

**WELCOME HOME**  
**Part Two: Single Life & Dating**  
**Pastor Rick Henderson**                      **April 13-14, 2024**

I hope you came ready for a second round of honest, family conversations. That's what this series is. That's why we're calling it welcome home. The experience that we each should have as we gather together right now should be comfortable, restful, and safe—even if it challenges us. That's exactly what Jesus wants for you. Did you know that?

There was a time when one of Jesus' closest followers was just complaining. After going on about how much they all gave up to follow Jesus, this is part of Jesus' response.

**MATTHEW 17:29** *And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.*

The greatest benefit we get from following Jesus is Jesus. In him, we get a life of thriving. That's what eternal life is. It's more than life without end. It's a full, thriving, abundant life. And included in that is a bigger family and a richer family experience than we could ever have on our own. Church is family. We should engage with each other, serve each other, be devoted to each other, and talk with each other like a beloved family. It is a big deal.

With that in mind, I want to remind you and invite you all to a special family meeting next week. Recently, our church affirmed that both men and women can serve in and occupy any position of leadership without restriction. I'll share a New Testament perspective on what led to that. There will be a live Q&A. I hope you come.

Today, we're having a different family conversation. We're talking about the single life, which means we'll talk some about dating. First, I want to recap something we covered last week.

We are all **REFLECTING, RESISTING, or REDEEMING** our cultural influences.

How are you reflecting, resisting, or redeeming the influence of the broader culture on your mindset about singleness? Please hear me. That's a question for everybody, including the married people. How are you reflecting, resisting, or redeeming the influence of your friends and family on your mindset about singleness? How are you reflecting, resisting, or redeeming the influence of your religious culture on your mindset about singleness?

Remember, reflecting cultural influences—**AND THERE ARE COUNTLESS CULTURAL INFLUENCES WORKING ON US**—takes zero awareness and zero effort. But if we are going to be wise people and not foolish people, we must be aware of and think carefully about those influences. Resisting and redeeming the influences that want to push us around, that want to push you around, takes lots of awareness and lots of effort.

This is my starting point today, and I want it to be our starting point too.

Singleness isn't a **PROBLEM** to solve, but loneliness is.

I know that some of you need to be validated today. I hope you let this encourage you. There is nothing wrong with you. Your relationship status doesn't signal anything about your significance or value. Singleness is not a problem to be solved.

This doesn't come from any one Bible verse, chapter, or story. From cover to cover, we will encounter pages that reinforce this, that point to this, but there isn't anything that explicitly states this. And yet, when we take it all together, this is the conclusion we will come to. When God made the first human, God declared that it wasn't good for him to be alone. It wasn't singleness, but being alone was the problem to be solved.

According to Jesus, no one is going to be married in heaven. All of us will have the relationship status of single. And none of us will be alone. The main passage that we are going to read from today literally celebrates people who stay single. I don't know if you know this, but followers of Jesus were the first group of people to honor and celebrate singles and the single life.

The conversation that we are having today is a good and needed conversation. But let's be honest, there's more than what we can cover in one sitting.

**REALITY CHECK:** There's not a single *singles* demographic.

The more you dig into the single life, the more complex it becomes.

### **3 CATEGORIES**

- Single people who want to get married.
- Single people who don't want to get married.
- Single people who are happily unmarried but are open to marriage.

There's absolutely nothing wrong with any of those 3 dispositions. Is it really possible to take a one-size-fits-all approach to single life? And we're just getting started.

There are many other variables that make the single life much more vibrant and dynamic. There are single people who were once married. There are single people who are wrestling with the reality of same-sex attraction, and they have intentionally decided to put romantic relationships on pause as they seek to follow Jesus. There are single people who have been in an exclusive relationship for years. There are single people who want to stay unmarried so that they can have more freedom to serve others. There are single people who have kids.

To the single men and single women, whatever your experience with the single life is, it would mean the world to me if you felt seen today. A biblical event that probably doesn't get enough attention is the first time someone gave a name to God. It was a woman. She wasn't married. She was a slave. She was at the bottom of the social hierarchy. She was desperate because she was being exploited and taken advantage of.

Her name was Hagar. And when God met her and responded to her in her need, Hagar responded with this.

**GENESIS 16:3** *She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: “You are the God who sees me,” for she said, “I have now seen the One who sees me.”*

Every single one of us needs to know that God sees us. Whatever iteration of the single life you’re living, you need and deserve for your church to see you. Not your status. You. If ever a church culture privileges married people over single people—that church is wrong. If ever a church treats singleness like a problem to be solved or adopts a mindset that makes marriage the goal of the Christian life—that church is wrong.

God sees you. Let’s truly see him **and** each other, and let’s see the gospel. If we do that, we’ll find ourselves taking on some needed perspectives that will shape our mindset about singleness.

#### **NEEDED PERSPECTIVES:**

- Christological

Christology is simply knowing and seeking to better understand who Jesus truly is.

- Devotional

This is about living out our love for and happy obedience to the leadership of Jesus.

- Practical

This is about merging wisdom with real-life situations. Let’s start here.

The most **JOY**-filled and **COMPLETE** person in human history was single and never had sex.

While this is absolutely true about Jesus, it’s also a perspective that can easily become a cliché. This truth becomes little more than a cliché when used a license to ignore someone’s experiences, longings, hurts, or loneliness. No one should ever throw this out flippantly. Please don’t ever use this as a way to bypass the discomfort of honest vulnerability.

Let’s take each other seriously and this truth seriously. Do you think Jesus ever thought, “I wonder what it’s like to really be happy? I wonder what it’s like to really have intimacy?” No way. So, if you’re living a single life, let me ask this.

**QUESTION:** Do you think it’s possible that Jesus wants to use your singleness to give you a greater knowledge of and deeper experience of him?

Married people have advantages and disadvantages. Single people have advantages and disadvantages. Married people have the advantage of getting to play out the living metaphor of Jesus’ relationship with the church in a way that singles can’t. We talked about that last week. The advantage that single people have is that they get to model Christlikeness in a way that married people can’t. Now, if you’re single and you doubt that Jesus really understood and truly experienced all that it meant to be a single adult in a world where respectable men his age weren’t single, let me remind you of this.

**HEBREWS 4:15-16** *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to **empathize** with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been **tempted in every way**, just as we are—**yet he did not sin**.*

Here's at least one implication of this. Whatever your status or circumstance, Jesus can legitimately and authentically say to you, "I understand. I get it. I empathize with you." Notice that in his love and empathy with us, he was tempted and did not sin.

When you and I emotionally connect with someone and empathize with them—which is absolutely right and good—when that leads us to compromise our moral conviction, do you know why we do that? It's not because we care about them. It's because we care about ourselves. When we feel the discomfort and tension that comes from caring for someone and caring for moral truth, we compromise our moral conviction—that's not love for the other person. That's love for ourselves. We're unwilling to sit in the discomfort. Not so with Jesus.

Hang with me. And, when we feel discomfort and tension that comes from caring for someone and caring for moral truth we distance ourselves from them—it's not because we care about truth. No, we're just caring about ourselves. We're unwilling to sit in the discomfort. Not so with Jesus.

### **1 CORINTHIANS 7:25-35**

I want you to grab a Bible and find this passage. It's in the second half of the Bible, called the New Testament. It's the 7<sup>th</sup> book: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians. If you're at 2 Corinthians, you've gone too far.

This chapter covers all the relationship categories: married people, even unhappily married people. It addresses single people, even unhappily single people. It also speaks to widowed people and divorced people. The section we're going to read is for single people, and it's about living with an undivided heart.

**1 CORINTHIANS 7:25-35** *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. Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for a man to remain as he is. 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. 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. What I mean, brothers and sisters, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they do not; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away. 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. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife—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. 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.*

I want to highlight the end.

**1 CORINTHIANS 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**.*

This was written by a man named Paul. He was single himself. This wasn't abstract for him. It was personal. What he is passing on is what he learned from Jesus and what inspired him to write. Can we see this?

Jesus is **MORE** committed to your good than **YOU** are.

Jesus once said, "The thief only comes to kill and steal and destroy. I've come to give you life to the fullest. He gave his life so you and I could have an abundant, full, thriving life. He's all in for our good. We can trust him.

**1 CORINTHIANS 7:25-28** *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. **Because of the present crisis,***

I was recently talking to a group of young singles, and one of them asked, "How do you know when it's the right time to pursue a relationship?" There is not a one-size-fits-all answer to that. There is wisdom. Look at your life in the broader context. Paul was writing to people who were facing some sort of crisis. A crisis is typically not a great time to make a major life change.

What's going on in your life right now? Would making a major change contribute to the Christ honoring direction you are going? Would it distract you from that or derail you from that? Look at your life in the broader context and use wisdom. Invite wise people who you trust to speak into your life.

*I think that it is good for a man to remain as he is. 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. 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.*

Changing your relationship status doesn't **SOLVE** problems. It **EXCHANGES** them.

I don't want that to sound heavy or negative. It's not negative, but it is true. Every relationship status comes with a set of challenges. Being single comes with a set of challenges. Being married comes with a set of challenges. Opting for divorce comes with a set of challenges. Believe it or not, not even divorce solves problems. It might remove you from a situation, but it does not resolve or solve what created that situation.

This is one of the reasons that I love the Bible and trust biblical writers. What you read is honest and raw. It doesn't pull any punches. Paul doesn't flinch or sugarcoat how he engages in real life. There are advantages to being single and disadvantages to being married. And there are advantages to being married and disadvantages to being single. You need to know that if you change your relationship status, you are not solving a problem. You are exchanging one set of challenges for another. That's OK.

- If you are single and you like the problems of marriage better than the problems of singleness—get married. That's great!
- If you are single and you like the problems of singleness better than the problems of marriage—don't get married. That's great!

- If you are married and you like the problems of singles better than your married problems, pump the brakes. That's not great. There are valid reasons for divorce, and yet divorce is never a celebration.

If you are single and you want to change your status. Do it. I just hope you know at the core of who you are that a relationship can't elevate your status. You're not incomplete. You get to decide how you want to maximize the status you have and the season you are in. Whatever you decide, I hope you reject the cultural influences that want to deceive you into thinking that being single is about living for yourself.

If you live for yourself while **SINGLE**, you'll live for yourself **WHEN** married.

If you're not a follower of Jesus, I'm so glad you're here. Some of this may not make sense, and yet it makes perfect sense. Hang with me, and it will be clear very soon. If you are a follower of Jesus, then you know that we don't ever live for ourselves. Married people don't. Single people don't. Each weekend, we end our service reading the same passage that tells us, "We don't live for ourselves. We live for the one who died for us and was raised again."

Even if you are not a follower of Jesus, it isn't true that you get annoyed or turned off by people who always think of themselves first and only think of themselves first. If you don't like it when others are like that, why would you ever want to be like that? The question is, who do you live for?

For those of you who can say I was more guilty and sinful and morally messed up than I could ever dare admit, and now I'm more loved, accepted, and forgiven in Christ than I could ever dare hope—we don't live for ourselves. We live for him. Which also means we place others ahead of ourselves.

If you were here last week, you remember that Jesus' way in marriage is to place ourselves last. That's not a switch we flip on and off. Saying I do doesn't make that automatic. If you are a follower of Jesus—put yourself last. If you're single and you hope to one day be married—start this now. Practice this now, and you will be ready then. I promise you. And even if you never get married and don't want to get married, this is the way of the gospel, and it is good.

I want to end our time with some practical advice. This for folks who want to be married or who are open to it. After that I'm going to offer some practical advice for us married folks.

#### **PRACTICAL ADVICE FOR SINGLE PEOPLE**

- It's OK to meet people at church.

Living for Jesus doesn't mean that we don't get to do good things for ourselves or pursue desires and wants. Living for Jesus means that we happily live life under his authority, following his lead. His way of doing things is our way of doing things.

There's nothing wrong with meeting people at church, with looking for community at church, and with looking for friends at church. What better place is there to find friends? There's nothing wrong with looking for a significant other at church. What better place is there?

It's only a problem if we're simply using church to find someone. That'll make it weird. That's why it can get weird. But what better place to meet someone who's living for Jesus than in a place where we gather with people who live for Jesus?

- I think it's awesome when people meet while serving on a ministry team together.
- I think it's awesome when people meet while attending a small group together.
- I think it's awesome when sparks start to fly, or your stomach gets queasy when you notice someone in the lobby.
- It's OK to date casually, not carelessly.

It's OK to date to get to know someone. It's OK to date because you enjoy each other's company. You don't have to know how you feel about someone before dating them. You don't have to know if you're ready for marriage yet to date someone.

With all the love and seriousness I have, don't be careless with your heart and with your body. And don't be careless with someone else's heart and with their body.

- Define your boundaries before you start dating.

Can we talk like adults? God created us as sexual beings. Don't be a slave to your sexuality. Don't suppress your sexuality. Do steward your sexuality. This is a powerful part of who you are. It's not wrong. It's powerful. If you want to follow Jesus's lead in this area of your life, it's going to take more than effort. It's going to require a strategy. I'm going to offer you a set of starter boundaries and strategies.

If a bathing suit covers it, don't touch it. Don't lie down together. If you ever break rule one or two and add alcohol, you're toast.

- Don't give your heart to someone who hasn't given their heart to Jesus.
- Monitor and evaluate the sexual messaging you consume.
- Eliminate pornography from your life.
- Develop friendships with married people.
- If you want to maximize your freedom, minimize your debt.

#### **PRACTICAL ADVICE FOR MARRIED PEOPLE**

- Don't pity single people. Honor them.
- Don't play matchmaker unless they ask you to.
- Eliminate "when are you going to/why aren't you..." questions from your conversations.
- Be a great friend and invite single people into your home.

**BOTTOM LINE:** Not everyone is supposed to be married. No one is supposed to be **ALONE**.

Jesus gave his life so that we can have a full, thriving, abundant life. We can trust him. Let's follow him.