

# Bridging the Great Divide

*By Jeremy Weese*

## Explaining the Divide: The truth about singleness and marriage

The danger in talking about singleness, dating and marriage is that it can unintentionally exalt marriage as the perfect state, and being single as being somehow less... perfect, less human.

It can sometimes make it seem that being single is like being in Peoria. It's where you are, and you make the best of it, but you are certainly looking for ways – any way – to leave. And the longer you are there, the more desperate you become...

*Editor's Note: Pacific Crossroads Church does not endorse this depiction of Peoria, Illinois. We love Peoria. We are looking to start a Hope for Peoria soon.*

That's why I love the way the Bible talks about marriage. God tells us that He loves marriage – He designed it, He created it, He made it for us. (Gen. 2:18-24) Marriage is a good thing. But all good things in our world can be twisted, can be distorted, can draw us away from God. So Paul, in a letter to his friends in Corinth, talks candidly about marriage (1 Cor. 7). He points out that often times your marriage will distract you from God – that your interests will be divided. The married person now has a priority, a call on their attention and their time that the unmarried person does not have. Paul actually promotes being single as the way he has chosen to devote his life to God.

Is it better to be married or single? Yes. Let's be as honest and nuanced about reality as the Bible is.

## Bridging the Divide: Why married people and single people need each other

While I have the floor, let me take this opportunity to say: STOP!!

Married people: stop spending time only with other couples or families.  
Single people: stop spending time only with other single people.

Let me give a theological reason, and then a practical one.

The theological reason: any time we allow a distinction to divide us, to

keep us from connecting our lives to other people in our community, we are missing the whole point of the gospel.

Paul, in Ephesians 1 sums up God's plan like this:

"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His love which He lavished on us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His purpose which He set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth." (Eph. 1:7-10)

We are one community, one people; with one God, one Lord, one faith, one name, one eternal inheritance in Christ.

It is not enough to acknowledge this with our lips and yet to live our lives disconnected from each other.

Stop dividing.

Married people, invite singles over to your messy house, to play with your rowdy kids. Single people, go over. It's a chance to eat real food, for goodness' sake. And then invite married people to go out on the town. Of course they will not be able to join you all the time. But keep inviting them.

*Editor's Note: The above paragraph is rife with vague generalizations and caricatures. Pacific Crossroads Church does not believe that all families have unkempt houses. We do not believe that all children are so unmannered. We do not endorse the view that single people don't eat real food.*

The promise and the picture of the gospel is that people who have nothing else in common, nothing else to unite them, are now brought together in the closest of unions. We are a family. Let's live like one.

Here's the practical reason: Single people need married people in their lives. When I was in seminary, I lived in an apartment building with 11 families and 1 singles apartment (mine). It was wonderful. I ate better. I never had to sit in my apartment alone if I didn't want to. But most helpful for me was getting to see real marriages played out in front of me. I saw couples that fought fairly. Couples that stayed together through tough situations. That loved their kids even though they weren't perfect. I began to believe that marriage is actually a good thing, something I had questioned for a very long time.

Conversely, married people need single people in their lives. Like Paul articulates in 1 Corinthians 7, husbands and wives can get caught up in each other and in their family. They forget what their marriage is really there for: to demonstrate God's love between the spouses AND His love out into the lives of other people. Marriage, like everything in the Christian life, is toward mission. Interacting with and caring for single friends reminds married couples that there is a world outside their front door; that there is a purpose to their lives beyond themselves and each other.

Single people need married people. Married people need single people. Without each other in our lives we will miss out; our community and our lives will be diminished.

## Crossing the Divide: Reflections on dating and the single life

Due to the graciousness of God's timing, the surprising acceptance of a wonderful woman, and a touch of sheer blind luck, I find myself on the verge of leaving the single life. There is fear – just a little; there is excitement – a whole lot; and there is hope. Hope that I myself can live by what I write, and live out what God has called me to.

But I wanted to take this opportunity to put into words what I've learned through the process.

*Editor's note: Pacific Crossroads Church takes no responsibility for the views that follow. We make no claims that following this advice will lead to marriage and/or bliss. Check with your doctor and your pastor before beginning any dating regimen.*

**1: There is no blueprint.** Every story of marriage, like the people who live in it, is different. You know this. Well, you say you do. But then you, like me, eagerly listen to other people's stories, hoping to grasp something, anything, that would help decipher the indecipherable; something to explain why things work out, and why they don't. Save yourself the angst. Enjoy others' stories, and realize that yours, whatever it may be, will be different.

**2: Dating is at best a mixed bag.** But it's the only bag we have. Unless you live in a different culture, or you really trust your parents, you have to go on a date or two if you want to be married. I promise. It's the only way. So men, ask women out. It's the single most effective way to get a date. Empirically proven. Women, say yes. It's a date, not a wedding ceremony. You don't have to say yes to every guy.

But say yes. We cannot let what we do not know about the future, and our fear of it, keep us from living.

**3: Stop trying to manage risk.** Life is risky. Love is risky. We can be so fearful, and let that fear shape us, and sabotage our relationships. What does fear played out in relationships look like?

It can be small and kind of ridiculous, like asking a girl out over text message because rejection hurts less in 100 characters or less.

Or it can look like two people spending a lot of time together, who to outsiders are obviously interested, yet they are hesitant. They are so intent on making sure the other person is interested, so they spend hours, with friends or by themselves, in relentless analysis of the other's words, and inflection, and actions, when it could all be answered with an honest and risky question.

Or it can be one person so trapped by their fear of the unknown future, and so desirous of certainty, that they want to know for sure that it is meant to be – that it will work out. As a result the relationship gets stuck in a paralyzed state. They are too scared to move forward, come too far to move backwards, and are too connected to break it apart.

When we move toward marriage we are not making a prophecy: "I am sure this is right. I know beyond doubt it will work out." Rather, we are making a promise: "I am in this. Come what may, we will work it out."

Do not be afraid. Jesus, who died, lives again. What do we ever have to fear?

**4: Embrace your finiteness.** You don't know everything. You don't even know everything you want. You certainly don't know everything you need. So that list you have, the one with the characteristics of your perfect mate? Yeah, that one. Throw it out. Stop sizing up people you meet based on it. It is a flawed list made by an imperfect person who is still growing and maturing. It does not merit the force of law. So stop giving it that. Be ready to be surprised by how different your expectations will be from the reality.

**5: Men, be courageously honest.** You can save yourself a lot of questions, and the women you date a lot of angst, if you care for them well. The simplest way is to be honest. If you are interested, tell her you are interested. Stop trying to decipher the signals that she isn't sending. Just tell her you are interested, ask her out, and let her

respond.

You can give her the gift of never having to wonder where you are in the process; give her the freedom to respond to what is real and true, not what she thinks you might possibly be thinking.

It is risky. It is putting yourself out there, on the line for her. But if you can't do that now when the stakes are low, what makes you think you'll be ready to put yourself on the line for her when the stakes are so much higher? God calls husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:25), to give up their lives for them. You don't get to that kind of love by accident; it is a series of small, self-sacrificial choices. Start early.

**6: Give up on marriage.** Give up on marriage being the thing that finally makes you feel loved and accepted. Give up on your future spouse being the person who will finally fulfill your deepest longings. Give up on marriage being the goal of your life. Because those expectations will cripple you as you pursue marriage; and they will destroy the person who chooses to marry you. Your future spouse will not be enough. Marriage isn't enough. Marriage is not the goal. It is a means. God's goal is the restoration and renewal of all things. God's goal for you is transforming you from one degree of glory into another. God is remaking you into the image of Christ. And marriage is one way He does that. It is not the only way. It is not even a sufficient way.

The sooner we release our marriage and our spouse from the burden of those expectations, the sooner our marriage will be and do what it was meant to be and do: be a picture of what happens when God enters life, a picture of people living together with self-sacrificing and self-effacing love, and that marriage relationship becoming a fountain of life that pours out into every life it touches.

And the sooner we give up on marriage as our ultimate hope, we can embrace the one who is our ultimate hope. We can be certain, whether we end up married or not, that the God who is making all things new is at work even now in the middle of our lives, shaping for us and in us an eternal weight of glory that defies all comparison.