

The Christian Home

Lesson 10: Every Household Honored: Singleness, Widowhood, and the Hard Home -- 1 Corinthians 7:7–9, 32–35; 1 Peter 3:1–2

Up to now this study has spent most of its time on marriage and children, and for good reason, since that is where most of Scripture's teaching about the home is found. But if we are not careful, a study like this can leave some people feeling as though they are standing outside the window looking in, watching a family celebration they were never invited to. The widow who goes home to a quiet house. The single believer who has waited years for a marriage that has not come. The man or woman who sits in the pew alone every Sunday because their spouse will not come. The one whose home is marked more by sorrow than by joy. To every one of them, and perhaps to you, God has something to say, and it is not a word of pity. It is a word of honor.

Consider this: the two most influential people in the New Testament, the Lord Jesus Himself and the apostle Paul, were both single. Jesus, the most complete human being who ever lived, never married. Paul, who turned the ancient world upside down, wrote, "I wish that all were as I myself am," single and free for the work of God. If singleness were a second-class state, a holding pattern for the incomplete, no one told Jesus or Paul. They lived it as a gift, and Paul says plainly that it is one. "Each has his own gift from God," he writes, "one of one kind and one of another." Marriage is a gift. Singleness is a gift. Neither is the measure of a person's worth or usefulness to God.

Paul even points to an advantage in the single life that married people do not have: an undivided devotion to the Lord. The married believer is rightly concerned with pleasing a spouse and caring for a family, and his interests are, in Paul's honest words, divided. The single believer can give to the Lord an attention and availability that marriage necessarily limits. Far from being a waiting room, singleness can be a launching pad, a season (or a lifetime) of wholehearted service that blesses the whole family of God.

And to those whose homes are hard, the believer married to an unbeliever, the one enduring a painful or divided household, Peter speaks with tender realism, holding out the quiet power of a godly life to win even a spouse who will not listen to a word about the Lord. This lesson is about the truth that God honors every household and every station of life, and that no one, married or single, widowed or waiting, joyful or grieving, is a second-class member of His family. Read these verses slowly, and hear how wide the welcome of God really is.

Group Discussion: Churches can unintentionally send the message that marriage and a houseful of children are the only truly 'arrived' Christian life, leaving singles, widows, and those in hard homes feeling overlooked. Yet Jesus and Paul were both single, and Paul calls singleness a gift. How can a church genuinely honor every station of life, so that no one feels like a second-class member of God's family?

Personal Reflection: Whatever your situation, married, single, widowed, or carrying a difficult home, consider how you actually feel about it before God. Do you receive your current station as a place you can serve and glorify Him, or as a problem to escape, a punishment, or a waiting room? Where do you need to hear God's honor and hope over your particular situation?

Read 1 Corinthians 7:7–9, 32–35; 1 Peter 3:1–2

Study Questions

1. Paul writes, “I wish that all were as I myself am [single] ... To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am” (1 Corinthians 7:7–8). Remembering that both Jesus and Paul were single, what does it tell us about God's view of singleness that Scripture calls it ‘good,’ and how does this challenge the assumption that marriage is the only complete or honorable Christian life?
2. It is easy, in a culture and even a church focused on marriage and family, for single believers to view their singleness as a curse, a failure, or a mere waiting room. If you are single, how do you tend to view your season, and what would change if you received it as a genuine gift and calling from God? If you are married, how might you be quietly communicating that singleness is second-best?
3. Paul points to a real advantage in singleness: “The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord ... I say this ... to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord” (1 Corinthians 7:32–35). What is the unique opportunity for devotion and service that singleness can offer, and why does Paul present this as a genuine good rather than a consolation prize?
4. Whether single or married, every believer is called to wholehearted devotion to the Lord. If you are single, are you actually using the freedom of this season for the Lord, or merely waiting for life to ‘begin’? If you are married, where have your God-given responsibilities become an excuse for a divided, half-hearted devotion? What would undivided devotion look like for you this week?
5. Paul insists, “each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another” (1 Corinthians 7:7), placing marriage and singleness side by side as gifts. Why is it important to see both marriage and singleness as good gifts from God rather than ranking one above the other, and how does this protect the dignity of widows and the never-married within the family of God?
6. Many people carry an unspoken belief that life truly begins (or truly ended) with marriage, that singleness is incompleteness and marriage is arrival. Where have you believed a version of this lie, that a spouse would complete you, or that without one you are less? How does the gospel speak to that belief, whatever your situation?
7. Peter writes to wives married to husbands who ‘do not obey the word,’ that they may be won ‘without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct’ (1 Peter 3:1–2). For those in a spiritually divided home, what hope and what calling

does this passage hold out, and why does God so value the quiet, patient witness of a godly life in a hard household?

8. Those married to unbelievers, or living in painful or divided homes, often feel alone and weary, tempted either to nag and pressure or to give up hope. If this is your situation, what would it look like to entrust your spouse and your home to God and to persevere in godly conduct? If it is not, how could you come alongside someone in your church who carries this burden?
9. Throughout Scripture God shows particular tenderness toward the single, the widow, and the lonely, declaring Himself 'Father of the fatherless and protector of widows' who 'sets the lonely in families' (Psalm 68:5–6). Taken with these passages, how does God honor every household and every station of life as a full member of His family, neither exalting marriage as the only valid path nor lowering the single, widowed, or hard-pressed to second-class status, while still upholding His call to purity and faithfulness in every station? What does this mean for how the church should embrace everyone in it?
10. Look back across these passages, the goodness of singleness, the gift of undivided devotion, the dignity of every station, and the hope held out to the hard home. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth about your own station, or about honoring others in theirs, that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Matthew 19:11–12, those who live unmarried 'for the sake of the kingdom of heaven'; Psalm 68:5–6, God as Father of the fatherless and the One who sets the lonely in families; Isaiah 54:1, the song given to the barren and desolate who will yet rejoice; 1 Timothy 5:5, the true widow who sets her hope on God and continues in prayer; 1 Corinthians 7:17, each one living the life the Lord has assigned to him