

Singleness: Jesus & Paul

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Preacher: James Tang

[0:00] Man, it's dreary outside. Amber? Is it amber rain warning today? I didn't expect that.

! If it's your first time here, can I just say we're not normally this moody. It's normally! a little bit brighter, but it is what it is. Actually, when I was listening to Alex sing, and just the word, actually the word holy kept coming up even before the third song, and I was like, what does holy mean? Holy just means we're different. What does different mean?

We're people that are still willing to gather to worship him, come rain or shine. And the fact that you're here encourages me. I hope you are encouraged by today as well. I support a football team which years in the past would be accused of being called fair weather men. Arsenal were fair weather men in the sense that they could play on a nice warm summer day and do really well, but when they go to Stoke-on-Trent for a cold dark day in November, they would struggle.

It reminded me that actually as Christians, what does it mean to be holy? What does it mean to be different? It's precisely this kind of thing where come rain or shine, whether life is going really well and going exactly the way you planned it or whether it's completely getting washed out by the rain and the storm, we're still the same. That's what makes us different. That's what makes us holy.

And we're really going to think about and talk about what that is. We've got an interesting topic coming up that I shared briefly with you last week. But before I even go into that, one of the big things that has been on my heart this week, and it's in the passage that we're touching on, 1 Corinthians 7.35, Paul says, in order to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.

[1:42] Everything is about getting to the point where we can have an undivided devotion to the Lord. Well, I don't know why you gather. I don't know why you're here. I'll tell you why I'm here, because I want to gather to have a relationship with Him. That's why I'm here, to know Him, to enjoy Him, to live out the faith and the life that He's given me, He's gifted to me. And I realized I can't do that without you. And I shared last week that, hey, there's churches and the Lord uses those for different contexts where you can just sit and you can just listen to a sermon, not talk to anyone, and then leave. For me, I need more than that. In order for me to learn how to love God, I don't need to just learn about loving God. I need to then have people around me, people who are hard to love, to practice loving. That's why I gather for a relationship. That's why we're here.

And I've been thinking about what does that even mean to be devoted, undividedly devoted to Him and to one another. And actually, it made me think of Queenie. Last week, we had the pleasure of Trevor sharing a bit with us. And then we had Kuban, we had Agnes. My heart for this is, if we're talking about relationship, I don't want you just listening to me talk about relationship. I want you to hear from some of the people that are just part of this gathering, because they have something to say.

They have something even more, maybe important to say, that resonates with you that I think it would be wrong to ignore. So I want to invite Queenie up here. Queenie, can we give her a round of applause? Now, Queenie's been a fairly new addition to the gathering. Take a seat. Thank you, Queenie.

We first met Queenie with mutual friends at Jason and Juliana's house, I think. I think that's where we met you. And then we've seen you at different places over different times. Queenie, tell us where the Lord has placed you for work.

I'm a barrister. So I'm a lawyer, the type that goes to court. The type that goes to court. Can I have this one? The type that goes to court. I don't know anything about that world.

[3:40] I have a good friend. We have a mutual friend called Abraham, who I had breakfast with on Friday, and I asked him to tell me a bit more about you. And all he said was, Queenie's a big deal. Queenie's a big deal in the world of law.

And he then proceeded to explain to me why, which I've completely forgotten. Nathan, why is Queenie a big deal? Go on. Tell us why, Nathan. Nathan's a lawyer, by the way. I'm not putting him on the swap completely.

She is a great mentor, I guess. Sorry. Maybe she should make this announcement. I feel like this is...

Okay, I'll announce her. So Queenie recently made the senior council, was appointed a senior council, which I think will be effective in May 11th.

So it's a big deal. Yeah, is what it is. Yeah. Thank you. Apparently only two people in Hong Kong got it. Three people this year.

[4:44] Three. Wow. Okay, loads more than I thought. Three people got it. It was signed by the Chief Justice himself. And so when I look at you, Queenie, I see an undivided devotion to the Lord and also to the work that he's placed you, which is why you made senior council at the stage that you're in.

And so really I had one question for you and we spoke about this. Don't worry, I didn't put her completely on the spot. I gave her at least two days notice. And it's the question of actually what does undivided devotion to the Lord look for you?

And what are some of the challenges that you've faced in pursuing that? Thanks, James. So I just wanted to begin by saying that I'm sharing not as actually someone who has made it and arriving at that undivided devotion to God.

It's definitely something I'm continuing to learn. It's something I continue to struggle with. I fall short all the time. And much of what I share today is actually aspirational, more than necessarily something I've sort of achieved or understood or managed.

So I think one of the biggest questions for me in my life is what is God calling me to do? What is his calling for me and how am I fulfilling it?

[5:59] Because I think what he is calling me or who he is calling me to be and what he is calling me to do, if I'm not able to do it, then I feel I'm not really following him. And so when I think about following him, that's the sort of big question that comes to my mind.

And I think the two major areas in my life which are sort of linked to that and which I try to be quite intentional when I think about following God would be first work, which James has just mentioned, and secondly, relationships.

Because I think realistically, these are the two things that I spend most of my time doing. So for work, I've already found out a long time ago that what I'm doing now is what God is calling me to. So that's a real blessing. In terms of relationships, sometimes they may be very longstanding relationships. Sometimes they are newer relationships. And sometimes they are very, very new relationships which were perhaps just birthed even just a few weeks ago.

But with these relationships, I often see God showing to me that he really is calling me to those relationships. Sometimes it may be with people who seem very different to me, and I kind of wonder, can we even be friends to some extent?

[7:12] And yet God may somehow just really put these people in my heart and just grow some really deep friendships and relationships there. And sometimes there may be relationships where I've known this person for a long time, but just never really had the chance to talk to them very much.

But then suddenly something will happen. Suddenly they may share more. Suddenly our relationship may deepen, and I may feel called to walk with them. So when I kind of look at or think about what new things or extra things to do in my life, I often sort of contemplate that in the context of thinking, how does that impact upon what God is already calling me to do already?

So that's really often the perspective I come at it from. And I think there are sort of several practical things I can share about what I try to do to help me as I learn to follow God.

I'll give you three examples. The first is that I like to spend most of my mornings or start most of my mornings with a coffee and reading a bit of a Christian book.

So before I launch into the craziness of my day, I try to have a quieter start, and I try to begin with him. The second thing I'll share is at the beginning of each year, I write a prayer that I then pray every day.

[8:33] So obviously I pray about other things, but I find it helps me to center myself on prayer that is not just about my most immediate circumstances or what's happening around me.

And so one of the verses I've been praying for a few years now, actually, every day, is Matthew 6.33. And so I ask God to help me to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and not to just focus on myself and my most immediate things.

And then the third thing I was going to share is about John 21, 15 to 17, which I think Julian also mentioned when he was sharing a few weeks ago. So that's one of my favorite passages, and so I schedule it in to my diary so that at least on the 1st of January and at least on the 1st of July, I will spend some time on this passage and reflecting on it.

This is a passage where Jesus asks Peter three times, do you love me? Or a variation of that, do you love me more than these? And so I find it helpful to reflect on do I love God?

What does that actually mean? And do I love him more than everything else, basically? So those are just some practical steps I take to try to regularly help myself focus on him.

[9:48] And then I guess James' next question about what are the challenges that stand in the way of all that. I would say for me the busyness of life. So I'm quite busy at work and other things.

And so work in itself, as I say, is something I feel very called to. But it's also quite easy for something good to turn into something a bit big sometimes, and sometimes even a distraction. So that's definitely one of my struggles. Yeah. Actually, when we first met at the Youngs, I think you may have been there for the conversation. I think Juliana said something, which was, if you can find peace and God in Hong Kong, you can find it anywhere.

Because such is the life and pace of the city. And of course, from someone like you who's grown up, I'm assuming DGS. There's more context to that, I promise.

It's not just stereotypical. But you can ask yourself. DGS and temple chambers and all these things you've got going on. The challenge is how to still maintain that routine.

[10:49] Are you saying that those three things that you do are kind of some of the responses that you've had to life here that have kind of kept you grounded? Is that what it is? Yeah. And what I actually find is that the busier I am, the more I need those things.

Because the busier I am, the more I sort of fall into all this craziness. And the more I need to start my day and to hang on to that. I mean, I think it's Martin Luther who said it right.

He was too busy not to pray. And he lived in a very different era that was not Hong Kong in 2024 as well. So thank you. Thank you, Queenie. We just love it.

And please feel free to just pick her mind. She is an incredibly smart and accomplished woman who does so many things. But most of all, has this undivided devotion to the Lord that we can clearly see.

So thank you. Round of applause for Queenie. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. So continuing on talking about relationships, we keep saying we gather for a relationship.

[11:57] We gather so that you can have a relationship with God, that I can have a relationship with God. But one of the things is we have to tackle what is the main priority of the people who we're trying to make disciples of. That's our goal, to make disciples of Jesus.

But in order to do that, we have to tackle some of the biggest priorities that disciples of Jesus or potential, disciples of Jesus have. And that is, as Queenie says, the life here and the relationships that we have.

And last week, we talked about family. And I'm hoping that we have a time, actually, to pray about this. I think it was a missed opportunity last week because that just unpeels so many things, right? That's where it all comes from. That's the original source of our vocation, as Ellen said.

How we relate to family impacts how we relate to each other and how we relate to God. The topic that we're going to talk about today is one that, actually, I've still found hard coming in this morning. Because I know that many of us have struggled with this and gone through this. And actually, I come into this with a heavy heart. We're talking about singleness. We're talking about what it means to be single.

[12:59] Now, just to throw some kind of thoughts out there. All of us started single and all of us likely will end up single. Actually, even the way society is trending, people are not getting married as much.

And actually, churches are finding that over 50% of the population of the congregation are single. So we have to figure out how to talk about this. We have to figure out what it means.

And if you are married, half of you here who are married will at some point end up single. I was talking to a pastor friend whose dad, who's very, very old now, who's 100 years old, literally. And he got married and he was married for 50 years. But then his wife passed away. But what does that mean? That he still had 50 years to figure out what it means to be a single person. So we are all going to end up single at some point.

And of course, the other thing is marriage, as we know, is a temporary earthly construct. Even the most beautiful of days, when Florence stares into Juju's eyes and says, Till death do us part. [14:00] It really is just till death. And then it's done. So it's temporary. So for those of you who are married, you're like, oh, it's temporary. Thank goodness. That's good. That'll be over soon.

But we have to keep that in mind. But one thing I really wanted to start with, and that I've been praying about, is actually may it not just be my thoughts about this.

And there are plenty of people here who I've grown to know and love. And you are single. And actually, the overwhelming thought I had as I was preparing this is one of repentance.

Is one of repentance. And so, again, maybe in line with the mood lighting that we have today, I wanted to start this message by saying sorry. Sorry to you.

On behalf of myself and on behalf of the church, because we've basically bought into what society has told you about being single.

[14:59] That you are not enough. Through your family reunions that you have at Chinese New Year or Christmas or through the adverts that you see at the MTR, time and time again, society has told you, if you don't have someone, you are not enough.

And you cannot be loved. And I'm sitting here saying that as a pastor to you, and I'm sorry because I may not have said that to you personally and explicitly, but through my jokes.

Through the way we talk in church. I'd like to first offer just an apology to you that actually, if you are single and you sat here and even Ellen mentioned, as we all come with past experiences, if you've been hurt by past experiences, whether in a different church, whether in a different family, or whether in this one, I apologize to you because I will tell you this, you are enough.

You are and you are loved. And that is all you need. I'll tell you how often our jokes and our questions betray that. The way we talk to people, oh, how are you?

Oh, so are you married? Oh, you're not. Oh, oh. And then suddenly there's nothing else to talk about. Right? Because suddenly, oh, I mean, this happened to a beloved auntie that I was speaking to, and she was asking me about, oh, how so-and-so, how are they doing?

[16:17] Oh, he's, oh yeah, he's doing well, he's doing well. Oh, is he married yet? No, no, no. Oh. Oh. It's like a tragedy. Right?

And the way your marital status is described is not married. It's in the negative. And that's wrong. That's not what we believe at all. In the book of 1 John and 1 John 4, it talks about testing the spirits.

And how do you test the spirits? If that spirit says that Jesus, the Son of God, has come in the flesh. Now, if we truly believe that, that all that means, the gospel message is wrapped up in that statement, that Jesus, the Son of God, has come in the flesh, and he's completely human and completely fulfilled, any other thing that we say that tells you that without being married or without dating, you are not fully human is completely wrong.

Of course, the cliché is, oh, well, Jesus was single, but it's more than that. Jesus wasn't just single, but he was the Son of God, and he was the complete, he was the only definition of a perfect, complete human being.

And we sell ourselves short if we talk to people who aren't dating or who aren't married, or actually, this goes to those who are married who don't have kids yet. You have the same thing, right?

[17:34] When people ask you, oh, you're married, and then the church, the world, asks you, oh, well, are you working on the next step? Are you unlocking the next thing? And when you haven't unlocked the next thing, then you're like, oh, oh, why haven't you unlocked the next thing?

You're not enough. There's something wrong with you, right? The church needs to repent of that. I need to repent of that. If we're to truly believe that actually all of us find true contentment and fulfillment only in one thing, and it isn't in relationship with other people, it's in relationship with God. You see, and I joked last week, we have this scene where the single people want to get married and the married people want to get single again. But this is what happens when we're in relationship with other people.

We look across at someone else and we go, I would prefer that. I would want that. And so this week, I've been talking to a lot of single people and I've been picking their minds and asking them questions because I didn't really want to kind of come into this uninformed.

Actually, one of the things people, actually an author wrote about this was actually for single people, actually for both sides, what we end up doing is we end up comparing the lows of singleness with the highs of marriage.

[18:47] Married people compare the lows of marriage with the highs of singleness. Right? Isn't that what just social media or Instagram culture is?

Who's posting up their lowlights? No, you're posting up your highlights in the Maldives and you're putting that up, but you're not showing us the lowlights. And it's the same for single or married. You're single people who go, oh, I wish I just could have someone because I can do this because then it'll be easier to cook for two people and for one person. It'll be easier to show up to a party together so I don't have to just like find out who I'm sitting next to and all those kinds of things. But the married person is looking at you going, man, if I could just have my nights back, if I could just spend time doing the things that I want to do. And we end up comparing lowlights versus highlights.

Don't you do that? I do that. And actually one of the authors of this topic who himself has been a pastor for years and is single, he'll say, you know what? I've pastored so many people, both single and married, and all the troubles that come with both.

[19:44] He'd pick the loads of singleness over the loads of married life any day because the trouble that comes when two people get together. And because that's not something that I'm saying, it's just something that a pastor, a very thoughtful pastor who's just reflecting as a single man himself.

And I realized, man, I don't know if we're talking about this enough. Hence why we're here. Hence why I'm also asking for your grace as I talk about this is that I'm presenting to you what I'm looking here.

Actually, because you might just look at me and go, well, James, you're not an authority on this because you're married and you've got three kids. But I'll tell you this, I'm sat here to talk about this, not based on my authority or based on my experience.

I'm sat here based on my faithfulness to scripture. And the Lord helped me with that because it's not about what my experience is. Paul wasn't married and he talks to, he writes to married people, right?

But on the faithfulness of scripture, that's my hope and that's my prayer. And there's going to be two passages that I want to look at. One is from Matthew 19 is what Jesus says about this. Jesus doesn't, neither of them talk about this.

[20:49] And actually, Jay and I were hanging out yesterday morning. We were talking about all things and I was like, you know what? I don't think God has that much he has wanted to say about our particular romantic relationships.

He seems to have something bigger in the back that he cares even more about. And as I was looking at this, there's not that many places that they, Paul or Jesus, talk about this, but there are a couple that I think we can learn from and I invite you to look through it with me.

It's from the book of Matthew and we're going to go with Jesus one first and chapter 19. Matthew chapter 19, as is our custom, can I invite you to stand for the word of the Lord? Jesus, as we read your word, would you prepare our hearts?

As we read your word, would you prepare our hearts? As we read your word, would you prepare our hearts? Matthew chapter 19, Now when Jesus had finished these sayings, he went away from Galilee and entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan.

And large crowds followed him and he healed them there. And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause? He answered, Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female and said, Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife and the two shall become one flesh?

[22:17] So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate. They said to him, Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?

He said to them, Because of your hardness of heart, Moses allowed you to divorce your wives. But from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.

The disciples said to him, If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry. But he said to them, Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given.

For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.

This is the word of the Lord. Take a seat. Take a seat. So I believe that through this passage Jesus shows us a little bit of what actually it means to live for the kingdom of God and to live as a single or a married person.

[23 : 24] The context here is an interesting conversation because once again, the people are trying to trip Jesus up. So they're bringing up this issue about marriage and divorce. Now you need to understand the Jewish culture at that moment how they perceived marriage and divorce.

And it is one of just basically functionality. It's basically getting two families together. There wasn't the romantic element here where the two people had the feels for each other and so that they would want to be together and live happily ever after.

Again, just a side note on that apology. Disney is not correct on that. When two people finally get together and one's been sleeping for a hundred years and gets a kiss and then suddenly they're together and then they sail off into the distance and it's happily ever after, I can tell you that it is absolutely false.

Do not believe it. Anyone who thinks the moment you are with someone it is happily ever after, that is false. We have done you a disservice to what it means to be married and to be in relationship and it is so much, so much harder than that.

And yet we perceive that. And the problem with that is then we have a whole population of people, over half the people looking going, well, I'm never going to be happily ever after then. Right?

[24 : 29] Isn't that the connotation when we see two people sail off on a white horse? Then it's like, well, they're going happily ever after even though behind the curtain there's tons of things happening. But for those on the other side, well, okay, does that mean I'm never going to be happily ever after?

Paul and Jesus seem to tackle this in a very conservative way or in a very low-key, even-keeled kind of way. It's interesting, the conversation here is how you can divorce someone.

Now, in the Old Testament, there's tons of reasons why you can divorce and they say, well, Moses, let us do this and let us do that. And he's saying, Jesus is saying, well, that's because Moses knew that you guys were idiots. And you have hard hearts.

And you have all this sin inside you. So he's helping you damage control with some of these rules and regulations. Because back then, you could divorce your wife if she made your egg in the wrong way in the morning.

And that was it. Jesus then says, no, that's not it. Actually, the only reason you can divorce your wife if there is sexual immorality. That's the only reason. And then the disciples quip.

[25 : 33] And I've got to say, I might actually be the guy that says this. Verse 10. Well, he's like, they're like, well, if that's the only reason that we can get divorced and there's no other reason, then it's better not to get married because it's not worth it.

And it is, if such is a case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry. What he has is a cynical, low view of marriage.

What he has is a cynical, low view of marriage, which is, how low can I get? What can I get away with so that I can divorce my wife and find someone else? And if you're not letting me do that, then maybe there's really no point.

That's what he's kind of saying. And Jesus obviously knows what he's saying. And Jesus responds to him, which in an interesting way, verse 11, it says, but he said to them, not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given.

which then starts this journey again, well, actually, not everyone needs to be married. In fact, some of it, some of you who won't get married, this is the Lord's gift to you.

[26 : 39] And then this unveils the second problem. Who's wanted, who's received that unwanted gift at Christmas from that uncle who buys you a pair of socks that you'll never wear? Some of you are single, you go, well, what if I didn't want the gift of singleness?

Again, I think we've come at it from the wrong way. We're coming at it from a low, cynical view of what it even means for two people together. And what does a gift even mean?

If you're sat here going, well, I don't know if I have the gift of singleness, if you have a think how Jesus talks about the gift and how Paul talks about gifts, what's the purpose of a gift according to the Bible? Julian just nodded, so I'll pick on you.

What's the purpose of a gift in the Bible? It's not just for you, it's for you to use for others.

The whole point of a gift is that you would use it to serve the church, to build the church up, to edify the body, as it says in Ephesians 4.

[27:42] That's what the gift is for. So the next time you catch yourself going, well, I'm not sure that's a gift that I want. Well, there we've exposed the real issue here, that we don't have an undivided devotion to the Lord.

Now, I'm not here saying that, man, you're single, so you best just appreciate it and give it to the church and build up the church. I know that there's all these wrestlings and all these emotions that go on that are hard.

And I'm not here to say any of that, which is why I started with the apology, but I'll tell you this, a married person has to go through the exact same things. Singleness is a gift, just like marriage is a gift.

Why? Not for you to have someone to hold and love and comfort and go and eat with and do life with. It's for the church. It's for the kingdom.

So I think the first thing that we have to surrender is this low cynical view of what even a relationship is. When we do that, I think we can rediscover what it means to be single or what it means to be married and you realize, actually, it's a temporary thing all for the glory of God, all pointing to him.

[28:46] And Jesus talks about the eunuch. If you don't know what a eunuch is, then I encourage you to ask someone about it, just preferably not me. Well, of course, eunuch is someone who's an emasculated male without testicles, basically with the idea that actually this person, actually often in that culture, eunuchs were hired by powerful people so that they wouldn't be susceptible to the same temptations because they don't have a family to care about.

They have a family to think about. They have a future to think about. And so Jesus has this fascinating thing where he goes, for there are eunuchs who have been sober from birth and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

He has this profound knowledge that actually we are in the fallen world now and there are people who are born this way. There are people who are made this way. But what he's focusing on, there are people who choose this way.

Why? For the kingdom of heaven. He's not talking about their earthly status here. He's talking about, he's actually encouraging all of us to be spiritual eunuchs, not from a physical standpoint, but we want to basically commit yourself fully to the kingdom of heaven because that's the one that will last.

That is the one that we'll find in eternity. And this is interesting here because, of course, when we talk about spiritual eunuchs, we've got Jesus, we've got Paul, we've got the John the Baptist here, we've got people who actually have devoted themselves to the work of God without being married.

[30:11] Key here, there is no difference. neither is morally superior. Neither is morally superior. Even, despite whatever that uncle or auntie or grandparents says at your next family reunion, neither is morally superior.

The key here is how are we using that gift, whatever that gift is, in that season for the kingdom of heaven. Paul talks about this. He says, neither are actually, not one is better than the other, but 1 Corinthians 7, which is the other key passage talking about singleness, it's actually not just about singleness, it's about marriage, it's about all kinds of relationships.

Paul writes here, he says in 1 Corinthians 7, 32, I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord, but the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided.

Later on, it says, verse 35, but to promote good order and secure your undivided devotion to the Lord. There is a plus in singleness.

There is a plus, and what is that? That you are free from anxieties. You're like, oh no, I'm single and I'm very anxious. But it's saying, actually, but if your heart is inclined towards him, then you would be less anxious, because the person who is married can't do the things that a single person can do.

[31:36] A couple weeks ago, my dear friend and colleague, Pastor Johnny, got to represent the gathering basketball team and then go to the other side of Hong Kong and represent the football team in the same day, within the same afternoon.

I dream of doing something like that, but I could never do something like that. I dream of pulling off a shirt like that, but neither can he. So, when you're a single person, again, I hope you receive this in the spirit that it's intended and not condescending anyway.

You have an ability to focus that other people do not, a married person does not. Ability to focus and to be flexible. to be able to say yes at a moment's notice to go and hang out and do something to be with someone.

You might have this gift only for a temporary period, but my question is, are you using it? Well, you have focus and you have flexibility. If everything is about securing an undivided devotion to the Lord, are you using what you have to get to that point?

There's a study that said that the average 21-year-old spends 10,000 hours playing video games. By the time he's hit 21, he's played 10,000 hours of video games.

[33:02] 10,000 hours. Malcolm Gladwell says that means you're an expert. You are the legend of the league. 10,000 hours.

Single people, how do you use the time that the Lord's given you in this season? I know that there are anxieties about the future and all these, but if you truly are enough, if you truly are loved just the way you are, how are you using the gift of focus and flexibility to be utterly and undividedly devoted to the Lord?

I'm not here and I'm very carefully, I don't want to talk about single people and how you can find someone because that almost goes against my whole point that I'm saying that you're not enough as you are. but the heart is the same here is actually whether you are married or single, do you have this devotion to the Lord?

I love Queenie's humility when the very beginning, when I asked her to talk about undivided devotion, she says, actually, I haven't got this, I'm pursuing it. Do you know what it reminds me of? Philippians 3 and Paul says, not that I've already obtained this or I'm already perfect, but I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus made me his own.

brothers, I do not consider I have obtained this, but I press on toward the goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Paul talks about that undivided devotion as an upward call of God in Christ Jesus, whether you are single or whether you are married.

[34:35] Do you, do we have that? There's something else here which is, actually, you can be content in singleness, but also still desire relationship.

They are not mutually exclusive. You can still be both. Paul talks about this in Philippians 4. He says, not that I'm speaking of wanting or speaking of being in need, but I have learned to be content in whatever situation.

I know how to be brought low. I know how to abound. Actually, there's many people who believe that actually Paul was married at one point because actually the Jewish culture at that time, if you're going through to become a Pharisee, you will be assigned a wife.

Now, he doesn't talk about it at any point and later in life, whether it's through being widowed or divorced or whatever it might be, he's not. So in some ways, I'm thinking actually Paul would have understood both of these situations because actually commentators say it would have been very unlikely for him not to have been married off in an early age because that was the culture.

Now, he doesn't talk about it and we know that he's a single man at this point when he's later in life, when he's becoming the most prolific church planter in the whole of history. So when he says, not that I'm speaking of being in need, but I've learned to be content in whatever situation, I know how to be brought low and I know how to abound.

[35:49] It could easily be, I know what it was like to be married and I know what it is like to be single. But in any and every situation, circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.

I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Regardless of marital status, Paul had an undivided devotion to the Lord. You can still desire but also be content.

You can also still be content but still struggle. Okay? We do not live in a black and white world. You can have these things.

You can say, Lord, this is what I desire. This is what I want. Actually, C.S. Lewis says a really interesting quote. He says, A woman's heart should be so close to God that a man should have to chase him to find her.

A woman's heart should be so close to God that a man should have to chase him to find her. One of those cheesy Instagram quotes that you could see. But it's C.S. Lewis so it's okay. Instagram wasn't created at that point.

[36:45] But you get the heart behind it. What are you using with whatever status you have? Is it an undivided devotion to the Lord? The 10,000 hours that you spend doing whatever it is that you're doing, could it be used for him?

I think, I think we struggle to think about it even for a single person. Actually, there are dangers to being single. Actually, one of my best friends in England is single. Same age as me and he's the godfather to our children and we talk about this a lot.

You know what? One of the biggest dangers and he'll admit this as well, one of the biggest dangers of being a single person, self-centeredness. Self-centeredness. Everything just becomes about you because it is about you and that's a dangerous place to be.

One good thing that comes out of a marriage, if you can call it a good thing, is that you'll discover problems that you never knew existed. You'll fight about things that you never knew you could even fight about.

Kenneth's just like, preacher bro. There's character flaws in me that actually I only realized once I married Christina and she lovingly, graciously points them out to me on a fairly regular basis.

[38:04] I have no choice. Well, I still am and I can have to confess recently that I am selfish. I am selfish because I wasn't able to do my own thing on an evening anymore because I've got these other things I have to do.

Man. But when you're a single person, that danger is even higher. Higher. You just, you just becomes absorbed by the things of you. You just keep thinking about yourself.

Right? But how can we release that? How can we release that so it's not just about us and actually that we have to ask ourselves that question.

Why do we want to be with someone? If we are single, why do we want to be with someone? Here's another question that I found that was interesting. If your prayer for a spouse was answered, would it change the world or would it change yours?

If your prayer for a spouse is answered, would it change the world or would it only change your world? That will reveal to you what you're actually craving, what you're actually looking for.

[39:10] Where is, where is your heart in this? Where is my heart in this? In whatever circumstances that the Lord has given us. If all of it is to point towards that, to press on toward the goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

That's the prayer. That's the thing that I don't think we as a church are doing well enough to call single people or called married people to the kingdom of heaven and saying, man, I know you have this struggle whichever way you are in terms of your life right now, but how can we call each other higher to the things of the kingdom of heaven?

That's the most important thing. But there are some extra questions about this that I want to quickly tackle as well. If you are single, you're like, well, what about my sexuality? Created as a sexual being.

What about that? Well, again, it points to one thing that is most important. This whole book, this marriage itself points to what? Points to the coming return of Christ.

Jesus, as the most complete single man, the most content single man, talks about the church and his future return in terms of bridegroom and bride. And he says, hey, I'm coming back.

[40:22] And actually, the author, Sam Albury, who actually writes the book called Seven Myths of Singleness, says this, we are created as sexual beings and we have that desire to be fruitful and to multiply. That is part of it.

On a side note, for single people who don't have kids yet or who will never have kids, you have a spiritual family here with children that are in desperate need of discipling. How can you contribute to the growth of the next generation growing up in this family?

That you have something that you actually have to teach them and to guide them with? To dispel some of the myths and some of the misconceptions of what even singleness and marriage is. You have a role to play.

Are you actively playing that role to bring up the future generation? But when it comes to sexuality, Sam Albury says this, actually, allow our sexuality to be the thing that points us to the greater consummation, which is the day that Jesus comes back for his bride.

The moment you feel those things, the moment you feel and reminded of your flesh, use it as a chance to point you to the greatest consummation that Christ is coming back and when he's coming back from his bride, that will be the true satisfaction, that will be the true fulfillment that we're all actually craving for.

[41:33] Something else about that is married people also have the same sexual temptations. Why are divorce rates at their highest? why are so many marriages falling apart?

It's because just because you're married, it does not mean that you suddenly have no sexual temptations. Quite the opposite sometimes. Again, it's the same thing.

Single or married, which you allow your sexuality to point you to the coming of Christ. Let's not turn sex into the evil thing is because, remember, God Almighty, the creator of heaven and earth, was the one that created it.

Why? To point people to Christ. Marriage is only an earthly, temporary construct. The whole point of two people getting together to be married is so that other people can see that actually this is the kind of love, this is a reflection of the kind of love that God has for his people.

And the moment that served its purpose, when God returns, there is no need for marriage anymore. There is no need for sex anymore. We still have to fight those same temptations whether you are single or married.

[42:44] But use it the way you were created to point yourself, to remind yourself, to remind ourselves of the day that Jesus returns. And the second question is what about intimacy?

If we were made for a relationship, then man, without a spouse, without someone, I don't have the intimacy. Well, let me dispel another thing that movies seem to promote a lot, which is when you have sex, you have intimacy.

You can have a lot of sex and have zero, zero intimacy. Intimacy is not something that is tied to sexuality. If this is supposed to be what it's supposed to be, there will be people here as friends, as family, who can help bring you into an intimate relationship where when you are going through sugar calls, when there are rainy days, you can call and you can speak to, just like a married person has to speak to their spouse at home when they're going through the same thing.

The question is, how are we promoting, how are we pursuing intimacy between the people here in this room, the people that we've chosen to gather?

Some marriages don't have intimacy at all. It's not a given. Again, whether you're single or married. Psalm Albury says this and this is where he finishes and I'll finish with this final story here.

[44:10] He says, if marriage shows you the shape of the gospel, singleness shows you its sufficiency. That the gospel is sufficient for you, you as a single human being.

Marriage will show you the shape of the gospel and how you're supposed to die for one another even when you don't deserve it, but singleness will show you its sufficiency, that this is actually all you need. This does not make you any less of a person.

Marriage and singleness are both a gift and that is the good news. The problem is we have a low view of marriage and we have a low view of singleness. Why?

Because we have a low view of who God is. When you discover who God truly is, and that song that we sang, the first song, the goodness of God, when you truly discover the goodness of God, you will discover the goodness of marriage and you will discover the goodness of singleness. It starts as it always does. It ends as it always does with God. The question for us is, do we truly realize that?

[45:10] Or have we let our own lives catch us in this spiral where we're just thinking about ourselves? And it's funny, Jesus says this, when you lose yourself, that's when you'll gain the true abundant life.

So many of us, regardless of marital status, have to be reminded of that. When we have this undivided devotion to the Lord, that is when we'll see Him.

Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5, 8, says, those who are pure in heart, they shall what? See God. Those who are pure in heart, they shall see God.

Now, for a young man growing up in this culture, we straight away, we know what being pure in heart is, and we know that we are not pure in heart. And there is a side to sexual temptation there

that is true.

But I'm not entirely sure that's what Jesus was talking about. When He says, blessed are those who are pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are those who are single-heartedly devoted to seeing Him, because if you are, then you shall see Him.

[46 : 16] Blessed are those who have an undivided devotion to the Kingdom of Heaven, who seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and at that point, everything else will be added.

I want to finish with a story of a eunuch. And you guys will know this is one of my favorite stories in the Bible. It's Acts 8. It's about Philip, the evangelist. And I love telling this story, because in Acts 8, this is Philip, the evangelist, he, the apostles and disciples are getting persecuted, so they have to scatter and leave Jerusalem.

They have to leave the city that they love, and they have to go. And they're terrified, because this could be the end of their lives. And then something fascinating, because Paul, actually, funny story there, Paul's the one who's chasing them down and trying to kill them.

Philip is an interesting one. He runs away. And you'd think he'd stay down low, on the down low, and low key, and just kind of try and keep his life and preserve his life. He doesn't. He goes into Samaria, and he continues to preach the good news.

He can't stop. He has this undivided devotion to the Lord. And then he has this magical thing which we all hope for. For those of us who are asking God, how can I serve you? He has this moment where God zaps him, literally zaps him to a different road.

[47 : 24] I would love for that to happen. For God, use me however you want. Take me. Like, zap me to Hawaii right now. There are bartenders at the beach club that need the gospel. And I would love for that to happen, yet it often doesn't happen because I don't have the faith of Philip.

Because if someone was trying to kill me, I'm lying low. But he doesn't lie low. He goes into enemy territory and he carries on. So God zaps him. He moves. He guides the moving car to this Ethiopian eunuch.

And that's kind of the story I often like to tell. Actually, man, Philip's heart just constantly moving, not afraid. I love this. But I want to finish with the story of the eunuch. The guy who's in the chariot.

Okay?

Tell you a little bit more about this guy. He was essentially the CFO of his kingdom. He's a eunuch, which means he has no hope of a family at all.

And he's a very powerful man. The queen has entrusted all the nation's treasures to this guy. And actually, let me turn to it now just so we can follow through. If you've got it as well, I want you to turn to it because I think there's things here that often we skip through.

[48 : 29] Acts 8, verse 27, and he rose, so he gets zapped into a desert place, not quite Hawaii, but he goes to a desert place and he rose and went and there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure.

This was an important man. This was a very important man who had castrated himself for the kingdom for Queen Candace and was basically looking after all her treasure.

Okay? That's the context of this man. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning seated in his chariot. So he'd gone to Jerusalem from Ethiopia, which actually would have been a long, long ride.

And he's gone on his way back and Philip has this moment with him where Philip is zapped to this desert road and then goes to speak to him. And what does the Ethiopian say? What does Philip say?

Philip says, hey, do you know, do you understand what you're reading? Verse 30. Because he's reading a scroll. He's reading the scroll of Isaiah, which isn't a nice, tidy book like this. It's probably just all scrolled up, just a huge manuscript.

[49 : 34] He's just reading it. A few years ago, I understood a little bit more of the context of this. This Ethiopian official, who was an incredibly powerful man, had all the nation's money at his disposal, but was a eunuch, so he had no hope or a future for his own family.

He leaves that and takes a sabbatical to go to Jerusalem. Can we just pause there and just have a think? What's going on in his heart?

He's the chief financial officer for Queen Candace, has everything that he needs. Yeah, he won't have children, but there's something going on in his heart that is like, guys, I've got to take a few months off and I've got to travel to Jerusalem because there's something going on inside me that

I'm hungry for, that I'm desperate for, that I can't have even though I have all this money at my disposal.

So he makes this journey from Ethiopia to Jerusalem. But here's the problem. According to Old Testament law, eunuchs are not allowed in the temple.

I don't know whether he knew that beforehand, so was heading there to see if he could just sneak in, or whether he didn't know and he would have been turned around at the door.

[50:57] Either way, look at his response when Philip says to him, do you understand what you're reading? And so he's reading the scroll of Isaiah as he's going home. Unlikely, a two, three month journey back home and his colleagues are going to go, oh, what did you do?

Did you find that God that you were looking for? Did you find that satisfaction that you were looking for? And I don't think he's that happy because what does Philip say? Philip says, do you understand what you're reading? And then the Ethiopian unit goes, how can I unless someone guides me?

Do you sense that? Do you sense that? So he shows up to the temple. He gets turned away. He's been on this huge pilgrimage and gets turned away.

And then now this random guy runs next to his chariot as he's heading home in his Rolls Royce and he's saying, do you understand what you're reading? He's like, what do you people want from me? I came looking for answers and you wouldn't let me through the door.

What was he reading? Like a sheep, he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent so he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation, justice was denied him.

[52:06] Who can describe his generation for his life is taken away from the earth? In his humiliation, justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? Remember, this Ethiopian doesn't know anything.

Where's this passage from by the way? Bible trivia. Does anyone know? Isaiah 50, Isaiah 53.

It's the man of sorrow's passage. Now we now look at this and go, well obviously he's talking about Jesus. The Ethiopian does not know this because he's not even been allowed to ask the question. He's not even allowed to go in. Maybe there was a scene of humiliation that was happening right at the temple. I've traveled here from very far and now you're not letting me in because something that someone else did to me.

How can I understand unless someone guides me? He's reading that passage from Isaiah 53 that we now know is about Jesus. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted but he was pierced for our transgressions.

[53:12] He was crushed for our iniquities and he's going what does he say to Philip? He says who's this about? What's this about? I want to know.