

The Call to Remain Single



God is a Matchmaker (Part 3)
by Derek Prince

In my previous talks this week I've established certain basic facts which are necessary for a proper understanding of marriage, and let me add that today in our contemporary culture there are few people who do have a proper understanding of marriage. This is what I believe to be the Bible's evaluation of marriage and the way to achieve successful marriage. First, the Bible places much greater importance upon marriage than most of us realize. Second, in His teaching on marriage, Jesus went right back to God's purpose in creation, He refused to accept any lower standard. Third, in the record of creation we find four successive phases in the establishment of marriage: first, it was God's decision, not Adam's; second, God formed Eve for Adam; third, God brought Eve to Adam; and fourth, God established the terms of their relationship. I believe that all these four principles still apply today in the outworking of God's purpose for marriage in our lives.

But, before we can begin to apply these principles in our lives, logically there is one question which each of us must face and the question is this: Is it God's will for me to marry at all? Or does God want me to remain single? It's this question I'm going to deal with today.

I'm going to turn to the writing of Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 7, the chapter which is entirely devoted to marriage and related themes. In verses 1–3, Paul opens the chapter this way [and apparently he's answering questions that the Corinthian Christians had directed to him]:

> "Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry. But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband."

So Paul says, "In order to avoid immorality, it's important that every man have his own wife, every woman have her own husband." Nevertheless, he says that isn't necessarily God's will for everybody. But if the alternative is immorality, then

marriage is what God demands. He continues a little further on in that chapter, 1 Corinthians chapter 7 verses 6–7. Having said this, he goes on:

> "I say this as a concession, not as a command."

In other words, he's not commanding every man to marry or every woman to marry, but he's saying it because so often the alternative is simply immorality or frustrated, unfulfilled desires. Then he sums up with a little personal comment:

> "I wish that all men were as I am. [That is, of course, unmarried, single.] But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that."

Now, that word "gift" there is a very interesting word. It's a word that a lot of people are very busy with today. It's the word charisma. Many Christians don't realize that the ability to find fulfillment without being married is a charisma. The word charisma means "a gift," or "of God's grace." It's something that God supernaturally imparts by His grace.

It sometimes amuses me when I'm with people who are not Catholics that they're so busy talking about charismata or spiritual gifts and the various gifts they have or want to have. But very seldom do I hear those who are not Catholics talking about the charisma of being single. And yet, it's one of the charismata that are mentioned in the New Testament. So Paul says, "That's my charisma. I'm very happy that way. I could wish all of you were just as happy as I am the same way. But," he says, "I realize that's not going to be so. Because my being able to live happy and fulfilled without marriage is a charisma, it's a special distribution of God's grace given to me in His sovereignty." And if you don't have that charisma, he's implying you'll never find that happiness and that fulfillment. You'll probably be frustrated. You may be tempted into immorality.

Now, let's make a few comments on those words of Paul. First, as I've said already, let me emphasize again the ability to find fulfillment without being married, living single, is a charisma. But it's exemplified by two of the main characters of the New Testament: Paul is one and whom do you think I have in mind beside Paul? Of course it's Jesus. And yet I think many, many Christians don't realize that that charisma is demonstrated in the life of Jesus; He never married.

The second comment I wish to make is this, that God is sovereign. He makes the decisions. I want to emphasize this all the way through, He decides whether we are to be fulfilled in marriage or in a single life and if it's marriage then He decides whom we are to marry. This matter is so important that God does not leave the initiative with man. Many, many tragedies of unfulfillment and frustration have come into the lives of many believers because they have not been willing to leave this initiative in God's hands.

The third comment I wish to make is this, that as I see it in Scripture, singleness is the exception, not the rule. It's normal for men and women to marry but in special cases, for His own purposes, for His service and for His glory, the Lord distributes to certain men and to certain women the ability to find fulfillment and to serve God on the highest level without being married. I think it's probably easier for a woman to achieve that than a man. If you consider the career of Paul as outlined in the New Testament, it's obvious that he could never have made any woman happy because he would have been with her very, very little. So we see the wisdom of God.

Finally, this is my fourth comment: To miss God's plan either way is to miss God's highest. To get married when you should be single or to stay single when you should be married or to marry someone God has not appointed for you, all those are errors which will cause you to miss God's highest will for your life.

Now I'm going to deal with a very important and practical question which arises out of what I've been saying. The question is this: How can you know if you should remain single? I want to suggest three steps that you need to take to answer this question.

Step No. 1: Commit your life to God without reservation. Don't hold anything back. Don't try to make your own plans. Don't impose your prerequisites on God. Just tell God, "Here I am. Take me as I am, in the name of Jesus. Make me what you want me to be and use me the way you want to use me."

The second step is: Ask God to show you His will in this important matter. Don't just grope. Don't just speculate. Ask God for clear direction. Here's a beautiful pattern prayer which is one of my favorite prayers from all of the Bible. It's in Psalm 25 verses 4–5, a prayer of David:

> "Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long."

Would you pray that prayer? "Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me." If you pray that out of a sincere and believing heart, I am sure that God will show you, if you're willing to be shown.

The third piece of advice I wish to give in this connection is this, it's negative: Do not move either way without positive

direction. One of the simplest and most practical pieces of advice outside of Scripture that I ever received was this: If you don't know what to do, don't do it! And I'll pass that on to you. If you're not sure about marriage or whom to marry, don't do it! Don't move either way without positive direction. This is what Paul says about living single a little further on in that same 7th chapter of 1 Corinthians:

> "Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord has assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches."

Whatever your calling is, whatever your position is, stay in it until God moves you out of it. And a little further on in the same chapter, verse 24:

Brothers, each man, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation God called him to.

How do you know that you're in the situation? I believe one main way is that as long as you're walking in the will of God, you'll have a deep settled peace. Let me read the Amplified Bible version of Colossians 3:15:

> "And let the peace [soul harmony which comes] from the Christ rule [act as umpire continually] in your hearts, deciding and settling with finality all questions that arise in your minds [in that peaceful state] to which [as members of Christ's] one body you were also called [to live]."

So, if you let God's peace arbitrate in your heart, it'll show you in what state you've been called to live. If you lose your peace, it's a warning that you're probably beginning to move out of the place that God has put you in. Let God's peace arbitrate, make the decision, finally settle the questions that arise in your heart.

Finally, let me add this: If you do decide that you are called to remain single, this will probably affect other aspects of your life. In particular, you'll especially need the close fellowship of committed believers of your own sex. Remember Genesis 2:18 is still true. "It is not good for the man to be alone."

May God help you to make the right decision.

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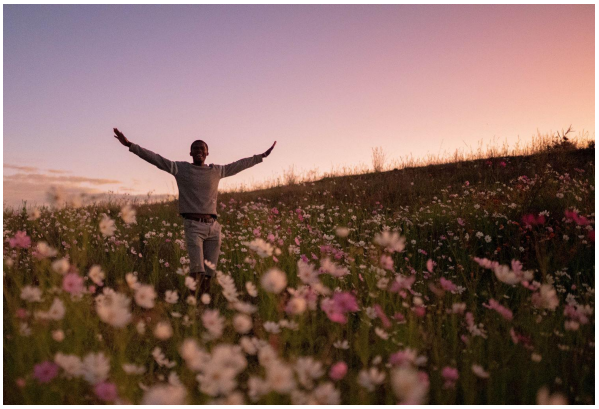

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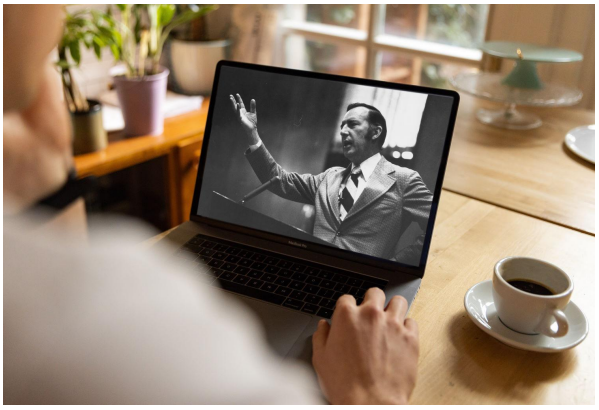

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