

SINGLE BUT NOT ALONE

SERIES: LIFESTYLE ISSUES IN THE CHURCH

Doug Goins

The church at large probably tends to make single people uncomfortable with its very consistent focus on what the Bible has to say about marriage, children, and family life. Think about all the Christian books, radio and television programs, conferences, and magazines articles on those subjects. It isn't that those things aren't good and important. But there is a lot less attention given to what the Bible has to say about singleness. And it seems to me that what literature and media programs there are that address the issue are directed toward helping single adults cope with their condition, as if single adulthood is not quite normal and certainly not desirable. Unmarried adults probably have a sort of second-class citizenship in the church. The implication is that married people are the healthy ones. If you're a single in that sort of environment, it can be pretty miserable. We who are married in the church either tend to ignore you, or try to rescue you from your misery with our incessant matchmaking!

The apostle Paul, as a single man, would have been outraged by our assumptions, attitudes, and behavior in this regard in the church. Remember, in the early part of this chapter he gave his ringing endorsement of the single life (Discovery Paper 4521). In 7:7-8, speaking very personally, Paul said, "...I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner [being married], and another in that [being single]. But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I." His point is that the marital status we have right now, whether we're single or married, is a gift from God, an evidence of God's grace to us.

We also saw, later in chapter 7 (see [Discovery Paper 4522](#)), the universal spiritual principle that can control our attitude about marital status, whether we're single or married: learning to be content where we are. We should ask God to change us before we start asking him to change our circumstances. Three times Paul hammered away at this principle, in verses 17, 20, and 24: "Only as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk...Let each man remain in that condition in which he was called...Brethren, let each man remain with God in that condition in which he was called." Those verses were applied in the middle part of the chapter to those in difficult marriage relationships. But now Paul is going to address the unmarried adults among us.

In verses 25-40 he is going to unfold some tremendous advantages that single people have that married people don't. This teaching is anchored by the same spiritual principle that we just surveyed in those three verses. Look at verse 26: "...It is good for a man to remain as he is." And verse 40, where he is speaking of widows: "...She is happier if she remains as she is...." Paul was a great model in this regard. He walked his talk. He didn't teach one thing and then live out something else in contrast.

In Philippians 4:11 Paul says this about his own condition: "Not that I speak from want [I don't view myself as disadvantaged, as needing or wanting anything]; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am." Learning contentment with circumstances is a lifelong process. But Paul had gotten to the place in his life that he really could be contented as a single man. He understood that changing our circumstances won't make us better, happier, or more fulfilled people. He had worked through the false belief that "the grass is greener on the other side of the fence."

In the last message we saw that whether we're a Jew or a Gentile, a slave or a free person, married or single,

none of those conditions have anything to do with character development, with what God wants to do in us and through us. We tend to think that our limitations or our difficult circumstances are somehow hindering us from being everything that we could be. But from God's perspective, those very circumstances are helping us grow up into "the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13).

GOOD ADVICE

Let's look at the text. Verse 25 explains the verses that will flow out of it.

Now concerning virgins I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy.

Paul uses the same language to start this verse that he used to introduce the whole chapter: "Now concerning the things about which you wrote...." Apparently a question was addressed to him: "Paul, you're an advocate of marriage. Should virgins (single people) try to get married? Is singleness normal? What is God's view on singleness?"

Paul says he doesn't have a clear apostolic word from God about whether single people ought to stay single or try to get married. But he does say that we should be able to trust his opinion. He says that he has experienced much of God's merciful patience in his life. There were many times when Paul needed God to bail him out, to save him from bad choices and difficult circumstances, and so he has covered some miles. He has learned a lot of things in the life that he has lived. Paul was probably married at one point in his life. He has now been single for awhile. So he has experienced both states of living, and he speaks out of a great heart of wisdom and maturity. This is really good pastoral counsel. He says so right off the top in verse 26, because the word "good" shows up twice in this verse.

SINGLENESS, AN ADVANTAGE UNDER PRESSURE

The first advantage to remaining single, which is summarized in verses 26-28, is because of the pressures we live under in the world, both external pressures from the culture around us and the internal pressures of marriage itself. There's also a sub-theme in this paragraph about living contentedly with our current marital state.

I think then that this is good in view of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is. Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. [Are you married? Don't try to get separated or divorced.] Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife. [Have you been divorced? Then don't try to get remarried.] But if you should marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin should marry, she has not sinned. [If you make the choice to marry or remarry, there's nothing at all sinful about it.] Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you.

Paul speaks of two crises here. The first is found in the phrase in verse 26, "this present distress." This speaks of external issues. The word "distress" is always used in the New Testament of something external to oneself. He is not talking about the general stresses and strains of life, but rather about particular times of crisis. Now, we don't have a clue about what was wrong in Corinth historically. The city was prosperous and stable economically. There was no famine or plague. There was no persecution of believers at the time of Paul's ministering and writing these letters.

But Paul wrote transparently about his life in his letters, and we know that there were alternating periods of blessing and deprivation, living bountifully and being persecuted. We know the repeated cycles of distress in his life. He alludes to it again in Philippians 4:12: "I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need." He's describing distressing cycles of humiliation, hunger, and suffering; and all of them in his case were for the sake of Jesus Christ. He understands that there will surely come, in the life of the individual believer and in the life of the church, continuing cycles of trouble that will put tremendous pressure on individuals, marriages, and families. In 2

Timothy 3:1 Paul calls them "perilous times."

Persecution and personal threat are difficult enough for a single person, but the problems and pains are multiplied if somebody is married. If Paul had still been married during his travels, his sufferings would have been intensified by his own worry about his wife and children at home, and by their tremendous worry for him as he was beaten, stoned, thrown in prison, and faced with impending execution. Married believers who go through the distress or peril of social turmoil can't escape carrying a much heavier emotional load than do single Christians.

A number of weeks ago in two of our adult Sunday School classes, we heard James Marweh, a pastor from Liberia, talk about the terrifying experience of being forced to lie on the ground with his wife right next to him, as rebel troops in Liberia told them they were going to execute them. They had automatic weapons, and as he lay there waiting for him and his wife to be executed, his distress for his wife was great. A single person would not have had to experience that. Praise God! He delivered them from that peril.

The second crisis is described by the phrase in verse 28, "trouble in this life" for married people. Now, Paul makes clear in verse 28 that marriage is a legitimate option for single people, but it is good to thoughtfully consider the option of singleness. As I said, he is thinking practically from his own experience in marriage. He wants to spare single people "trouble in this life," or literally, "many tribulations in the flesh."

The word "trouble" or "tribulation" means "pressed together under pressure," which is an interesting description of the marriage relationship. You have two people who are pressed together in the closest possible way—physically, emotionally, spiritually. They are two very distinct individuals with different personalities, different temperaments, different wills, different histories, different struggles and difficulties that they have brought as baggage into the relationship. And even believers in Jesus Christ are still subject to the limitations and weaknesses of the flesh. So you have two angry, selfish, dishonest, proud, forgetful, thoughtless people. And that's true even in the best marriages. It's hard enough for a sinner to live alone with himself, let alone with another sinner. You put those two separate constellations of problems together when two people are bound together in marriage, and the problems of sinful human nature are multiplied.

Now, we've seen throughout chapter 7 that Paul is very much pro-marriage. But here he's pointing out that while there are troubles that are unique to being a single person, they may be exceeded by those in marriage. Marriage was never intended by God to resolve all the personal, emotional, spiritual difficulties in our life. Whatever struggles we bring into marriage will be a part of the process. And marriage definitely will intensify the struggles.

I thought of two examples of this, two men who really illustrate both the circumstantial crisis and the relational crisis in their marriage. These are two of my heroes in church history, and I've read biographies of both of them. These two men were good friends who had a phenomenal impact for God's kingdom in eighteenth-century England. One was John Wesley, and the other was George Whitfield. Both were removed from the Church of England for their preaching of the gospel. Both men were married, and both had terrible marriages. Throughout their entire life in ministry, their marriages never got better. Their families said later in life that neither one should have been married because of who they were temperamentally. And then that was compounded by the persecution they suffered from the Church of England, and the constant itinerating. In the same way that the apostle Paul had an impact on the Roman Empire, both of these men had a phenomenal impact on the British Isles. Yet the tribulations in the flesh and the present distresses had a terrible effect on their marriages. As a matter of fact, John Wesley's wife left him late in life and didn't live out her years with him in marriage. In a pressure-packed world, singleness may be an advantage.

SINGLENES, AN ADVANTAGE IN MAINTAINING SPIRITUAL PRIORITIES

Now look at the second advantage of singleness in verses 29-31. It may be helpful in maintaining spiritual priorities, living with an eternal perspective and values.

But I say this, brethren, the time has been shortened, so that from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none; and those who weep, as though they did

not weep; and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as though they did not possess; and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form of this world is passing away.

Paul's argument here seems to be that the single person will find it easier to maintain spiritual balance in life, to resist unhealthy attachments to people, things, and institutions.

The opening and closing statements focus on how single life should be viewed. Verse 29 says, "...The time has been shortened..." Time has been drawn together, compressed down to a small amount. The Bible tells us that human life, no matter how many years we have on earth, is a very brief moment. And the older you get, the more you realize how quickly time goes by. So Paul's point is that we should live our life with a sense of spiritual urgency. The reality of eternity is barreling down on us. The return of Christ may be imminent, and it should control our priorities in how we live our lives. Can those around us tell that we're followers of Christ because of our expectation of his coming back? Do they sense an urgency in our commitment to spiritual things?

The closing statement, at the end of verse 31, is, "...The form of this world is passing away." The manner of life in this world, the way of doing things, the mode of existence is passing away. All five things listed in these three verses are impermanent and fleeting: the institution of marriage; grieving over death or loss; celebration and joy in some kind of personal success; buying, possessing, and managing things; and pleasure and recreation. All these physical, material things are good in themselves. God doesn't withhold them from his children. But they are impermanent. Even marriage, which God blesses and greatly values, is not eternal. Jesus said there will be no marrying in heaven (Matthew 22:30). None of these things should be over-valued, because they are passing away. And if a spiritually unhealthy pattern develops in any of these five areas of life, the Bible would call that idolatry.

Marriage partners can tend to reinforce that sinful pattern in each other, whether it's idolizing the marriage relationship, a grief-stricken obsession with loss of a loved one, exhilaration over personal success which reinforces materialism, or a driven, compulsive hedonism. In these areas the marriage relationship can compromise the spiritual urgency with which we are called to live. Listen to the words of the apostle John:

"Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever." (1 John 2:15-17.)

Listen to the paraphrase of verses 29-31 from *The Message* :

"I do want to point out, friends, that time is of the essence. There's no time to waste, so don't complicate your lives unnecessarily. Keep it simple in marriage, grief, joy, whatever. Even in ordinary things, your daily routines of shopping and so on, deal as sparingly as possible with the things the world thrusts on you. This world as you see it is on its way out."(1)

The apostle Paul believes that it's easier for a single man or woman to maintain these priorities, so if some people among us choose not to get married in order to pursue that spiritual simplicity, we should honor them, not assume that there's some weirdness about them.

The best example of this that I can think of from my thirty-five years since college is John R..W. Stott. Stott committed himself to celibacy years ago. He's now the Rector Emeritus of All Souls Anglican Church in London. What has impressed me so much about Stott is not just the prolific output of his ministry-his commentaries, preaching, teaching, mentoring, and leading in the evangelical world-but the simplicity and purity of his focus as a follower of Jesus Christ. Stott spends four hours every morning uninterrupted with the Lord and the word. And that's not doing the academic work. That's a life of worship seven days a week.

I can't live that way as a married man with a wife and four children. The priorities have to be different. The call

here is to be committed to maintaining these spiritual priorities of living with eternity's values in view. And Paul believes, as a loving pastor, that it's probably easier to maintain that if you're a single man or woman.

SINGLENES, AN ADVANTAGE OF FEWER DISTRACTIONS

The argument is strengthened in verses 32-35. In serving the Lord, giving your life away in ministry, there are fewer distractions in singleness, and it may be an advantage.

But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband. And this I say this for your benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is seemly [attractive or graceful], and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord.

It seems pretty simple and obvious from Paul's perspective: Being single will allow you to devote more time, energy, and resources to the kingdom of God, to serving people, to ministering in Jesus' name. Single people and married people have different concerns. These verses are a glorious description of the single life for men and women-if they are sold out to Jesus Christ. Paul's assumption is that they really do care about pleasing the Lord, about intimacy with the Lord.

Jesus Christ is a powerful example of this kind of singular focus in the intimacy he had with his heavenly Father, in the submissive, loving relationship that nurtured him every day of his life. Jesus in essence said, "I do nothing without checking with my heavenly Father" (see John 5:30; 8:28-29; 12:49-50; 14:9-10; 14:31). Jesus Christ gave himself wholeheartedly to twelve men, and then to a circle of seventy people. Jesus was not lonely or isolated. He gave himself away for his Father's sake to men and women. Remember, in Matthew 12 there was a point in his ministry when his mother and brothers came. Embarrassed about the extremism in his life, they tried to call him out of a meeting where he was teaching. Jesus said rhetorically, "Who is my mother and who are my brothers?" and then answered the question: "Whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother." (12:48, 50.) And single men and women, you can have a spiritual family that's as wide as your heart, if you want to follow the Lord Jesus. Loneliness doesn't have to be a part of your life.

Think about the freedom the apostle Paul had to travel in service to the Lord Jesus around the Mediterranean basin, from one end of the Roman Empire to the other, dedicated in spirit and heart, living a life of moral purity and abstinence before the Lord. And by the grace and power of God in his life, he planted churches all around the Roman Empire. More importantly from our perspective, he wrote these letters that have literally changed the course of human history, all because of this singular focus in his life. And even for Paul, relationships were paramount. In the last chapter of the letter to the Romans, there's a list of about thirty names of people who had become dear to him over his years of ministry. They were his best friends in Christ from all around the empire, his spiritual family.

The single life makes possible a degree of devotion and commitment to the work of Christ that married life does not allow. And as a single person you have a phenomenal opportunity to minister to the needs of other people in the church, in the world, in the neighborhood, in the work-place. Give yourself away to people. Married men and women have preoccupations built into the equation. In Paul's words, our interests are divided. That is not a bad thing, it's just reality. I want to have the same passion, the same concern as my single brothers and sisters about the evangelism of the world and of my neighborhood. I want to be a discipler of men and women. But I committed myself to a wife and four children, and I have responsibility for "the things of the world." We care about college education, about a home for our children, about planning for the future. Those are good, important things to care about, but it does set up a tension for me that a single man doesn't have in terms of his money, his future, and the resources that God has entrusted to him. The call to single Christian adults is to live with spiritual abandon, complete and undivided devotion to the Lord.

The challenge both for single people and for married people is to be able to rejoice in either your gift of singleness and the freedom that comes with that, or the gift of marriage and the responsibilities that come with that. They both come from God's hand. And then the challenge is for us to commit ourselves together as singles and married couples to pleasing and serving the Lord, and to be honest about our self-absorption, self-pity, and jealousy of folks in the other state, and to repent of those things.

Another one of my heroes from church history is Robert Murray McCheyne. McCheyne, who is not as famous as Wesley or Whitfield, lived only thirty years, and died from influenza. He made a choice as a teenager not to marry. He went to a tiny country parish in Scotland and poured his life into the people and the word of God. He became a powerful expositor of the Bible. Revival broke out in that little parish, and it spread through the entire country of Scotland, basically because of the faithfulness of one man with a powerful life of prayer, preaching, and writing. God took him home at age thirty, yet his light still shines. His influence, in the books that he wrote and the example that he was, is still powerful and attractive to me.

Contemporarily, my dear friend Lambert Dolphin represents this to me as well. Because of Lambert's singleness, he is freer to minister, study, write, think, and process. Lambert is a tremendous resource to me, because I don't have the time that he does to sit in front of my computer, read voluminously, and correspond. Lambert has made a choice for celibacy to the glory of God and the furthering of God's kingdom, and it's a choice that he lives out joyfully.

THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF THE FAMILY

In the next section, verses 36-38, Paul address another category of single people: unmarried, dependent women. Of all the little sections of this text, this one was the most intriguing and rewarding to me. This is the one section I never really thought through very much before. It has been really encouraging to me, because these verses can help us understand how the families of single men and women can encourage them, surround them, and have input in their lives about singleness, marriage, and serving the Lord.

But if any man thinks that he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin daughter, if she should be of full age, and if it must be so, let him do what he wishes, he does not sin; let her marry. But he who stands firm in his heart, being under no constraint, but has authority over his own will, and has decided this in his own heart, to keep his own virgin daughter, he will do well. So then both he who gives his own virgin daughter in marriage does well, and he who does not give her in marriage will do better.

In Roman, Greek, and Jewish cultures in the first century, the parents, particularly the father, had the primary role in arranging their children's marriages. They did so with input from the children; children had full voice in who they married and didn't marry, in cooperation with the fathers. So some Christian fathers among these Corinthians were struggling with their daughters' best interests regarding marriage. Should they enforce singleness or should they allow marriage, if that's what their daughters desired?

What Paul is doing is encouraging these fathers to follow through in helping the child to process the advisability and the value of marriage in their respective situations; to be willing to be committed to them financially for the long term, if they choose to stay single. There's a wonderful sense in which decisions like this are a family affair.

In verse 36 there are three conditions to be met if the father agrees to the marriage of his daughter. First, there's that word "unbecomingly." He must be convinced that her continued single life is inappropriate for him to insist on, because she wants to get married. It would be unbecoming toward her if she really had a young man she was in love with and wanted to marry, and the father refused that. Second, he must determine if she's "of full age," old enough not only in years but in maturity and wisdom. And third, she must want to be married. It must be important to her. If those conditions are met, then Paul says it's a great thing, let her get married.

In verse 37 he says there are two conditions that the father must meet if he decides against the marriage of his daughter. First he must be free from any pressure on her part to marry: "being under no constraint." So she's

comfortable with staying single. And second, he must be willing to assume the responsibility for her financial support, because single women in that culture had no means of support except for their fathers, uncles, or brothers. The phrase "keep his own virgin daughter" has financial implications for the rest of her life.

In verse 38 Paul is saying to the fathers, and indirectly to the daughters who are considering marriage, "Seek God's best. If you're going to think about singleness or marriage, don't just look for the expedient. Try to say before the Lord, 'What do you want, Father? What's best from your perspective?'" Paul says the issue is not whether singleness or marriage is right or wrong, but which is better to the Lord. He's acknowledging here that every family situation is unique, and each individual situation is unique, and you must go to the Lord to figure out what he wants. The call is for families of single people to encourage them in their walk with the Lord.

Spiritual responsibilities to our unmarried children are just as important as the financial responsibilities are. Rather than encouraging our young unmarried men and women either toward marriage or toward singleness, what we ought to be concerned about is encouraging them toward deepening their relationship with the Lord, seeking his kingdom, in the words of Jesus. Remember the promise, if you learn to seek God's kingdom, he'll add everything to your life that you need (Matthew 6:33).

I thought of the beautiful family relationship of the ten Booms. If you've read the book *The Hiding Place* (2) or seen the movie, remember that beautiful, intimate relationship between Papa ten Boom, the widowed father in the family, and his two grown single daughters, Corrie and Betsy. What did Papa ten Boom teach them? He had taught them a skill, repairing clocks and watches, so they could be self-supportive. And they worked together in the family business. He taught them to love the Lord Jesus with their whole heart. You saw that in their family life and in their worship life. He also taught them to serve people, to give their lives away with abandon. They were willing to risk their very lives to save the lives of the Jewish people whom they hid in their attic, until the Gestapo caught them and took them away to the concentration camps.

Betsy died in the concentration camp, as did Papa ten Boom. Corrie ten Boom emerged from that experience with a passion to remain as she was in the Lord, to become a "tramp for the Lord," in her own words, trotting around the globe for the rest of her life, telling people about the liberation that they could have in Jesus Christ, exulting in that freedom as a single woman. But I am convinced that much of what Corrie understood about herself came from her family, from the influence of her father, who was committed to her well-being materially, spiritually, and relationally.

REMARRYING IS NOT GOD'S BEST FOR EVERYONE

The final word in verses 39-40 speaks of the permanence and weightiness of marriage.

A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. But in my opinion she is happier if she remains as she is; and I think that I also have the Spirit of God.

The marriage relationship is permanent not in the sense of being eternal, but in the sense of being lifelong. We say in the marriage service, "...As long as we both shall live," or, "...Till death do us part." In Matthew 19:10 the disciples understood the weightiness of this. When Jesus taught about the lifelong nature of marriage, they said, "If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry."

Paul makes clear in verses 39-40 that you have the freedom as a Christian single to marry, and if you're widowed, to remarry another believer in Jesus Christ. But Paul doesn't feel that remarriage is the ideal. It is not God's best for everyone. And again, he makes clear, as he did at the beginning, that this is not apostolic commandment, but rather counsel from a pastor-caring counsel for the benefit of people who can receive it. So a widowed man or woman who has worked through the grief of loss, and then can see their singleness as the grace of God at work in their life, Paul says will be more fulfilled spiritually if they stay single. But whether they embrace remarriage or singleness, it must be in the context of their relationship with Jesus Christ.

I know some cases in which God has blessed the remarriage of widows and widowers here at PBC, and I

count several of those couples as friends. They are people who serve here among us regularly, and we benefit from their new life together and their commitment to follow the Lord Jesus as a remarried couple. But I also value relationships with several widows and widowers who have chosen to embrace the gift of widowed singleness and serve the Lord without the preoccupations of remarriage.

Charlie Luce, a founding elder here at PBC who is eighty-five now, very transparently went through the grief of losing his beloved wife Roberta, now almost ten years ago. And yet Charlie has chosen to throw his time, and energy, and resources into ministry. Charlie elders all of the current generation of leaders at PBC. He is so available, so faithful, so involved with us. Many men in this church can say Charlie Luce has spent time with them, counseled them, taught them the Scriptures, taught them how to be a godly man. The newest ministry Charlie has now is that he has become an elder to elders in other churches in the area. They're calling him up and asking him to come and help them figure out how to be leaders in their churches. He says, "I can't keep up with the ministry!"

I spent an hour and a half with Kay Grover last week. Kay is in her mid-seventies now, a widow among us who took a very small pension, her Social Security, and a tiny bit of financial support from a few people in this body, and in 1992 went to Japan. She has a whole new life teaching English as a Second Language. She is working totally on her own, without mission boards behind her. She is part of a small church in Japan. She teaches the Bible to new Christians. I was a bit intimidated by her energy, her enthusiasm, and her sense of adventure and excitement about what God is doing in her life because she chose to remain single and follow the Lord Jesus.

This entire passage offers a wonderfully healthy view of the single life. It's a perfectly appropriate choice for many people in the body of Christ. If you're single, the good news is that you can live life in Christ to the full right now. You are not in limbo. You are not incomplete. You don't have to wait for the miracle of marriage before life can really begin. You can express the same Christ-confidence as the apostle Paul, who said as a single man, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

And as single people or married people, we are called to contentment, to fulfillment that's going to come only through the Lord Jesus, not through our singleness or marriage. Thirty-five years ago in college I came across the phrase "learning to live a fulfilled life with unfulfilled desires." It comes from the writings of a South African marriage counselor named Walter Trobisch, who wrote a number of books in the 1950's on sexuality, dating, and marriage. He was very influential in my life. But it's taken me more than thirty-five years to even begin to understand that principle a little bit. You see, there will always be things that are unfulfilled in your life, no matter what state you find yourself in-never married, married and divorced, married but longing to have children, having more children than you think you can handle, or widowed. The calling in Christ is to learn to live in fulfillment, and changing stations in life will not make that true. We look across the fence and think, "They are so lucky because of what they have that I don't have." What does Paul say? "Brothers and sisters, let each man remain with God in that condition in which he was called"-and not just remain, but abound in that condition, exult in it, ask God what he wants to do with the condition that we're remaining in.

Paul, with the heart and soul of a single man who loves singleness, says this:

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:4-7.)

NOTES

1. Eugene Peterson, *The Message*, © 1993, NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO. P. 348.
2. Corrie ten Boom (with John and Elizabeth Sherrill), *The Hiding Place*, © 1971, Chosen Books, Washington Depot, CT. *The Hiding Place*, © 1975, World Wide Pictures. All rights reserved.

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Catalog No. 4523
1 Corinthians 7:25-40
Sixteenth Message
Doug Goins
January 25, 1998

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