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# WAITING ON THE LORD

A lot of singles would look at this chapter title and say, "Oh, yeah, I know all about waiting. I've been waiting on the Lord to give me a mate for a long time."

Most singles would agree that they're waiting for an opportunity to marry, because they don't plan on being single the rest of their lives. God's concern for you as a waiting single is *how you are doing* while you're waiting. Let me show you what I mean by giving you a kingdom view of singlehood.

I am sure that many of you who picked up this booklet are frustrated singles. You are frustrated because you have been alone for a very long time without any prospect of marriage. There are others who are frustrated because you have been in and out of one unhealthy relationship

after another simply because you are willing to lower your standards in order to avoid the feeling of being alone. Paul knows something of singlehood, so his words on this matter can shed light on what many people today are going through.

Paul had been discussing marriage and divorce in 1 Corinthians 7:1–24 before turning to the specific issue of singleness in verse 25: “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.”

When Paul said the Lord had not given a command about being single, he meant that when Jesus was on earth He didn’t speak directly to this issue. Jesus certainly could have spoken on singleness, because He experienced the single life to the *n*th degree, including the temptations that singles face.

But God chose instead to entrust His message on singleness and its principles to Paul. My point is that when Paul said he was offering his view, he was saying, “I have the Lord’s mind on this.” This is important because some people try to discount Paul’s teaching here as of lesser authority than Jesus’ words. But the Bible knows no such distinction.

### WAIT IN MORAL PURITY

Notice that when Paul began to discuss unmarried people, he used the term *virgins* in 1 Corinthians 7:25. For Paul, singleness was synonymous with virginity, and so the

first principle in waiting is to maintain your moral purity.

In the divine context, if you are single and you love the Lord, you are also celibate. The two go hand in hand. Paul was referring primarily to physical virginity or sexual purity, although there is also a spiritual purity that people who have been sexually immoral can recapture. We'll talk about that too.

God not only anticipates and expects, but also demands, that single people be celibate. Now this is a difficult message in a day of license, liberty, and hedonism. We've gone from the Victorian Age to Victoria's Secret catalogs. Victoria even has her own racy television ads. Modesty has been thrown to the wind. Yet we are not called to adapt the Bible to our age, but to adapt our age to the Bible.

Sex today has been cheapened by a world that does not have a divine perspective. And things that are cheap can be given away easily. Things that are valuable, you protect.

My single friend, your sense of value will be measured in large part by your morality. Many people treat sex like the all-night drive-through at the local fast-food restaurant—always available when the desire hits you. Purity is no longer a priority.

But the Bible says equally to men and to women that God's desire and design for singles is their moral purity. Sex in God's hand is holy. Sex in the devil's hand is death. One of the major ways that Satan promotes his program in history is through illicit sex. For example, Satan used

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sexual relations between unholy men and the “daughters of men” to produce an ungodly race in an attempt to destroy God’s plan for the world (see Genesis 6:1–2).

Since God commands purity for singles, how can a single person embrace this demand when our natural desires and our sexuality are so much a part of our DNA? To answer that, let me show you a crucial principle in Paul’s thinking that comes out of this same letter to the Corinthians. The principle is that as Christians we are not to view sex as purely a biological matter, but as a spiritual one.

In 1 Corinthians 6:13 Paul wrote, “Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, but God will do away with both of them. Yet the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body.”

Notice the contrast between the way we treat hunger, a legitimate physical appetite, and the way we should treat our bodies when it comes to sexual morality. Most people in Corinth, a very wicked city, equated food with

sex. When they got hungry, they ate. When they wanted sex, they fed that appetite. Corinth even had a temple with a restaurant on one side and a brothel on the other. A person could have dinner at the restaurant and go to the brothel for dessert. No big deal.

No, Paul says, it's a very big deal. It's okay to eat when you're hungry because the stomach was made for food. But it's not okay to indulge in sex whenever you feel like it because your body was not made for sexual immorality. This is where Paul begins to make the switch from the purely physical to the spiritual view of sex—which he will expand on in verses 15–20.

But notice verse 14, which explains how singles can remain sexually pure when everything around them says to go ahead and indulge their appetites. "Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power."

This might seem out of place at first. What does Christ's resurrection and our future resurrection have to do with a Christian's sexual purity? Everything, because Paul is saying that we have the same power working within us that raised Jesus from the dead. If God can raise Jesus from the dead, He can give us the power to remain pure even in a decadent culture.

### HOW SPIRITUAL IS IT?

How spiritual is this matter of sex for a Christian? Paul answers that by beginning with a question: "Do you not

know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be!" (1 Corinthians 6:15).

Why was Paul so adamant about this? Because the truth of our spiritual union with Christ means that whatever we do, we bring Jesus into it with us. In other words, whenever you as a Christian are sexually intimate with another person, you are making Jesus participate with you.

God has given His blessing to sex within the marriage union, but if the sexual activity is outside of marriage it's the equivalent of spiritual rape. Paul was horrified at the thought, and we should be too.

Why is sex so devastating both physically and spiritually when it is misused? We find the answer to that in 1 Corinthians 6:16–18. "Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, "The two shall become one flesh"" (v. 16). Paul says that a unique spiritual union is created by the sex act, even when it is done as an act of immorality between two people who have no intention of forming a lasting relationship.

We know this because Paul used God's own words from the first marriage (see Genesis 2:24) to describe a temporary sexual union. Even if a man would probably never consider walking down the aisle with a woman he used for a "one-night stand," there is a sense in which he *did* walk down the aisle with her.

To be sure, their union was a false one, but the fact is their sexual union formed a one-flesh relationship that also included a fusion of their souls. It's as if these two people each stamped a part of his or her soul on the other person. Therefore, when they separate, each leaves behind a part of him or herself with the other person, creating tremendous spiritual damage.

That's why the idea of illicit or casual sex as a one-time encounter that's over and done the next morning is the furthest thing from the truth. Many people who have been sexually immoral can testify to painful memories that play themselves back because God designed sex as a spiritual and not merely a biological reality.

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Instead of two people joining themselves together sexually outside of marriage, God has a higher standard: "But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him" (v. 17). There must be a spiritual oneness with the Lord that overrides the desire for illegitimate physical oneness with another person.

And so God's advice to singles or anyone tempted to engage in illicit activity is "Flee immorality." Do you remember the story of Joseph? When he was young, his jealous brothers sold him into slavery. He wound up in Egypt where he was purchased by Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's personal guard. Joseph was a faithful servant, and as God watched over him and blessed his work, his master prospered. Eventually, Joseph became Potiphar's "main man"—the overseer of the house and custodian of everything Potiphar owned.

It was at this point that he captured the attention of Potiphar's wife. She didn't give a thought to Joseph when he was brought into the house as a ragged, dirty slave. But now he was clean, well built, and handsome. So, with the class and charm typical of an Egyptian royal woman in that day, she walked up to Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me." Of course, Joseph refused. But he offered a pointed explanation: "My master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put all he owns in my charge. There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:8–9).

Joseph's resistance became an obstacle that Potiphar's wife was determined to overcome. She spoke to Joseph day after day, but couldn't wear down his resolve. It was time to engineer a more aggressive plan.

One day, Joseph entered the house to find it empty. Hardly by coincidence were the household servants gone.

Potiphar's wife grabbed Joseph by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" But the Bible tells us that Joseph left the cloak in her hand and ran out of the house.

"Flee immorality," Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6:18. That's what Joseph did. And that's what we must do, too.

Why? "All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body" (6:18). Translation: *sexual sin is self-destructive*. It's like a fire. A fire in the fireplace can do you a lot of good. A fire in the living room will mess up your whole house! And that's precisely the case with our sexuality. It is a fire to be kindled only within the fireplace of marriage. Outside of that safe enclosure, it can do all kinds of emotional and physical damage.

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Then Paul asked another important question. "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that

you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body" (vv. 19–20).

We can see the spiritual nature of sex here because Paul referred to our bodies as temples with which we can glorify God. A temple is a church house, the place where God is worshiped. This means that when a husband and wife engage in sex, they are actually participating in an act of worship. Single, if you have any doubt about whether your behavior—sexual or otherwise—is appropriate, just remember that you take Jesus with you wherever you go. Will you be able to look at Jesus wherever you go? He is right there with you. Will you be able to look at Him after doing whatever you are contemplating and say, "Jesus, did you enjoy yourself?" If not, leave your coat and run for the door.

If you are in Christ, you are now the personal property of the King of kings and Lord of lords. On the receipt, the price is clearly marked: "Paid in full by the blood of the Lamb." The church today needs a group of holy singles who will honor God with their bodies. We need young ladies who can say "no." We need to teach our daughters to say, "I'm saving myself for that man God has chosen for me, whenever he comes into my life."

Please do not misunderstand me. I am not saying that sexual desire is inappropriate. You should not be praying that God would remove your sexual drive. Instead, pray that He will enable you to control that energy until the time is right to unleash it. There are good reasons— theological, ethical, and medical—for remaining sexually

pure. But the truth is, it isn't easy. The world places a high value on conformity, and those who don't measure up to the image of the "liberated single" experience pressure.

Virginity is held in disregard today, much the same as promiscuity once was. Ridicule and perhaps even pressure to conform can be expected. In fact, even Joseph, who remained so faithful, was accused of rape by Potiphar's wife. He would spend thirteen years in prison because of that false accusation.

Beyond possible ridicule and feeling the pressure to conform, our own bodies may even fight against us. After all, our sex drive doesn't shut down just because we decide to keep ourselves pure.

Yet Paul reminds us that our bodies are now the temple of the most High God. As singles, we are to treat our bodies with the honor they deserve. This is an awesome illustration of the spiritual nature of our sexuality. In the Old Testament, a person who wanted to get close to God went into the temple to worship. And in the deepest recess of the temple was a place called the Holy of Holies, the most sacred part of the temple hidden behind a veil. No one could enter there but the high priest, and then only once a year with blood to cover the people's sins.

God has created every woman with a bodily veil called a hymen. This creates a covering that literally says what the Old Testament said about the Holy of Holies—no trespassing until such time as it is appropriate to shed blood.

That's why it is common for a woman who is a virgin

to shed blood on her wedding night. There is a breaking of the veil, the hymen, by the only person rightfully allowed to do that, the woman's husband-priest. Sexual intercourse between a husband and wife is a holy act.

### OUR BODIES RESTORED TO PURITY

What about single men and women who will not be able to know this wedding-night experience in the way God intended because they have already had sex outside of marriage? Let's be clear that illicit sex is sin, but the Bible also has a word of hope and restoration for singles who have failed morally.

Judging from Paul's message in 1 Corinthians, he was writing to a lot of people who had been immoral. No matter what they had done, Paul wrote, "But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 6:11).

God can and will forgive sexual sin and restore any believer to purity. Those who have lost their physical virginity can still regain their spiritual virginity and purity of life before God. Spiritual virginity is when God gives you back what the devil took away.

You see, when God saved you He made you a diamond. If I rub a diamond in the dirt, what I have is a dirty diamond that has lost none of its intrinsic value. It just needs to be cleansed and restored to its original luster.

We can't change the past, but we can clean up the present and look forward to a shiny future. If you have

compromised your moral purity and have not dealt with it before God, go to Him in confession and repentance and experience His cleansing (read 1 John 1:9 and claim its promise). If you are still a virgin and committed to sexual purity, ask God to help you stand strong. And remember, He has promised not to let you get in any situation without a way of escape (see 1 Corinthians 10:13).

### WAIT WITH THE RIGHT MENTALITY

While you're waiting on the Lord, make sure that your thinking is straight too. Paul addressed this issue in verses 26–28 of 1 Corinthians 7.

Too many singles have only one thought on their minds: *I need to get married, no matter what.* But the Bible has a different emphasis. "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" (v. 26). In other words, whether you're married or single, don't let your marital status dominate your thinking and focus.

Paul said this because he knew there were bigger things at stake in the Christian life than a person's marital status. This wouldn't be such a big deal for singles today except that we are guilty as a society and as a church of making single people feel like second-class citizens.

But God doesn't make any distinction between married and single people in terms of their value in His eyes. That's clear from what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 7:27:

"Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife."

If singleness were not as acceptable to God as marriage, He would have commanded all Christians to get married, and Paul would probably have gotten married, or perhaps remarried, himself. The point is that singles are not worse off than married people.

In fact, marriage has its own set of challenges and problems. "If a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you," Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 7:28.

#### ARE YOU BETTER OFF SINGLE . . . OR MARRIED?

Now I know that many single Christians, especially older singles, become defensive when they hear this because they think, *Oh yes, here it comes, the old "You're better off single" speech that's supposed to make me feel better about not having anyone.*

That may be some people's reaction, but there's no denying the truth that from the standpoint of kingdom service, which was Paul's focus, singles are less encumbered than married people.

We also can't deny the truth that marriage is not an automatic fix for all the needs of single people. You may say, "But Tony, I'm lonely. I have to eat alone at night and go to bed alone. I have normal emotional longings and sexual needs that are not being fulfilled, and I'm frustrated."

Well, I've counseled many married people who are so emotionally lonely and/or sexually unsatisfied that they're thinking about bailing out on their marriages and going back to being single. *The only thing more painful than being single and miserable is being married and miserable.*

Let's get our thinking straight. Anyone who thinks marriage is the end-all and be-all of life, the answer to all of a single person's dreams and problems, is in for a big letdown. Marriage is wonderful, sometimes. Someone likened it once to flies on a window screen. Some are on the outside wanting in, and others are on the inside wanting out.

There's not an honest married person who will not tell you that marriage involves adjustments and problems along with the benefits. The question is not whether marriage or singleness is better, but what God's will is for each of His children in light of eternity's values.

When Paul says that he is trying to spare singles from the troubles they will find in marriage, he acknowledges the reality that what many people think they are getting on the front end isn't what they wind up with every day. Without a doubt, there are troubles in relationships.

One of the troubles and challenges in marriages is that you can no longer come and go as you please. If you are single, you can choose what you do with the freedom you experience with your time. But when you are married, you have to call and check in, let people know when you are getting home, and then even when you do get home—there is often a "honey-do" list for you to do now

that you are home. Many married people often wind up feeling “hen-pecked” because they are bound not only by location and time, but by what they do when they spend their time at that location as well. To top it off, many married people aren’t having nearly as much sexual intimacy as they once thought that they would, so the bondage of marriage comes with little perceived benefit. Singles are free from the concern and troubles that are often found in marriage.

When Paul said, “Do not seek a wife,” he wasn’t saying it’s wrong to desire to be married. Instead, his focus was on methodology. The idea is, “Stop man-hunting or woman-hunting. Don’t spend all your time searching for the right one.”

Everywhere singles turn today they find someone trying to fix them up with a prospect, whether it’s over the Internet, at church, or in the family. Single people used to play *The Dating Game* on television. But some people play it in real life. As a result, singles end up trying to grab someone or Google someone or find someone at the club. Paul is saying that he doesn’t want you to go around with the attitude, “Let me find a mate—I need to find a mate . . . I’ve *got* to find a mate!” He knows that if you go out there and “find a mate,” you are also going to find some trouble. Due to that reality, you want to be very careful in the process of linking up with somebody.

Let me ask you a question by first making a statement. Statistics tell us that roughly 50 percent of all marriages end in divorce in America. A large part of the other 50

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percent stay together for convenience, finances, or the children. Here is my question: If 50 percent of all airplanes crashed, wouldn't you be extra careful about flying? If you knew that one out of every two airplanes was going to go down in flames, don't you think that you would do a real careful investigation before getting on a plane, simply because you wouldn't want to be one of those casualties?

The same answer should hold true for how you approach the potential of marriage. You need to be very careful before you link up with someone so that you don't end up as another statistic.

You don't have to cheapen yourself by playing the dating game. Adam found his wife when he was asleep. God put the boy out and crafted a wife for him and then brought Eve to Adam. I say that humorously but also seriously. God knows where you live. You don't have to spend all your time worrying about tracking down a mate

or trying to be in all the right places to meet people. Get on with your life and service for God. He knows where to find you when the time is right.

Again, I'm not saying to avoid social situations or relationships with other singles. In fact, it's still true that "he who finds a wife finds a good thing" (Proverbs 18:22), which implies that a single man must make an effort to seek a wife if he wants to experience the benefits of marriage. What I'm talking about is the frantic kind of dating in which a single goes from one person to another, hoping one day to bump into the right one but often getting messed up in the search.

### CONNECT WITH THE ONE WHO KNOWS WHERE THE RIGHT ONE IS

I'll never forget a single young woman in our church in Dallas who had it together. She was loving and serving God and minding her own business until one Sunday several years ago when she came to church alone because a friend who usually came with her couldn't make it.

This young woman was sitting in the second row of our family center, where we met for church in those days. A young man came into church that morning and looked for a seat in the back row, which was filled. The ushers escorted him to the front and seated him next to this woman. During the greeting time they said hello to each other—and you can guess the rest. They got married not long after that. It doesn't take long when God sets things up.

That won't happen for everybody, but whether it happens or not, God wants single people to seek Him, not seek a mate in the sense that you're on a mission that comes to dominate your decisions and your commitments. You don't need to find the right one. You need to connect with the One who knows where the right one is.

Singles who are waiting on God with the right kind of thinking know that marriage is not an escape from loneliness or lack of fulfillment or temptation, because there are lonely, unfulfilled, and tempted married people.

If you're thinking this way, God says change your mind. You're all right the way you are. Talk to God about your desires, but don't think there's something wrong with you that will never be fixed unless and until you get married.

### WAIT WITH THE RIGHT VIEW OF MORTALITY

Waiting on the Lord also involves a proper understanding of your mortality. I'll let the Word explain what I mean:

But this I say, 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. (1 Corinthians 7:29–31)

Life is too short, the apostle Paul says, to get all hung up on stuff—even relationships—that are going to pass away when God torches this present world and its system. Remember, God wants us to take the long, that is, the eternal, view of life. Anything that we can't send on ahead into heaven is strictly temporary and destined to pass away.

Paul illustrated his point with several earthly activities, but significantly that his first illustration is marriage. This is not a put-down on marriage, but a sober assessment of what counts most in life. Jesus said there will be no marriage in heaven because we will be like the angels, in the sense of being unmarried as they are (see Matthew 22:30).

In other words, marriage will pass away just like other earthly activities such as buying and selling. There is certainly nothing wrong with desiring to be married. Just don't treat marriage as if you'll die unhappy if you don't experience it. We as Christians can't afford to give anything on earth more time or weight than it deserves, or else it will start detracting from our eternal perspective.

### "WAIT, JESUS. I'M NOT MARRIED YET"

One day while talking with a single man he told me, "I don't want Jesus to rapture me yet. He just needs to delay His coming a little longer because I'm not married yet."

Now he may have been kidding a little bit, but that's a pretty common view among singles. We've already

established that there is nothing wrong with singles desiring a mate and developing relationships that could lead to marriage. But when any earthly goal overtakes a heavenly goal, we're vulnerable to making a mistake.

One mistake some Christian singles make when they elevate marriage to the top of their priority list is that they marry an unbeliever. We're going to talk later about what it means to be married "in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 7:39), so let me just mention this one for now because it's a big problem.

Bad things can happen when single people start fixating on marriage to the exclusion of other aspects of life. They begin to think that they're missing out on something good—or, worse, that God is holding out on them because He doesn't love them as much as the Bible says He does.

Singles in that situation are very vulnerable to the same deception that Satan worked on Eve in the garden of Eden. It was a masterful plan.

Let's say for the sake of illustration that there were one hundred trees in the garden. That meant Eve had ninety-nine beautiful trees to eat from freely, because God only put one tree off-limits: the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

But you can read about Satan's strategy in Genesis 3. He got Eve to focus and fixate on that one forbidden tree. "G-i-r-r-l-l, you see that tree? Why would God keep that one tree from you if He loves you? He's holding out on you, because He knows that tree will make you be like Him."

What Satan tries to do with singles is put marriage or sex before them and tell them, "If God really cared about you, He wouldn't deprive you of these pleasures. After all, He created them for you. Go ahead and enjoy the fruit."

### WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A SUCCESSFUL AND DEFEATED SINGLE?

Too many singles are so hung up on getting married that they never get around to enjoying the whole garden of opportunities and service that God has for them. That's the difference between a successful single and a defeated single.

Life is too short to focus all your energies on something that may last thirty or forty years as opposed to the things of God that will last forever.

Now don't misunderstand. It's fine to pray for a mate, desire a mate, and anticipate the day when you will have a mate. If you want to be married, assume that God is going to allow you to be married at some point unless He changes your desire.

But don't forget that He is also preparing you for greater things than just being married. Paul said he had the right to marry a believing woman (see 1 Corinthians 9:5), and no doubt he had thought about it. We tend to canonize and sterilize Paul and forget that he was a man with normal human desires. But Paul surrendered his right to marry for the greater calling of the kingdom of God. God doesn't call everyone to do that, but He does call us

to “set [our] mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth” (Colossians 3:2).

You can do this while you’re waiting on the Lord for a husband or wife. You can do this once you’re married. But you really can’t set your mind on the things of heaven while your heart is fixated on the things of earth. As you wait on the Lord, don’t lose your eternal focus. A proper focus will make the wait a lot easier.