



Accents & Issues

Singleness

In Christian circles where the nuclear family is usually accepted as the ideal, where parents begin early to pray for a good mate for their child, and where it is often implicitly taught that normal, well-adjusted people get married, the unmarried are often considered incomplete and unfulfilled.

The Bible approves both marriage and singleness but recognizes each presents its own challenge. In Matthew 19:1-12 Jesus' disciples have difficulty accepting the high standards Jesus set for the permanence of marriage and conclude: "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry" (v. 10). Jesus then affirms that there are those who are single for the sake of the Kingdom. This passage seems to be saying that God's call to fidelity in marriage is just as difficult to accept as God's call to singleness. In 1 Corinthians 7:26-40, the apostle Paul says that because singleness allows freedom and promotes effectiveness in witnessing for Jesus, it is preferable to marriage for the sake of the Kingdom.

Using singleness as an avenue of service and fulfillment is facilitated by the following:

1. **Recognize that singleness is a legitimate choice.**

There are many reasons why one may consciously and deliberately choose to be single. Since a Christian will choose to date and marry only one who is a Christian believer, the available possibilities are limited. A single person may be more wholeheartedly devoted to Christian service than is possible for a married person.

When singleness results from being divorced or widowed, one may choose to remain single.

2. **Differentiate between loneliness and aloneness.**

Loneliness is often viewed as synonymous with singleness. However, loneliness may be just as common among those who have a spouse. Loneliness is part of the human condition. However, when one is comfortable with oneself and is involved in caring relationships, being alone can result in "solitary refinement," which comes from being at home with oneself.

3. **Recognize the need for intimacy.**

Normal, healthy human beings need intimacy, which means being at home with another person. Equating intimacy and fulfillment with sexual activity leads to a viewing singleness as lacking fulfillment and intimacy. The reality is that sexual intercourse does not guarantee intimacy. Indeed, sexual experience without intimacy less than fulfilling. If the psychological need for intimacy is satisfied, the need for physiological sexual experience is lessened.

4. **Develop a variety of relationships.**

Relationships close enough to smooth off some of the rough edges are essential for keeping singles from becoming smug, satisfied, and self-centered. However, expecting one other person to meet all of one's needs in marriage is unrealistic and bound to fail. So both married and single persons need relationships with people of both sexes to meet their needs and to keep life meaningful and growing.

5. **Cultivate a proper independence.**

In our society, marriage is a way of proclaiming one's adulthood. Hence, it is sometimes difficult for those who never marry to establish credibility as a responsible adult. Thus it is important for singles to have a place of their own, a sanctuary which they can decorate in ways that express their personality, where they can relax and be themselves, where they are free to entertain and share themselves with others.

For the formerly married, finding the proper degree of independence can also be difficult because it is compounded by the need to establish a new identity. The hurt and pain associated with death or divorce make it easy to cling to others. Certainly, during times of emotional trauma, a person needs to find extra support and help, but one also needs the kind of support that helps in finding and developing one's own identity.

No matter by what route one came to the single state, it is crucial to guard against becoming so independent that one neither asks for nor receives help from others. Not only is that damaging but it negates the interdependence that should characterize those who follow Jesus.

6. Celebrate the freedom singleness allows.

As both Paul and Jesus affirm, singleness has real advantages for furthering God's Kingdom. Single people may take advantage of service opportunities without making demands on an entire family. Singleness allows freedom to make commitments to low-paying service vocations, because only one person's living standard is affected.

7. Continue to grow.

Singleness is not an interim, waiting for life to begin. Singles grow and develop. Identifying personal assets and support systems facilitates setting realistic goals. This includes identifying problems and developing realistic plans to address them.

We are called to live each day fully, cherishing the time. The wholeness that Jesus offers his followers makes it possible to be fulfilled and live in joyful celebration, whatever our marital status.

