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THE OVERLOOKED GIFT OF THE SPIRIT

Don't miss this powerful gift that Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians.

For most Christians, the idea of singleness as a gift from God is revolutionary. The church has all but idolized marriage, leading many single people to feel like they're not married because there is something wrong with them.

Whether singleness is for a season or a lifetime, it's rarely celebrated—by singles or marrieds—for the blessing God designed it to be. Charisma asked two single leaders to share their own experiences and what God says in His Word about living the single life as a Christian. Kyle Winkler writes from a single man's perspective, and Kris Swiatocho offers a single woman's take on the topic.

MALE PERSPECTIVE

BY KYLE WINKLER

Nearing the end of what people perceive as the acceptable age to be single, and with mounting pressure from fellow ministers to find a “helpmate,” by the end of my 20s, I ramped up my dating game.

It did not work.

Several years and relationships later, I was left frustrated because I strangely sensed more peace outside of a relationship than inside one. Most chalked this up to not yet finding the right “one.” “Keep looking,” they urged. But deep down, I heard God whisper something different: “Gift.”

Unwrap the Gift

Through the years, although rarely, I heard people speak of a “gift of singleness” (mostly those petrified they might have it). This premise is usually based on Paul’s writings about his decision to remain unmarried.

“For I would that all men were even as I myself,” Paul insisted. “But every man has his proper gift from God” (1 Cor. 7:7a).

Feeling God’s leading, I dug deeper into Paul’s words, particularly his curious use of “gift.” Of the two Greek words for “gift” in the New Testament, Paul selected *charisma* to describe his singleness. Not coincidentally, I have learned, this is the same word he later used to catalog what many call the “charismatic gifts.” These include prophecy and healing, which among others, are given by God to help believers fulfill tasks they could not otherwise do on their own (see 1 Cor. 12:8-10). As I studied Paul’s words, I discovered singleness is the same—a gift of supernatural power given for great feats.

Unfortunately, for most evangelicals, such an idea is revolutionary. The modern church all but idolizes marriage so that many subconsciously believe a single person is incomplete, immature or even a problem to be fixed. Therefore, singleness is hardly considered any kind of blessing.

Not to me, though. As an unmarried minister approaching my mid-30s, I can see that my singleness has afforded me opportunities to travel extensively, write and make the financial sacrifices necessary to launch a ministry. I have accomplished tasks that, knowing myself, would have been difficult if I were also juggling marriage and family obligations. For that, I celebrate my singleness.

Embrace the Gift

Many quiver at the suggestion that they might have the gift. “I could not ... would not ... should not,” some protest, mentioning their craving for intimacy and the promise, “[God] will give you the desires of your heart” (Ps. 37:4b), as reasons. But this thinking is misguided.

Although some singles have greater ease dealing with their desires than others, almost all battle desire at some level, even those who choose singleness for life. This is because God’s gifts do not remove our humanness. Rather, they empower us to accomplish His will in spite of it.

Just as Jesus gave various reasons people are not able to produce children (some from birth, some because of people and others by choice for the sake of His kingdom), so it is with singleness (see Matt. 19:12). Sadly, some are single because of biological conditions due to the fall of creation. And some are single because there are no suitable options. Still, others choose the single state for the sake of

“The enemy wants to destroy. He wants to destroy any evidence of your presence or the work you have done for the Lord.” —Kris Swiatocho





FEMALE PERSPECTIVE

BY KRIS SWIATOCHO

If singleness a gift, as the apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7, can I return or exchange it? That's my response to the many who say singleness is a gift.

How can not being married be a gift from God? How can being alone, especially around the holidays, be valuable? If I get invited to one more wedding or baby shower, I'm going to scream. How can being responsible for all the finances, including repairs to my home, be a gift? How can being a single parent or taking care of a parent be so great? A gift is supposed to be something you want. No one would say, "Give me a gift, but make sure I don't like it."

Perhaps this dilemma calls for a different perspective. Maybe the issue is how we see this life of singleness, this life that could be another year—or forever.

As a single adult, John 10:10 is one of my favorite verses to live by: "The thief does not come, except to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."

Satan Is After You

The enemy loves to steal your value, your confidence, your joy, your commitment and your identity. Now don't get me wrong, I believe most singles, including me, are called to and desire marriage. But in the meantime, while you are walking with the Lord as a single, hopefully growing, serving and changing, the enemy is doing his best to steal from you.

He gets you to doubt that you are complete in Christ as a single (see Col. 2:8-10) and that God is equipping you to do much for Him right where you are until He moves you.

The enemy doesn't stop there. No, he wants to kill us. Not only does he want to kill our physical bodies with overeating, drugs, stress and debt, but

undistracted ministry.

In short, those who are single, whether by choice or circumstance, have the gift. This will scare some, but it need not. If for a season or a lifetime, singleness offers incredible opportunities one would not have if married. Whether it is celebrated as a blessing and stewarded accordingly is up to the individual.

Celebrate the Gift

Every God-given gift comes with the support necessary to handle it. Unequivocally, the greatest need a single person has is relationship. This reality is what leads many evangelicals to dismiss the "gift of singleness," citing Gen. 2:18b: "It is not good that the man should be alone."

Although we are made for relationship, being single and being alone are two different situations. Both Jesus and Paul were single men, but they were far from alone. In fact, it could be argued their singleness allowed them to have more relationships and at greater depths.

To ease loneliness, it is crucial singles be intentional about developing friendships. Perhaps ironically, the place where they often feel most misunderstood—the church—is also the greatest solution to loneliness.

Jesus established the church as a family of believers who care for each other. Paul wrote, "If one part suffers, all the others suffer with it, and if one part

is honored, all the parts rejoice with it" (1 Cor. 12:26). Accordingly, a healthy church recognizes the gifts of both singles and married couples in support of each other. Married couples can provide a family for their single friends with whom to enjoy dinner, movies, holidays or vacations. Likewise, singles can assist their married friends with their children, cooking or home projects. This is the church in action, where each celebrates the other's unique situation.

Treasure the Gift

Finally, singles should be encouraged that they are not left out of God's plan. Actually, quite the opposite is true. Just as God established marriage as the earthly representation of the eternal union between Christ and His church, God established singleness as the earthly demonstration of Christ's sufficiency in an eternity of perfect communion with Him. Indeed, the single life is a powerful witness to the gospel—one that, perhaps now more than ever, both the church and world desperately need to see.

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ONLINE EXCLUSIVE: Kris Swiatocho, founder of an international singles ministry, encourages singles and those who minister to them at singlesministry.charismamag.com.

» More time with God. If you're a single parent, this point might not apply, but as a single without kids, I have more flexibility in spending my time with God. But I must still choose to spend it that way. We all have the same 24-hour clock. The more time I spend with Him, the closer I will get to Him.

» The ability to make your own decisions. This is one of my favorite benefits to single living. I can choose how to spend my money and other resources. If I sense God's leading to buy something, give it away or help a neighbor, I don't have to ask anyone but God.

» A larger community. As a single, we can have a much larger community of both male and female friends. But once you're married, you must be careful what and with whom you share.

» The flexibility to take care of family. About now, some singles are screaming at me that singleness can't possibly be a gift. But for me, it has been. I had both the flexibility and the joy of being able to take care of my grandparents, my father and now my mother. Sure, there are days that are horrible, but everyone has those. But what an honor it has been as a single to take care of family members. My married siblings simply do not have the flexibility in their schedules to handle this level of care.

These days, I treasure my gift of singleness, knowing God is doing something in me now He will not do in me as half of a married couple. I have a great life serving Him. I know He loves me and wants the best for me. And you know what? When I get invited to yet another wedding, I skip it and send the couple a check. This has helped me avoid many chocolate and Hallmark movie binges. ◀

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he sets out to kill the truth in our lives as singles.

It's one thing to steal the truth. After all, we can prove he is a liar by knowing God's Word, but the enemy then attempts to kill by distracting us with many things. These distractions may appear good but lead to our destruction, and they include not waiting on God for the mate He has for us. Why would any single want her best versus God's best? We must learn to trust God in our singleness (Prov. 3:5-6), which is for a purpose. God may even be protecting you from death. Proverbs 14:12 says, "There is a way that appears to be right, but its end is the way of death."

The enemy wants to destroy. He wants to destroy any evidence of your presence or the work you have done for the Lord, from your personal witness to your public ministry. That way there are no salvations, no spreading of the gospel, no ministry; it is as if you were never born.

But Jesus came to give life. This life has good days and bad, heartache and joy, love and pain. And this life is a gift; we are not promised one extra minute. But our time can be spent well with friends and family. We can

live, work and serve because of God's goodness in our lives.

God Enriches the Single's Life

Being single can be a gift. But how?

» A sharper focus: I can focus solely on pleasing my Savior in all I do. It is a gift to experience intimacy with God that you don't have to share with anyone else—a gift meant only for you.

» No permission needed: I can serve the Lord anytime and anywhere without having to ask my spouse. Now you may say, "But, Kris, I want to talk to my spouse. I want my spouse to join me in ministry." Yes, I get it. I want the same, but consider this: If a woman believes God is calling her to serve, both she and her husband should be in agreement. Singles don't need to take that step. We have freedom we don't fully understand until we're married and we reflect on our single life. This may explain why 80-85 percent of missionaries are single women (Africa Inland Mission and Mission Network News, mnonline.org/news/new-statistics-on-single-men-in-missions/). God's Word tells us: "As everyone has received a gift, even so serve one another with it, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Pet. 4:10).