

Redeeming Singleness

Thanks for asking me to speak with you today about what the Bible has to say about singleness.

The topic is something which I've given a lot of thought to over the past few years – not simply because it is an interesting theological issue but because it is something that is very personal to me as a 34 year old single Christian woman who has never been married.

I know that amongst you there are some who are single and others who are married. So let me address both of those groups quickly before we get stuck into the guts of the topic.

If you married - I'm very thankful for the opportunity to spend this time with you thinking about singleness. Most single people spend quite a bit of time thinking about what the Bible has to say about marriage... but I don't think the reverse is always – or even often – true.

I also want to say from the outset I think it is wonderful that you are married. Marriage is a great gift from God and I hope that today will provide you with further opportunity to reflect on how wonderful that gift is.

To those of you who are single ... I'm also very thankful for the opportunity to spend this time talking with you and thinking about a matter that is very pertinent to both you and I.

I also want to clarify who exactly I am referring to when taking about being single.

There are three groups of us.

Firstly, those who have never been married.

Secondly, those who have been married but who have been widowed and have not, to this stage, remarried.

Thirdly, those who have been married but who are now divorced and have not, to this stage, remarried.

I fall into the first category – I've never been married. ... and of course there are obvious differences between those three life situations... but when I speak of singleness I am actually referring to and including all three of them.

Ok. Down to business.

We're going to do two things today,

Firstly we are going to look at the biblical theology of singleness –we are going to look at what God has to say about singleness from the Old Testament through to the New Testament.

Secondly, we are going to look at the personal experience of being single and how we bring the bible to bear on the single life

After that, if I haven't spoken for too long, we'll have a chance to discuss any questions which might have been raised for you as a result of anything I have said.

Biblical Theology of Singleness

SLIDE – Biblical Theology of Singleness

So with that in mind, let's get stuck in! We're at point 2 in your outlines – **A Biblical Theology of Singleness** and we're going to start at the beginning... in Genesis.

In the Beginning - Genesis

Most of us are pretty familiar with the Genesis creation accounts. God created everything in the heavens and on the earth – including human kind - and his wholesale description of everything he had created was that it was ‘good’... except for one thing.

We read about it in Genesis 2:18

‘The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make a helper suitable for him”.

The **one** element of God’s creation which was ‘not good’ was the aloneness of Adam.

Of course, the question is, **why** was Adam’s aloneness not good?

Well, the answer is that it was not good because Adam was lonely.

Or was he?

The word used in verse 18 is not lonely... but alone. Those words are not the same as each other.

Adam **may** have been lonely (though I doubt it and you can ask me why later)... but the fact of the matter is that we just don't know either way! The verse doesn't say **anything** about how Adam was feeling.

It is actually written from God's point of view. *'The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone*

It is God who identifies the not goodness in the situation – not Adam and his feelings.

Genesis **does not say** that the reason it was not good for Adam to be alone was because he was feeling sad and lonely without a wife.

Instead, it gives us a different answer to the question of this not good aloneness.

A couple of verses earlier in verse 15 we read that God had given Adam a task – his task was to work the garden. Chapter 1 verse 28 gives us more of an insight into this work – man's role was to subdue, hold dominion over the earth and the way

he was to do that was to fill the earth, to be fruitful and increase in number.

That is why it wasn't good for Adam to be alone,...
because Adam alone couldn't fulfil the task God had given him.
Adam alone couldn't fill the earth, could increase in number,
couldn't subdue and hold dominion over creation.

Adam alone couldn't fulfil the task that God had given him. And so God said that he needed a suitable **helper**.

At the conclusion of Genesis 2 we read that the marriage relationship was **one** vital way in which men and women were to partner one another in their task of keeping the garden. After all, marriage is the context in which humans are called to be fruitful and increase in number!

However, marriage was not, and is not, the be all and end all of relationships between men and women.

Yes, being a wife was one way in which women were designed to be 'helpers'.

However, Eve was also Adam's colleague and partner. She was his friend and his companion. She became the mother and

the grandmother of men. Her female descendants became sisters and daughters and neighbours to men.

The bible talks about a whole range of relationships that exist between men and women as they go about partnering one another in their God given task to subdue this earth and rule over every living creature.

In other words, Eve's identity as a suitable helper was not solely defined by her role as a wife.

Marriage amongst the Old Testament people of Israel

And yet, as we read the rest of the Old Testament it is clear that marriage **was** absolutely central to ancient Israelite society. And it's not hard to understand why.

You see, the cornerstone of Israel's relationship with God was the covenant, the promises, that he had made with their forefather Abraham and all of his descendants.

Look at Genesis 17:7 with me...

*“I will establish my covenant as an **everlasting** covenant... between me and you**and your descendants after you for the generations to come**”.*

God’s covenant with Abraham was also an ongoing covenant with all of Abraham’s descendants.

And so, the role of God’s Old Testament people was to have lots and lots of babies. ... Why? Because God was building his kingdom through the physical descendants of Abraham.

As a result marriage was considered absolutely vital. ... because marriage was the context in which these descendants were born and raised.

In the Old testament, marriage was absolutely normative for God’s people.

Singleness amongst the Old Testament people of Israel

Which means that a single Old Testament Israelite, whether unmarried, divorced or widowed was a tragic figure.

Singleness in the Old Testament was the domain of the slaves, the beggars, the prostitutes and the eunuchs ... **none** of those were appealing lifestyle options.

Marriage was the **norm** for an old Testament Israelite. And therefore, if you were single well, then you were... in a very real sense... abnormal.

The New Testament

However, when we come to the New Testament something momentous happens ... **and it changes everything.**

The Bible tells us that when our Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins something changed – the kingdom of God drew near and the day in which he would return became imminent.

Therefore, the way in which God's people are called to live, as they wait for that day, has also changed.

As a result the New Testament begins to speak about singleness ... **positively.**

In fact it appears that there has become something intrinsically *good* about remaining chastely single.

So the question is then - What difference does Jesus make to our understanding of the purpose of singleness?

Our Heavenly Reality

Well, firstly let's talk about our heavenly reality.

Earthly Marriage points to...

When we read the New Testament it is very clear that Jesus didn't do away with marriage. The New Testament **does not** reveal that earthly marriage has been made redundant.

However, it **does** reveal that earthly marriage will one day **become** redundant.

In Matthew chapter 22 we see some of the religious leaders try to trip Jesus up. They remind him that the Mosaic law commanded a man whose brother had died without any children to marry his brother's widow.

But then they make up this hypothetical of a woman who ends up marrying all 7 brothers in a family, one after the other.

And they challenge Jesus to tell them **which** of those brothers she will be married to in the resurrection age.

Jesus responds in verse 29:

"You are in error because you don't know the Scriptures or the power of God. At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven."

In this passage Jesus tells us that human marriage between individuals will not exist in heaven.

Now you might think – hang on... doesn't he only say that there won't be any **new** marriages in heaven? Maybe marriages made on earth will still exist.

But if that is what Jesus meant, then the Sadducees question still stands – which of the 7 brothers **would** the woman be married to?

Jesus clearly says here that they just don't **get it**.

The woman would **not** be married to any of the brothers because in heaven humans, like the angels, won't **be** married. Human marriage won't exist

Why?

Because in heaven, the purpose of earthly marriage will have been fulfilled

I'm a bit of a reality TV tragic... and one of my favourite shows is called Project Runway. I don't know if you have seen it or not but it is basically the fashion industry's version of Masterchef.

At the end of each episode before the contestants garments are revealed on the runway, the models stop behind a big white screen and strike a pose. And so you see a silhouette of the outfit they are wearing. That silhouette is just a hint... before the model comes out to reveal the full garment.

The Bible says earthly marriage is just like that silhouette – it is a hint... a shadow... that points to something greater than itself.

That is why Paul says in Ephesians 5 that the union between a husband and wife is a profound mystery... because it is actually about the heavenly union between Christ and the church.

The purpose of marriage is to point towards the picture in Revelation 21 when Christ, the bridegroom, marries the Church.

When that heavenly marriage happens then earthly marriage will be redundant... because it's purpose will have been fulfilled.

This means that married Christians are forerunners of heaven... because they point towards the heavenly relationship between Christ and the church.

Earthly singleness points to...

Now, that's all well and good... but isn't this meant to be a talk on singleness, not marriage?

Well, yes ... hang in with me because I'm getting there.

You see, just as those who are married are forerunners of heaven...

so, those of us who are single are **also** forerunners of heaven...
so we **also** foreshadow our eternal reality

... just from a bit of a different perspective.

You see although we will collectively – as the church - be married to Christ in heaven... we've seen from Scripture that none of us will be married to **each other**.

We will not always be husbands and wives ... but we **will** always be brothers and sisters in Christ.

In heaven there will no unique and exclusive relationships between one man and one woman.

No.

We will **all** partake in a totally inclusive relationship with each another – we will **all** be each other's brothers and sisters in Christ.

And so here's the point – single Christians foreshadow **that** heavenly reality in their lives now. Why?

Well, **because** we do not share in an exclusive marriage relationship...

...because we **already** relate to **all** other Christians as brother and sister in Christ,

... because **singles** relationships now foreshadow what **all** of our relationships will be like for eternity.

Earthly marriage reflects the wonderful heavenly relationship that we, as a church, will have with Christ.

Earthly singleness reflects the wonderful heavenly relationships that we as individuals will have with **one another**.

That is why earthly singleness amongst God's people serves a good purpose... an important purpose. In fact, the purpose of godly singleness is **just as** important as the purpose of godly marriage

... because **both** point us towards different aspects of the heavenly reality that awaits us!

Our Earthly Role

But there is **second** reason why godly singleness is good... and it has to do with our earthly role.

We saw earlier that the way in men and women belonged to God's people in the Old Testament was through their biological descendancy from Abraham.

However, in the New Testament Jesus **radically** redefines this.

Look with me at the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus in John 3.

"I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.

Jesus says to Nicodemus – it isn't actually your physical birth that matters... it's all about your spiritual rebirth.

In other words, we are not actually part of God's kingdom because of biological descendancy from Abraham

No... we are **adopted** into his kingdom because of our **spiritual** relationship with Jesus Christ.

That has massive implications for the way we understand our earthly role...

Because it reveals that what matters most for us as God's people is not creating biological heirs who are born... but spiritual heirs who are reborn.

Spiritual Parenthood

This is hugely significant for single Christians.

Why?

Well, because we are **all** called to urge others to be born again as disciples of Christ. Just like their married counterparts Single Christians are called to be parents... spiritual parents.

Now before you think I'm merely trying to sentimentalise singleness to make it all sound a bit rosier – let's consider the example of Paul.

We know that Paul was a single man throughout the course of his ministry. Yet in 1 Corinthians 4:15 he says that in Christ Jesus he, had become a **father** to the Corinthians Christians.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:7 Paul describes himself as acting towards his readers like “a mother taking care of her little children”.

In Galatians 4:19 he addresses his readers as his little children and he describes himself as being in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is fully formed in them.

Paul sees his relationship with his disciples as being genuinely and sincerely like that of a parent and a child. He sees his role as bearing spiritual children for God, through disciplining.

And so, in light of this, John Piper says, in an absolutely beautiful quote... *“it will be said of many single women in Christ: She was a great mother and never married”*.

God has a good purpose for those of his people who are single. He calls them to bear spiritual children for him – children who are born again of the Spirit.

And he places them in a situation where they have a unique freedom and flexibility to pursue spiritual parenthood within a wider network of relationships than their married counterparts.

I heard someone describe it well the other day. She said that before she was married her Christian ministry was very extensive. She was able to pour a lot of time into a whole lot of different ministries and relationships. But when she became a wife and then a mother her ministry turned from being extensive to intensive. The majority of his ministry and Christian service was focused on her husband and her children.

Now, one was not more valuable than the other! They were just different. As a wife and a mother her ministry focus was intensive, but as a single woman it had been extensive.

In fact, this is why Paul says that remaining single is actually the better of two good options.

The Better of Two Good Options

Now whoa! Hang on a second. That's a big call isn't it. Where does Paul say that it is **better** to remain single.

Come with me to 1 Corinthians 7:36-38. The passage is printed your outlines and I'm going to read from the beginning of the third paragraph.

In addressing the unmarried Christian man Paul wrote:

³⁶ If anyone thinks he is acting improperly toward the virgin he is engaged to, and if she is getting along in years and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. They should get married. ³⁷But 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. ³⁸So then, he who marries the virgin does right, but he who does not marry her does even better.

Now note, Paul doesn't overthrow marriage. He still considers it a right and a good option. But he says right there in verse 38, that remaining single is actually a **better** option.

I'm not sure we believe that...

particularly in our evangelical culture in which church has become so tightly connected with the nuclear family unit. In

that context singleness sometimes doesn't even appear to be a **valid**, let alone a better option!

But it's right there in God's Word.

The apostle Paul has an incredible vision for the godly single life – a vision which leads him to commend singleness as the better of the two good gifts that God gives his people.

What is this vision Paul has for godly singleness?

Look with me at the earlier two paragraphs of 1 Corinthians 7 starting at verse 26.

²⁶Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for you to remain as you are. ²⁷Are you married? Do not seek a divorce. Are you unmarried? Do not look for a wife. ²⁸But 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.

²⁹What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; ³⁰those 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; ³¹those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them.

For this world in its present form is passing away. ³²I would like you to be free from concern. ³²An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs—how he can please the Lord. ³³But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife— ³⁴and 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. ³⁵I 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.

Paul says that the single Christian has been freed from the concerns of this world....

So that they can instead be entirely concerned with eternity...

Marriage and family are both good gifts from God. But we've already seen that these human relationships will not stand, as they are, in eternity.

Paul's vision of singleness in 1 Cor 7 is a vision committed to reminding others to expand their understanding of Jesus' kingdom beyond just the earthly reality of marriage and the family...

A vision in which singles encourage other Christians to look forward to the perfected relationships we will share with one another in eternity...

A vision that calls singles to remind the body of Christ that the role of the family should be in building and growing the eternal church...

rather than the church's primary role being to build and grow earthly families.

Paul then goes on to teach his readers about the freedom that comes with this... better... option.

Whilst married women rightly need to invest primarily in their relationship with their husbands and their children, Paul says that single women do not have those divided interests.

Instead they have a particular freedom for a particular purpose.

This purposeful, **unique** freedom allows single women to aim to be undivided in their devotion to the Lord ...in both body and spirit.

It's right there in the passage.

And the reason he says it is not to place restrictions and burdens upon single Christians.

No, he says it for their good... so that they might live in a right way... in undivided devotion to the one who hung on a cross for the sake of his own.

Sisters, God's word says that, for the sake of his kingdom, singleness is actually the better of two good options.

Do you believe God's word?

The Personal Experience of being Single

Let's be honest.

It's hard to believe that singleness is good, let alone better, when sometimes, perhaps even most of the time, being single feels anything but good.

The grief, the loneliness, the anxieties, the dissatisfaction, the temptations, the uncertainty – most single people know them quite intimately.

And so the question is – how do we reconcile the pain of our personal experience ... with the fact that God's word says that he has a good purpose for singleness?

Well, there is a whole array of answers to that question, but we only have time to talk about a few of them now.

Here's the first.

An Obsession with Coupledness

It's doesn't take much to work out that we live in a world **obsessed with coupledness** does it? The obsession is all around – from magazine, to radio, to newspaper. Our world is obsessed with coupledness.

And unfortunately our church culture can be just as bad.

In the last few decades evangelical Christians have been fighting an uphill battle to protect the sanctity of marriage and

the family in a world which is seeking to undermine both... and none more so that in our present day.

As right and important as this battle has been, one of the unfortunate consequences has been an elevation of marriage and the family, from being good gifts from God, to the **ultimate** goal of the Christian life.

Apart from being on very shaky biblical ground, this obsession within the church makes it so very, very difficult for the single Christian.

Whether we are single or not we **must** uphold the sanctity and goodness of marriage and family.

But all of us in the church must humbly subvert all obsession with them... any idolatry of them...

...because as good as they are, in the blink of an eye they will pass away.

So if you are married, let me encourage you to care for your single brothers and sisters by making your family *outward* looking. Why not make a regular and standing date when a close single friend comes over, helps you put the kids to bed,

has dinner with you and then just hangs out for a few hours. Why not invite that close single friend to go on your family holiday with you? Why not ask that close single friend to be a god-parent to one or more of your children?

You see, you can love your single christian friends who don't have a family of their own by including them in yours.

And if you are single and struggling in a world obsessed with coupledness then keep your eyes fixed on eternity, and on our unmarried Saviour, who himself experienced every grief and temptation known to mankind, and who still entrusted everything to his father.

Understanding the Nature of the Gift

The second way in which we reconcile the biblical theology of singleness with the personal experience of it is by understanding the true **nature** of the **gift of singleness**.

Because that's the big question for us singles isn't it? What **is** the gift of singleness?

You might be a little surprised by this but those words - the gift of singleness - they don't actually appear in Scripture. What they refer to is verse 7 of 1 Corinthians 7 where the unmarried Paul writes:

I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.

The implication from the passage as a whole is that marriage and singleness are different gifts that God gives to different people.

Yet our personal experience of singleness makes it feel like anything but a gift at times!

And if it is a gift... well then too often we just want an exchange or refund don't we!

I did.

In fact for many years I prayed hard that I would **not** have the gift of singleness... and here's why.

I thought that it was a special spiritually empowered gift of inner peace – a kind of special injection of the Holy spirit, given to only a select few who God put aside for lifelong singleness.

I **didn't want** that gift.

But, how was I to know if I had been unwillingly stuck with it?

Well as one author put it:

If you are single and know down in your heart that you would get married in an instant if a reasonable opportunity presented itself... if you find yourself terribly frustrated by unfulfilled sexual impulses then you probably don't have the gift. But if neither of these things seems to bother you – rejoice... you may have found one of your spiritual gifts

Now that is **not** what I wanted to hear.

Because, you see, although I could see that being single gave me ministry opportunities that my married friends didn't have.... I **was still bothered** and **frustrated** by my singleness.... I **did** want to get married... I had normal sexual impulses.

On the basis of what that author said I **didn't have** this spiritually empowered gift of singleness.

And yet I was still single.

And so I found myself constantly frustrated at God who had withheld from me, both the special spiritual gift and a husband.

I felt cheated.

Maybe that is you today.

But friends, God's word does not lie.

It wasn't until a number of years ago that I realised it was actually my misunderstanding of the nature of the gift that was blinding me to the goodness of the gift.

You see, there is **nothing** in the text of 1 Corinthians 7 which says that the gift of singleness is a special spiritual injection of inner peace.

Paul **does not say** 'I wish that all had what I **have**'.

He simply says I wish that all were as I **am**.

What **is** Paul? He's unmarried. He's single. The gift he has is the life situation of being single.

That's all the gift is... it's simply the gift of being single.

Far from being for a select few, it is a gift that we are **all** born with. We will either have that gift for our entire life or else God will give us a different gift – the gift of being married.

And even if he does give us that different gift, then for some us later in life, he will give us back the gift of being single either through widowhood or divorce.

If you are single today, then God has given you the good gift of singleness **today**.

It is not an injection of spiritual power that will ensure you live a perfectly fulfilled life as a single person.

It is simply the state of life God has given you right here, right now. And it's a **gift**.

What's more, it's not a gift given primarily for your benefit.

The reason God gives **either** the gift of being married or of being single is **not** ultimately so that we can have a right merry time of it ourselves.

He gives them to us so that we can love and serve others... and so that we can love and serve Him.

When we understand that it is not **all** about **us**, then we are freed from being enslaved to our resentment of having been given a gift we didn't want or ask for.

We are free to pursue the good purpose of the gift, despite the fact that sometimes it is **really** difficult and painful to do so.

Cultivating Contentment

Which brings us to the third way in which we can seek to uphold what God says is the good purpose of singleness with our personal experience of it.

It is OK to feel sad about being single.

Let me say it again - It is OK to feel sad about being single.

Marriage is a good gift from God, and so it is natural that there be some grief amongst those of us who haven't received that gift, at least not yet.

It is OK to be sad.

But what is not OK is for us to wallow in our sadness. It is not OK for us to dwell in our disappointment. It is no OK for us to breed bitterness.

God's word tells us that we must all learn to cultivate contentment in the midst of pain.

Now this is entirely different to what the world ... and Dr Phil tells us...

They tell us that we **shouldn't** be content to settle for anything less than what **we perceive** will make us truly happy.

But the Bible .. well it tells us that we live in a world which has been ravaged by sin... that **we**, and our relationships with one other, have been ravaged by sin.

The world we live in is a world of tears.

Yes, God in his graciousness brings us measures of happiness and joy amidst the tears...

...but the tears **will** remain until that final day when God himself wipes them from our eyes for good.

In the meantime he tells us that we must learn the secret of contentment amidst the tears.

In Philippians chapter 4 Paul writes

I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty.

I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

If you are single and sad about it... acknowledge the truth of your pain and ask God to help you be content despite it.

Why?

Well, because we can do everything through him who gives us strength.

In talking about her desire to be married Lesley Ludy wrote:

The key was how I responded to my desires. In the past I'd allowed those desires to consume my thoughts and control my actions and decisions. Now I had to learn to thank God for the desires He had placed in my heart and then surrender them back to Him. He showed me that it was entirely possible to long for a human love story and yet not be controlled by that longing.

Longing for marriage without being controlled by that longing... it's not an easy thing to do. But it **is** possible. We can learn the secret of contentment because our good God gives us the strength to so.

Whether you are single or married...cultivate contentment in the situation God has placed you.

One last thing

Well, there is one last thing I want to take a moment or two to speak with you about. And let me say up front that it's likely to

set the cat amongst the pigeons a bit... so please do write down your questions and we'll have time to discuss it in a few minutes.

Ok. Here it is.

Dating... and marrying... a non-Christian.

There he is. Lovely. Charming. Sincere. Caring. Attractive.

And unlike the single **Christian** men you know... this non-Christian man... well he's interested in you. In fact, he's **really** interested in you.

It's a scenario that is all too common isn't it? It may be one that some of you here are currently in.

And we could spend a long time talking about it. But I want to just say a few things now and then if you like we can speak about it a bit more once I am finished.

I've always thought that dating a non-Christian is not a very wise thing to do. Let me explain my logic.

Firstly, the only reason I would want to date someone is if there is a possibility that I might at some point marry them. I'm not going to date someone if I know from the start that marriage is not a possibility.

Secondly, marrying a non-Christian seems to me to be a very silly thing for me to do. Who I am is totally caught up with the fact that I want to live with Jesus as my Lord and Saviour. And so committing to a lifelong covenant of marriage with a man who doesn't share the same central passion for Jesus that I do... well, it would seem to me a supremely unwise thing to do.

So , if I know from the outset I am not going to marry a non-Christian **and** I'm committed to only dating men that I know there is a possibility I might marry... well then I'm convinced that for me to date a non-Christian would be... well, foolish.

However, recently I've done some pretty heavy duty thinking about this whole question of dating and marrying a non-Christian... and I think I've changed my mind.

But probably not in the way that you might be thinking I have.

You see, having spent some serious time thinking about what the Bible says about this I'm now convinced that dating a non-

Christian is not just a matter wisdom or foolishness, but actually of obedience to God's word or disobedience.

That is, I think Scripture says enough on this topic for us to realise that marrying a non-Christian is something that God quite plainly says is **not** his will for us... and so if we decide to do so there is a very real sense in which we are acting disobediently.

We can ask me some more questions about this in a moment if you like, but in the meantime here are a couple of verses for you to jot down which I think help us understand how this issue moves beyond being a matter of wisdom and becomes a matter of obedience.

1 Cor 7:39

1 Cor 9:5

2 Cor 6:14-18

Eph 5:22-32

If someone is **already** married to a non-Christian then it is most definitely God's will that they remain entirely committed to that marriage! He wants them to honor the lifelong promises they made before him and others. He wants them to truly love and

honor their husband. And he wants them to pray earnestly for their spouse's salvation.

However, if you are single and contemplating entering into a relationship with a non-Christian... or if you are currently dating a non-Christian... then I want to urge you to go back to God's word, read it very carefully and trust that he knows and wants what is best for you.

Because he says that what is best for you is **not** entering into the lifelong covenant of marriage with a man who will not love you and lead you like Jesus does his church, a man who will not make your holiness his top priority, a man who will not bring your children up to trust Jesus in everything.

Redeeming Singleness

Let me wrap this up so that you can have a chance to ask your questions.

God has a good purpose for singleness in the lives of his children. He really does.

I want to ask you if are you convinced of that?

If you're married, will you promote the goodness of marriage and family in this life ... without making this life **all about** marriage and family.

Will you open your family to those who have no family of their own?

Will you love and care for, support and challenge your single friends as **they** seek to be godly in their singleness.

And, if you are single, will you trust God's word when he says that he has a good purpose for your singleness?

Will you take up the challenge of modelling the profound biblical truth that this world... and everything in it... is passing away?

Will you take seriously the privilege and responsibility of spiritual motherhood as you disciple others in Christ?

Will you seek to exploit the freedom you have as a single woman to be **undivided** in your devotion to God?

Will you acknowledge the sadness you feel and yet look to God for the strength to cultivate contentment as you keep your eyes fixed on eternity?

Why don't I pray for us....

Heavenly Father,

Thank you that you for all your goodness to us. Thank you for the happiness and the joy you bring us as we live in a world of tears. Thank you for the trials and the sadness which you use to draw us closer to you, and to make us more like Christ.

Thank you for singleness. Thank you that you have a good purpose for it.... That you have an eternal purpose for it.

We ask that you would help us to be content ... and to indeed rejoice in the situation you have placed us – be it marriage or singleness... not for our own sake but for the sake of your kingdom.

We pray this in the name of your beloved son,

Amen.