

Sermon Topic: **SINGLES FOR THE KINGDOM** by Rev Dr Lorna Khoo

1. Singles are useful but discriminated against, forgotten, even in churches

- At work, e.g. doing overtime covering those on maternity/paternity leave
- At home, e.g. babysitting nephews/nieces; taking care of parents

BUT

- discriminated against, e.g. in allocation of flats? Budget goodies?
- forgotten, i.e. under-appreciated spare wheel

even in churches, e.g. no Singles Sunday; few in leadership roles; pre-marital courses, boy-girl relationships (BGR) but no courses/preparations on living a single life as a vocation or for living holy single lives. Roman Catholic church may have such because of its emphasis on the single/celibate religious life, but in Protestant churches ... “evangelicalism’s obsessive love affair with the nuclear family leaves Christian singles in isolation ... (Albert Hsu, in his book *Singles at the Crossroads: A Fresh Perspective on Christian Singleness*)

2. The number of singles is growing fast – around the world & in Singapore

- 2012 study in US: One third of 45- to 63-year olds are single (never married or divorced) – 50% increase since 1980. Reasons:
 - Less or later marriages resulting from changes such as in
 - o Education
 - o Availability of opportunities
 - o Changing values
 - o Overseas jobs
 - o Financial difficulties
 - Shrinking family sizes
- In Singapore: Single person households = 11.2% (2014); could hit 40% in 15 years’ time (a 2011 report). Nuclear & 3-generation families form 59% of households (i.e. 41% NOT nuclear or 3-generational).

NUS study found half of Singapore’s elderly to be frail, mostly due to malnutrition. Overwhelming majority of them were single, divorced or widowed.

3. Types of singles:

- a) Type A – are waiting and want to get married; may feel ashamed to be single
- b) Type B – happy and proud to be single; don’t want to marry but may not mind getting married

Most of the time, the church ministers to singles who are waiting, to those who are afraid of singlehood as a stigma (Type A). Church singles groups function like “spiritual singles bars” and cater mainly to young adults, esp. those who want to get married – talks on dating, BGR, socials, etc.

But Type B singles form the bigger group, which the church (and all of us) tends to forget about and they get left out.

Focus tends to be on those who want to get married ... want the rest to get married so that there will be children/grandchildren; larger population means more people to take care of the nation & so on.

Remember: There are more than one type of singles:

- ✓ never married, both Type A & Type B
- ✓ single again (widowed/divorced) – with kids & without; Type A but older or Type B

Society’s values:

- Singles are desperate, lonely, (ugly?), left on the shelf
- One is not an adult (whole and mature) until married. Children and singles get CNY angpows

4. Biblical Identity Of Singles

- People who're seen as mature in the faith – John the Baptist, St Paul, Jesus – ALL singles!
Christ is the visible image of the invisible God ... for in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body (Colossians 1:15, 2:9). Christ is the symbol of maturity.
- Completeness in Christ, not dependent on marital status
 - A. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. (Colossians 2:9-10)
 - B. Perfection: Him we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus (Colossians 1:28)
- Emphasis is not on whether you are married or not. Rather, that singles (as well as married people) can be **whole, mature, valued, honoured**
- Jesus did not talk much about marriage ... but a lot about discipleship
 - ✓ Make disciples of nations, NOT be fruitful and multiply
 - ✓ Cross life (life of discipleship) is more important than family life – in Scriptures: If love father/mother/children more than Him, not worthy of Him. (Matthew 10:37)
 - ✓ Christian kinship is more than blood family. Who's my father? brother? sister? – the one who does the will of God.

DISCIPLESHIP, not marital status, is CENTRAL

5. Singles In The Kingdom of God

Two passages in Scripture that talk a lot about the single life – Matthew 19 & 1 Corinthians 7

A. Matthew 19

Matt 19:10 – 12: ¹⁰ The disciples said to him, “If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry.” ¹¹ Jesus replied, “Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. ¹² For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others—and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.”

- Eunuchs (Hebrew = “cariyc”)
 - not only castrated single man (Deuteronomy 23:1) but could also be married male, or married man who is “high ranking officer”/“chamberlain” of the court (Genesis 37:36, 39:1; Esther 4:4), e.g. Potiphar
 - those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of God, i.e. singles (Matthew 19:12)
 - In the past, practice of making eunuchs of men was not acceptable to the Jewish people (Deuteronomy 23:1; Leviticus 22:23 – 25), though it did not stop the Jewish kings in employing them in their courts
 - self mutilation often in honour of a heathen god
 - seen as a not whole person (Leviticus 21:16, 22: 24)
 - but in Isaiah 56, eunuchs/singles were warmly welcomed and given promises by God, e.g. in verses 3–7. The powerful topic of “house of prayer” is linked with the calling of the singles who serve the Lord to be accepted and honoured.

In short, “eunuchs”

- have a great place in the Kingdom of God
- can refer to different scenarios of singlehood

Three scenarios Jesus mentioned about those who remain single (“eunuchs”)

- a) Made that way – born with a physical defect or have no real desire for marriage/sex; celibacy as a gift
- b) Made “eunuchs” by others – castrated or situational, e.g. poverty, taking care of sick siblings or aged parents
- c) Choose to live like eunuchs for the Kingdom of heaven

Bottom line: Singles of all groups can be living consecrated lives for Him.

Examples:

- a) Sophia Blackmore – single Australian missionary who created rich missionary heritage, including founding Fairfield Methodist Schools & Tamil Girls School (which later become Methodist Girls’ School); starting girls’ boarding home; translating hymns to Malay; publishing Christian periodical in Peranakan; preaching in open air/Telok Ayer area; one of founders of Kampong Kapur Methodist Church
- b) Sadhu Sundar Singh – single Sikh/Punjabi who experienced many mystical experiences with the Lord; was an itinerant preacher, traveling from village to village in India and across Asia, USA, Europe, Australia; moving in miracles/healing and preached the gospel; wrote 8 books; inspired generations of Christians in India and the West. Life story depicted in movie “Journey to the Sky”
- c) St Francis Xavier – “Apostle of the Indies”; “Apostle of Japan”
- d) Jackie Pullinger – British Anglican charismatic missionary who founded St Stephen’s Society. Worked among drug addicts in Hong Kong’s Walled City. Wrote book “Chasing the Dragon”

B. 1 Corinthians 7

- Good to remain single (unmarried, widowed therefore single)
- Please marry if you cannot “tahan” (can’t stand it)
- Be single because
 - Marriage will have its hosts of troubles and responsibilities
 - Present situation (crisis)
 - There is trouble already
 - Time is short, priorities need to be focussed
 - Can be more wholeheartedly devoted to pleasing God
- Marriage and singlehood are giftings from God

Singles for the Lord – have a calling/destiny because they are available to serve the Lord. Whether they were married before and became single again, God can use them in a powerful way.

- ✓ Solely devoted to the Lord
- ✓ Available to go anywhere, anytime
- ✓ Making impact, pioneering new ministries, transforming the world for Him!

Marriage is good; Singlehood is better

Singles in the Kingdom

- a. It is a vocation of dignity and honour
- b. It is a spiritual gifting

c. They leave spiritual legacies

Building a legacy

- Old Testament times – children seen as essential, for they carried on the life and name of a person beyond his death ... the need to continue their life through children.
- Singleness expressed the belief that there was life after death for the individual ... demonstrates his or her faith in giving up the possibility of heirs (Rodney Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads*). Singlehood is affirmation that after death, life goes on ... there is a legacy that singles can leave for others by being single because they will have spiritual children (cf. Isaiah 56: ... “you will not be a dry tree”).
- Sometimes, may not be able to see future impact during own lifetime.
Example of a 31-year-old single man who died painfully of kidney failure in 1950’s when there was no dialysis. Single, no child, little impact = wasted life? But because of his life – living for Christ and dying in Christ – the National Kidney Foundation (NKF) was started by his brother, Dr Khoo Oon Teik, who saw him suffer and die. Few know of or remember the Rev Khoo Oon Eng, but because of him, people’s lives were impacted beyond what he could imagine; God used his life to bless lots of people with kidney issues.

6. **LOOKING AHEAD.** What does it mean for us?

- Genesis 2:18 – It is not good for the man to be alone. Therefore, get married?
- If look at the Scriptures carefully, doesn’t necessarily mean that if it is not good for man to be alone, therefore marriage is the way forward. If look at context of Scripture, it’s a call to community – it’s not good for a human being to be alone, since the human being needs to be with other human beings, i.e. be in community (we are social beings).
- We need each other, need helpers – that’s why God said I will make a helper worthy of him.
- Helper (Hebrew = “ezer”) – “one who helps”, “sustainer”, “one who surrounds” ... not number 2’s or assistants.
- “Ezer” = powerful partner. Used 21 times in Old Testament, of which used 16 times for God, 3 times for aid given to the needy, and only 2 times for women.
- God is our Helper, meaning the one who is stronger, more powerful, a partner with different strengths, able to protect. Jehovah Ezer – “The Lord is with you, mighty warrior” (Judges 6:12)
- God is also the one who empowers the woman to be the helper of the man, to be the stronger one in some areas.
- In context of community, it means we need to have communities that are stronger than the singles themselves – to help, sustain and protect. Married people may have families to help and protect but singles need community for this. For Singles ministry, stop just thinking about trying to do things like BGR Connect so that they can get married ... start communities for singles to build friendships, relationships, communities
- Scenario of elder orphans/widows/widowers with no children, children who have died, children in other countries, cut off from other relatives, no siblings – lonely, socially/physically isolated, failing minds, need help with hospital decisions/end of life issues. Perhaps co-opt nephews/nieces to take care of the old? Appoint a proxy? Need friends or make new friends for this.

Singles:

- Start or build communities
 - ✓ join or start cell group
 - ✓ meet at least once a month
 - ✓ go out for meals
 - ✓ WhatsApp each other
- Ask: “To whom do I belong?” I belong to my family, but do I belong to a community with close friends who can help me or I can be of help to when needed?

Church's part:

- Help start groups, need champions to help start groups – create opportunities for trips, gatherings, support. Share gifts/skills to bless each other, e.g. change light bulbs, drive, repair car, fix plumbing, computer and handphone helps
- Recognise and equip singles as Kingdom leaders
- Care for singles:
 - a) Acts 4:32-35 – one in heart & mind; shared everything
 - b) Psalm 69:16 – God sets the lonely/singles in families. Fostering/adopting adults in church – become family for each other
 - c) Acts 6:1-7 – 7 deacons set aside to care and provide for Hellenistic Jewish widows
- Change our attitude towards singles
- Cater to Type B singles as well
- Help them organise into communities, e.g. tours, pilgrimages, retreats, encounter weekends
- Mobilise them for challenging ministries leadership

QUESTIONS

If you are a single:

- Do you feel discriminated against in society and in church? How so? How did it make you feel?
- Are you more Type A or Type B type of single?
- To whom do you belong? List down your communities. Are they sufficient? Do you need more? How can you actively start communities?
- How do you feel with Jesus, Paul, John the Baptist, Sophia Blackmore, Sadhu Sundar Singh, St Francis Xavier, Jackie Pullinger as your models of maturity, wholeness, heroism?
- Is there something the Lord is challenging you to be or do (even if you are quite senior in age)? How can the church help you discern your calling and respond to it?

If you are not single:

- What are some labels and prejudice you have about singles? How does that square with what you have learnt from the Scriptures?
- Think of two singles in your family, in your place of work, in the church. How can you facilitate the forming of communities for them?
- The Bible says, “He puts the lonely/singles in families”. How can you include singles into your family life beyond getting them to help service your family needs?