Although this chapter is for single people, it is not for them alone. Single people are family members. Single

people are church members. Single people are neighbors and friends. The struggles and triumphs of single people need to be discussed and understood by everyone for several reasons. First, single people need to be understood because everyone in God's family is valuable. If we are to relate properly as Christian to Christian, we need to understand one another. Second, as we learn about single people, we often come to realize that some of their problems are compounded by unthinking and uncaring people around them. What may be thoughtlessly brushed aside as "their problem" is in reality sometimes "our problem." And third, the whole subject of singlehood needs to be considered more carefully by all because too many single talents and resources lie dormant or buried and go unused in the kingdom of God.

WHY AM I SINGLE?

"Why" questions are not always profitable, particularly when they are asked in anger or discouragement. But "why" questions can be asked honestly. And with singlehood, as with any other human condition, we usually function better when we understand ourselves. It is to that end we pursue the matter here.

Obviously, looking at why people do anything can be as varied as people themselves. The issue of why a person is single, however, is often confused in Christian minds because so many factors outside of our control bear upon it. True, some people choose to be single. For them, the matter of why is usually more clear. But for many, singlehood seems to be one's lot rather than one's choice, and here is where misunderstanding easily sets in.

Christians view God as sovereign. When they are willing to be married but instead find themselves single,

they legitimately ask, “Is this God’s will for me?” And the next “logical” questions are “Why? Is there something wrong with me? Am I not where God wants me to be? Have I just not found the right person?” At this point objectivity is easily lost. Personal feelings cloud the issues. And as Evelyn Mumaw points out in her book *Woman Alone*, “Frequently the real reasons and the felt reasons are not the same.”¹

If you analyze the above questions, they tend to fall naturally into three categories of possible reasons for singlehood—personal character, God’s will, and circumstances. Let’s look at each of these more carefully.

Personal Character

In our hearts and in our minds, companionship is inseparably tied to love and personal acceptance. In reality, of course, companionship may bring hate and rejection. But in our hearts we want to be accepted, and in our minds we tell ourselves it ought always to be so in marriage. When we find that we are not married, we easily begin to assume that we are not because others have rejected us.

The feeling of rejection, left unchecked, can be destructive to say the least. It can damage relationships. It can sap one’s spirituality. It can wear away at one’s spirit and virtually destroy a personality.

In single people, the feeling of rejection may take a variety of forms. There may be anger at the opposite sex in general. The anger may turn inward and develop into a sense of personal failure, resulting in depression. On the other hand, there may be unconscious attempts to control others, particularly putting their love to the test—a person who feels rejected sometimes seems driven to prove that he or she actually is rejected. The feeling of rejection may also cause the single person to try to prove personal competence *as single*. Thus, he or

she² may launch into work, hobby, education, or recreation with a drive that declares, "I'm quite capable of living life myself, thank you."

This rejection, however, may be much more of a felt reason than a real one. But whether it is real or felt, the reactions mentioned above invariably do not help, but only serve to alienate a single person even from those who could be true friends.

Having noted that the feeling of rejection, particularly as attributed to the opposite sex in general, is usually unfounded, we must acknowledge that character and personality do legitimately bear upon singlehood and marriage. They are foundational for companionship as well as for any other human relationship. Christian young men and women seeking companionship *should* be attracted to solid character and mature personality. And the same standard by which young people seek companionship should be used also to avoid companionship.

The ultimate One to approve character and provide acceptance, however, is God, not the ones we date or do not date. Those who feel rejected in singlehood must learn to come back to openness before God. What Paul wrote to Timothy could be applied here. "Study [give earnest diligence] to shew thyself approved unto God" (2 Timothy 2:15). We must recognize that people do not always approve or disapprove rightly. Some people who would make excellent marriage partners never marry, and some who are grabbed up readily in marriage make poor mates. The simple point is that the single life which has God's approval will inevitably be more fulfilled than the married life which has not God's approval.

So, is there "something the matter with me" if I am not married? There could be, just as there could be something the matter with me if I am married. But as we will see later, there are enough other factors involved

that we are wrong to *assume* that singlehood is a matter of personal failure—either in assessing ourselves or others.

On the other hand, it can be healthy periodically to evaluate ourselves, not so much from the standpoint of whether we are eligible for marriage, but whether we are personally, socially, and spiritually healthy. Ask yourself: Am I continuing to expand my mind and skills? Am I gracious, thoughtful, and helpful in my relationships? Am I experiencing a deepening acquaintance with God, gaining insight into His ways and into His purposes for my life? As Mrs. Mumaw helpfully counsels, “Note your weaker areas, and set about to deal with these constructively.”³

God’s Will

A second factor often viewed as a cause for singlehood is God’s will. The whole subject of God’s involvement in our lives is so much larger than the present discussion that we simply cannot do it justice here, and yet it is so basic to a proper understanding of life that we must consider it, although only in brief.

The Scriptures reveal truth, but the Scriptures do not always explain the truths they reveal. From the Scripture we know, for example, that God is sovereign. “Our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased” (Psalm 115:3). The Scripture also reveals that sin is in the world and that things are not as they ought to be—there is pain, there is struggle, there is misunderstanding and betrayal, there is injustice and inequity, there is temptation and evil, there is hardship, sickness, and death. “God looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God. . . . there is none that doeth good, no, not one” (Psalm 53:2, 3). “I saw the prosperity of the wicked” (Psalm 73:3). “I have seen servants