



PRODIGAL

CHURCH

SERMON SERIES: PRODIGAL CHURCH

DATE: SUNDAY, 6 SEPTEMBER 2020

SPEAKER: BRITTANY WILLEMSE

SERMON TITLE: SINGLENESS

SCRIPTURE: 1 CORINTHIANS 7:25-40

We are continuing in our series Prodigal Church based on Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Over the last couple of weeks, we have truly covered some nitty gritty relevant subject matter like sexual immorality, marriage and divorce. In the passages we are in today, Paul is now speaking to the unmarried.

It is important for us to engage with this topic because for those that are married, in the eyes of many single people, you've made it! So, by default, rightly or wrongly, you become the automatic advise givers in this area.

Q. What is the best dating advice you have ever heard, given or received? ☒ Brittany said that dating advice is descriptive rather than prescriptive. Why is that important to remember when giving dating advice?

Q. How has the dating scene changed over the years?

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 7:25-28.

"Now about virgins: I have no command from the Lord, but I give a judgement 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."

In verse 26 Paul talks about the 'present crisis.' During this time in Corinth there was a severe shortage of grain because of a drought. Grain was a staple food item for the people in this time but they had taken it for granted and assumed the great Roman Empire would keep them safe and sound and well fed when suddenly there was a food crisis.

Most of the Christians in Corinth were poor so they would have felt the effects of this and have been anxious about it. In this day and age getting married inevitably led to having children, which would have added to the pressure of having to provide for their family. So, Paul is giving some very practical advise here 'in this present crisis just remain as you are'.

The Message Version spells it out a but more explicitly in verse 28 when Paul says: **“All I am saying is that when you marry, you take on additional stress in an already stressful time, and I want to spare you if possible.”**

Then if we skip ahead to the end of this chapter to verse 38 it reads:

“Marriage is spiritually and morally right and not inferior to singleness in any way, although as I indicated earlier, because of the times we live in, I do have pastoral reasons for encouraging singleness.”

So, we can see in these scriptures that in light of the context that Paul was addressing the church of Corinth in, it provides a pretty big reason for Paul to practically and pastorally encourage singleness because of this grain shortage.

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 7: 29-31.

“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.”

Q. The world in its present form is passing away. How and in what ways is this a great reminder for all of us?

This life, the here and now, the good and the bad that we experience, the things we buy and enjoy, the things that bring us loss and grief and sadness are all temporary. It's a reminder to live, through our lives, our working, our raising of children, our marriages, our singleness, completely devoted to God and under the authority of the One who loves us. Marriages and families are Kingdom work also if all things are devoted to the Lord.

AS PAUL SAYS IN ROMANS 12:1

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, on account of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies (everything that you are) as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, - this is your true and proper worship.”

And that is the challenge for all of us. That in spite and despite of our relationship status we are to be fully devoted to the Lord. That is the goal, that is the aim, that is Paul's ultimate desire for the Church. Marriage is temporary, and so instead of offering or pointing to marriage as the complete answer for all or the pinnacle of the Christian faith, we need to continue to point to the gospel of Jesus Christ and to a time when our earthly desires will be fulfilled in Christ.

Q. In what ways do we have a tendency to over-emphasize the superiority of the Christian marriage? Why do you think that is?

After being widowed at the age of 25, Brittany said that in her experience of navigating dating a second time around, and in speaking to other singles, is that it can feel like as a single person you're in a 'waiting room'.... the Single Person Waiting Room. Then when you meet another person in that 'waiting room' and fall in love, only then can you enter the door of 'Finally Living Life Properly.' Only then will your purpose be fulfilled.

And unfortunately, more often than not, the Church can confirm this by remaining silent about and not celebrating the singles within their communities. Even though about 30% of adults in Church, at any one time, are single. It's often met with sadness more than celebration. And this culture is spread subtly.

For example, when married people only want to socialise with other married people. Selfishly, yes, selfishly, looking to their perfect couple friend match. Jane doesn't want to befriend Sally because who will husband John hang out with?

You see, we all want easy friendships but what we are actually saying, even subtly, to the single person is that you are not worth my time as you are now. You, as a single person, are not enough for us and not worth the elements of inconvenience or awkwardness. You are not worth my time to learn what life looks like for you.

We justify it by saying things like: Well, we won't have anything in common - they don't have kids. How can the single person come on holiday with us or to dinner, or join our Life Group? Let's not invite them because honestly they will feel like the odd one out and that's not fair on them to parade our relationships in front of them.

It's that simple... and an easy way to make marriage seem like the superior option and to make single people, divorcees, widows and widowers feel undervalued.

Q. In what ways have you seen or experienced people being placed in various 'waiting rooms' single or otherwise?

Q. What are some practical ways we can embrace and celebrate the single people in our church communities?

Q. How do we / can we include people that live outside our areas of comfort and convenience in church life?

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 7:32-40.

"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.

If anyone is worried that he might not be acting honorably toward the virgin he is engaged to, and if his passions are too strong (bow chika a wow wow) and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. They should get married. But 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. So then, he who marries the virgin does right, but he who does not marry her does better."

**Just to clarify the referencing to the men and not the woman isn't because men are the only ones who experience desire, it is reflective of the marriage culture of the time.*

"A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord. In my judgement, she is happier if she stays as she is- and I think that I too have the Spirit of God."

What is surprising in this passage is that although Paul believes both marriage and singleness are good in the eyes of God, he is glorifying the single life as a more noble way. Now it's no secret that most people desire to be married and very few people have the gift of celibacy.

Singleness is often a personal, painful wrestle where you don't feel liberated. Singles desire and long for the companionship, the intimacy, even just the option to do life with someone else. So, the question is, if you burn with passion or as the scripture mentions, your desires are too strong and you're not planning on an arranged marriage, what do you do?

There is nothing shameful about this desire. The Bible book Songs of Solomon freely talks about this burning passion. But how do you navigate this in-between time?

One of the areas that you are going to travel are the murky waters of dating. Paul says: If anyone is worried that he might not be acting honourably toward the virgin he is engaged to and if his passions are too strong and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. He should get married. So, if you want to get married, then you'll have to, unfortunately, date. The Bible doesn't explicitly look at the topic of dating because most were promised to one another by their parents.

To say it can be tough, frustrating, awkward and lots of pressure is an understatement. But if we don't talk about it, our present culture of dating will define ours. Currently our society says:

- That our feelings rule
- That it's all about chemistry, a vibe and sexual compatibility
- That romance is fuelled by experience
- Where the question is no longer how long should we date before we have sex but how long do we have sex before we date?
- Where sex is defined as intimacy
- Where we don't communicate our feelings to one another but instead play this guessing game with no intention of being with that person because it makes us vulnerable and being vulnerable in this way isn't 'good for us'...

A word to any single people in your Life Groups: As you face these challenges, you really are modern day saints by not succumbing to the dominant culture that it's a basic human right to experience sexual relationships and dating in this fashion, beyond the fact that we are hard wired for relationships and often desire to be desired. But it's hard work!

Q. How can our church community help and support our singles, our Young Adults, widows and divorcees to put God first?

Singleness is a unique opportunity as a Christian as it highlights our, the churches love and devotion to Christ, as it's seen in the single persons exclusive devotion to Christ.

Singleness says to a watching world

- God is enough
- God is sufficient
- God is worth the pain and grief that I feel in my singleness

It is in that struggle and in that tension that singles can point people to God as they rely on Him in a greater way for fulfilment of such needs and desires. Singleness isn't about being single, it's about God.

Editors note: Over the years I have observed Brittany navigating being a single person once again in our church community. She made the most of it! She stepped right into serving by going to Fiji for 9 months to work with the Bula Coffee team. She finished her theology degree which had actually begun the last time she was single. Brittany interned again at church. She began a Life Group for a small group of young adults (being the older one in that group) where we have seen that grow to become the larger younger adults' community here at BBC. I could go on and on. The point being is that if you are single:

Feel the fear and serve anyway.

Don't wait to be married before you serve God

Don't wait to be married before you spend time with God.

Q. The question remains the same for all of us: How can we best serve God in our current status or situations?

End your time together with praying for one another and by praying for those singles in your sphere of influence and in our BBC family. Be brave and invite some singles over for a meal or a movie/game night! Let's feel the awkward and do it anyway!

Have a great week!

