Why Singles Belong in Church Leadership

**JUL 25 2014**

*Unmarried ministers offer a unique understanding of devotion to Christ alone.*

***Lore Ferguson, guest writer***

Each time I read a well-intentioned article on how to make the most of your single years, I scan down to the author's bio and often discover that, sure enough, he's married to his college sweetheart, pulling advice from a brief period of singleness years ago.

Even at 33, I'm a spring chicken to some of the seasoned single men and women before me. These Christians have spent their lives burning with passion, unmet desires, or unrequited love, or have committed to a life of celibacy. These are the clouds of witnesses I look to for wisdom in issues of singleness—not the well-meaning, but hollow three-points and a poem professor with his winsome wife and four little ones. What do I know of his life? The hardships of parenting, husbanding, pastoring, teaching, ministering? But what does he know of mine?  If the life of a single Christian, as Paul admonished, is to be undistracted by the world, concerned with the things of the Lord, then unmarried ministers have a unique calling indeed. And it is one the church ought not ignore—or usurp.  Where I live, in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex, young marriages are common. Younger than the national average at least. Yet few single men and women are involved in ministry. My pastor leads a large church-planting network, and I asked him recently, "How many single guys are planting in the network?" He named a mere few. The dearth of undistracted men and women in ministry is sad, but more so, it is alarming.  I am in no way discouraging marriage (I want to be married, after all), but I believe the church can do better in this area. If the trend of delayed marriage continues, we must have men and women who have walked the narrow path of godly singleness teaching those who come after them. The church's tendency to primarily hire married men and women, for whatever justification—stability, plantedness, longevity—should be reconsidered for multiple reasons.

**1. Godly singles will be more available for ministry and study than their married counterparts.**

To be undistracted by husbands and wives does not have to mean one is distracted by other earthly entities. Paul's encouragement to the singles was to be undistracted in their devotion to the Lord. Still, a godly unmarried person will, and should, have more time to invest in study, discipleship, ministry, and service than a married person will. This is a precious gift and shouldn't be overlooked within the church. Churches need to equip their singles—not with singles ministries where they meet and mingle—but with opportunities to grow in their devotion to the Lord, specifically in vocational ministry.

**2. Walking unpartnered equips singles to deal with painful realities of life without seeking solace in a spouse.**

Without the daily liturgy of the marriage covenant running through their lives, single Christians can feel the weight of aloneness deeply. There is no one to help shoulder the burden of bills, chores, or concerns as a spouse would. In these moments the lack can feel a near agony. I think often of Christ in his last days: Could you not wait with me? Keep watch with me? How aching the loneliness must have felt to him in those moments.

There is quietness in the life of a single that can be a gift, but it can also be an echo chamber of darkness where difficulties must be wrestled through with God alone. This equips singles in unique ways to minister with an eye toward finding our strength in Christ alone as our ultimate groom. Kathy Keller, in a panel on gender at the recent Gospel Coalition Women's Conference said, "Singles have in many ways more of an opportunity to display what it means to be Christ's spouse in their singleness."

**3. If Christ asks for holiness, purity, and chastity from the unmarried, then we need models of those who are living out those virtues in prolonged seasons.**

Those who have wrestled deep with their prolonged chastity have experienced something of earth's groans in wait for her Creator. A friend recently confessed struggles of waiting sexually for her upcoming wedding day. I was able to tell her the hunger pangs of longing she feels for her fiancé are akin to the hunger pangs we feel when we're fasting. Those pangs teach us we're waiting for a better feast. For the one fasting, the feast isn't the break-fast, and for the virgin, the feast isn't the wedding night. The feast is the marriage supper of the Lamb and an eternity spent with him. But those pangs are still real and felt, to pretend they're not is ignorant.

Being content in Christ while single is not as simple as three points and a poem. Sometimes it is a very real war against flesh. The church desperately needs single pastors and ministers who understand that prolonged warring. They understand the agony of having not yet arrived to eternity's shores in a deep and daily way.

Church, fill your staff with single men and women. Pursue them for ministry places. Do not always make the comfortable choice of a potential staffer who has 2.5 kids and a house in the suburbs.  As culture continues to trend toward prolonging marriages longer and longer, and especially as same-sex attraction issues rise, we need men and women who have firmly planted their feet on the rock of purity and undistracted devotion to the Lord.

*Lore Ferguson is a freelance writer and graphic designer living in Dallas, Texas. You can follow her on Twitter* [*@loreferguson*](http://twitter.com/loreferguson) *and read more of what she's saying at* [*Sayable.net*](http://www.sayable.net/)*.*