

/ by design series study guide

Speaker: Dr. Barry Danylak

Date: June 1 / 2, 2019

SERMON TITLE: Singleness / By Design

PURSUE RELATIONSHIP: Opportunities to connect as a group

1. When was the last time you were surprised?
2. Pastor Barry pointed out statistics that show a significant trend: as recent as 1981, three-quarters of the adult population would be married by their late twenties. Today that number has reversed as with three-quarters of those 25-29 years old being still single. How have you been impacted by these trends? in your life? in the lives of those you know?

PURSUE GOD: Time that is devoted to the Word of God

1. Read Deut 7:12-14 and Eph 1:3-14. Discuss how God's blessing in the Old Testament compares with His blessing in the New Testament.
2. Read Philippians 4:19 and Colossians 1:28. What does it mean to have our needs met and to be complete/fully mature in Christ? How does this compare with messages we receive from society and sometimes even from the church?

PURSUE MISSION: Seek to be the community of God's people in your community

1. Pastor Barry challenged us with the question: "Who do you have around your dinner table?" How can your Community Group begin to include the full diversity of the people of God—people of diverse race, economic status and marital status, etc.?
2. How can our dinner table be a place to welcome those who are not a part of God's family?

For Personal Prayer/Reflection

Is Christ your sufficiency? Or is there something you need to release to Jesus – even something good like the desire for a spouse or for children or for grand-children? Do you really believe and live the reality that God is the King and he is able to supply all your needs, even if you should lose who or what is dearest to you now? "And my God will supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:19).

What is he asking you to surrender or give over to him now?
Where is he asking you to trust him in his all sufficiency?

This week's writers: Edi Dygert, Thomas Attrell, Jan Varner, Jared Harrison

Link to other By Design sermons:

<https://www.cschurch.ca/bydesign/#sermon2>

THE WORD (NIV)

Gen 1:28

²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

Gen 3:15

¹⁵ And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

Deut 7:12-14

¹² If you pay attention to these laws and are careful to follow them, then the Lord your God will keep his covenant of love with you, as he swore to your ancestors. ¹³ He will love you and bless you and increase your numbers. He will bless the fruit of your womb, the crops of your land—your grain, new wine and olive oil—the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks in the land he swore to your ancestors to give you. ¹⁴ You will be blessed more than any other people; none of your men or women will be childless, nor will any of your livestock be without young.

Isaiah 53:10

¹⁰ Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.

Isaiah 54:1-5

Isaiah 56:3-5

Matthew 19:6

⁶ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

Matthew 19:10-12

Ephesians 1:3-14

Colossians 1:28

²⁸ He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.

Phil 4:19

¹⁹ And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

/ by design series study summary

Pastor Barry Danylak, who oversees the Single Adult communities at Centre Street Church, presents this sermon on Singleness: BY DESIGN. There are lessons here for everyone, single or married. Only 2 or 3 generations ago, people marrying in their early twenties was a matter of course, a coming of age. The following generation started marrying in their late twenties as getting an education and establishing a career became a priority. By 1981, Statistics Canada show that 75% of the adult population was married by their late twenties. Today the numbers are reversed – 75% of those aged 25-29 are still single. There are more single-person than couple households with children; 40% of adults have never married. Reasons for this shift include divorce, common-law relationships, and economics.

The definition of singleness has changed. Singleness was in contrast to 'being married'; now it is contrasted to 'being in a relationship'. Social media gives us a wide range of relationship descriptions ('It's complicated') and devalues marriage (no longer an aspired standard) and singleness (being alone without meaningful relationships), reflecting our preoccupation to meet personal needs. Instead of love commitment or sacrifice for the next generation, we seek personal fulfillment in an ultimate experience of pleasure. A movie, "The 40 Year-Old Virgin", is played for laughs. Yet Michael Castleman of Psychology Today infers that 'singleness' equates to shame by not being fully adult. There is another demographic shift. In 1971 about 5% of those surveyed in the prairie provinces self-identified as agnostic, atheistic, having no religion. By 2011, it had risen to 29%; trending in the young, the male and the single: 2 out of 3 claiming no religion or church. With God removed, we no longer see ourselves as God sees us and we define humanity in what we have left – a sex-centric culture pursuing happiness, and others, to give us pleasure. Reaching the world with the gospel is about the singles next door.

Jesus was a single man, yet research indicates that singles are under-represented in almost every area of church life from attendance, to service, membership, and leadership. Fellowship and involvement is often designed for couples, the church tragically failing to understand Jesus' teaching that the spiritual family is the real family of God. Pastor Barry shared some of his story: raised in a Christian family, presuming to get married because God had someone for him. So he kept looking as he worked: a second theological degree; research, then a PhD on singleness; an invitation to write a biblical theology on singleness. Pastor Barry finally stopped looking, realising that God's plans are not always our plans.

A basic question now needed an answer: why does singleness seem something 'good' in the New Testament but something 'not good' in the Old Testament? Is the difference that God broke into history as an incarnate human being to die and save us from our sins – as a single man? If our culture idolises the need to be in a fulfilling intimate relationship, does our church fall prey to a similar tendency that holds us as incomplete if not married? We must understand what the whole Bible has to say about marriage and singleness, beginning with Genesis 1:28, God blessing the world through offspring by reproducing His image in human beings. Offspring as God's blessing continues: the woman's offspring in Jesus Christ will defeat Satan and his offspring, Gen 3:15. Abraham is promised a vast offspring yet Sarah is barren; Isaac is the divinely provided offspring. Jacob (renamed Israel) had 12 sons whose offspring multiply in Egypt until God calls them to be His chosen people, Deut. 7:12-14. God promises to bless Israel with many physical offspring – children, herds, harvests of grapes and grain - if Israel obeys God's law.

But Israel failed in its own strength, even though God gave them everything. During and after the failure, prophets spoke of God doing a new work in a new kind of divinely begotten Offspring, Jesus Christ. Through Isaiah, God speaks of a **Holy Offspring** emerging from the stump of their destruction, Isa. 6; a virgin conceiving and giving birth to a Son, Isa. 7; that unto us a child is born, Isa. 9; and 'a shoot coming up from the stump of Jesse, a branch bearing fruit, Isa. 11. This Offspring blesses not by might and power but by being a Suffering Servant, a man without generation or children, Isa. 53:10 ESV. Yet He will see the spiritual offspring emerging as the result of his atoning sacrifice: a new people of God, those **spiritually born again** in Christ. The figure of the barren woman celebrates His work; a single woman whose only husband is the Lord, her disgrace reversed and shame forgotten, for in Christ she is a fully blessed, Isa. 54:1-5 ESV.

The barren woman is not just a female figure: Paul also identifies with her, Gal. 4:19, 1 Thess. 2:7. It was as much an issue for males as for females to be unmarried and childless. Males needed sons to remember and carry on their name. Children were a defense in crises: to care for you, manage the estate, and bury you when you died. In the days when kings passed leadership to the sons, trusted men who served the king were made eunuchs: they could not have children and thereby were no a threat to the dynasty. Having no sons, the eunuchs were entirely dependent on the king and his sons for protection. It is nearly certain that Nehemiah and Daniel were eunuchs; Daniel proves consistently faithful to the Lord his King, not the earthly king. Isaiah now presents a restorative picture of the eunuch, Isa 56:3-5. Note that though the eunuch is "a dry tree", that is without children, God promises full access to His house and an everlasting name and legacy, fully restored and blessed as a man in his relationship with God.

Jesus uses the figure of the eunuch in his discussion on marriage to answer the Pharisees' question about the conditions for divorce. Jesus simply points back to creation, Matt. 19:6 NIV, and seems to surprise even the disciples, Matt. 19:10-12. **Three** aspects are surprising: **1)** that a Jewish rabbi aware of the principle signs of God's covenantal blessing and having just expressed a high view of marriage and sexuality, would agree that sometimes **it is better not to marry**; **2)** that the unmarried one is described as a eunuch and then gives three categories of eunuch. The third is likely not physical but a picture of anyone, male or female, willingly surrendering their rights of body and to children to pursue the kingdom of God. Whether directed by circumstance or choice, we are all dependent on God's provision and called to live in His sufficiency. God alone is worthy of our highest allegiance. **3)** God uses a special word for 'receive' in this passage – as in 'grasping a big idea'. Not all can, for but those do - sacrificing all: sex, marriage and children to pursue God's kingdom – then let them do it.

In the Old Testament, God's covenant promises came as tangible blessings. In the New Testament, Jesus offers us a New Covenant with new and different kinds of blessings. Paul describes these in Ephesians 1:3-12. All are blessed in Christ alone with every spiritual blessing; not with physical land and prosperity, but with an eternal inheritance sealed by the Holy Spirit, who is its guarantee until we receive it.

What is God teaching us today? **First**, in affirming the figure of the eunuch, nothing must ever replace the primacy of God, who supplies all our needs, Phil. 4:19. **Second**, the figure of the barren woman reminds us we are fully blessed and part of a new Spiritual family commissioned to produce spiritual offspring "born from above" through the Holy Spirit. Created in God's image, in Christ we experience the completion of who we were designed to be. We are not completed by marriage, but by our relationship with God through Christ, Col. 1:28. Scripture indicates an age with no need for human marriage when all God's children will experience the ultimate consummated marriage – God in communion with His children. It is not that marriage will end, but that the real marriage begins. The message in Love/By Design reminds us that we are not defined by whom we love, but by Who loves us.