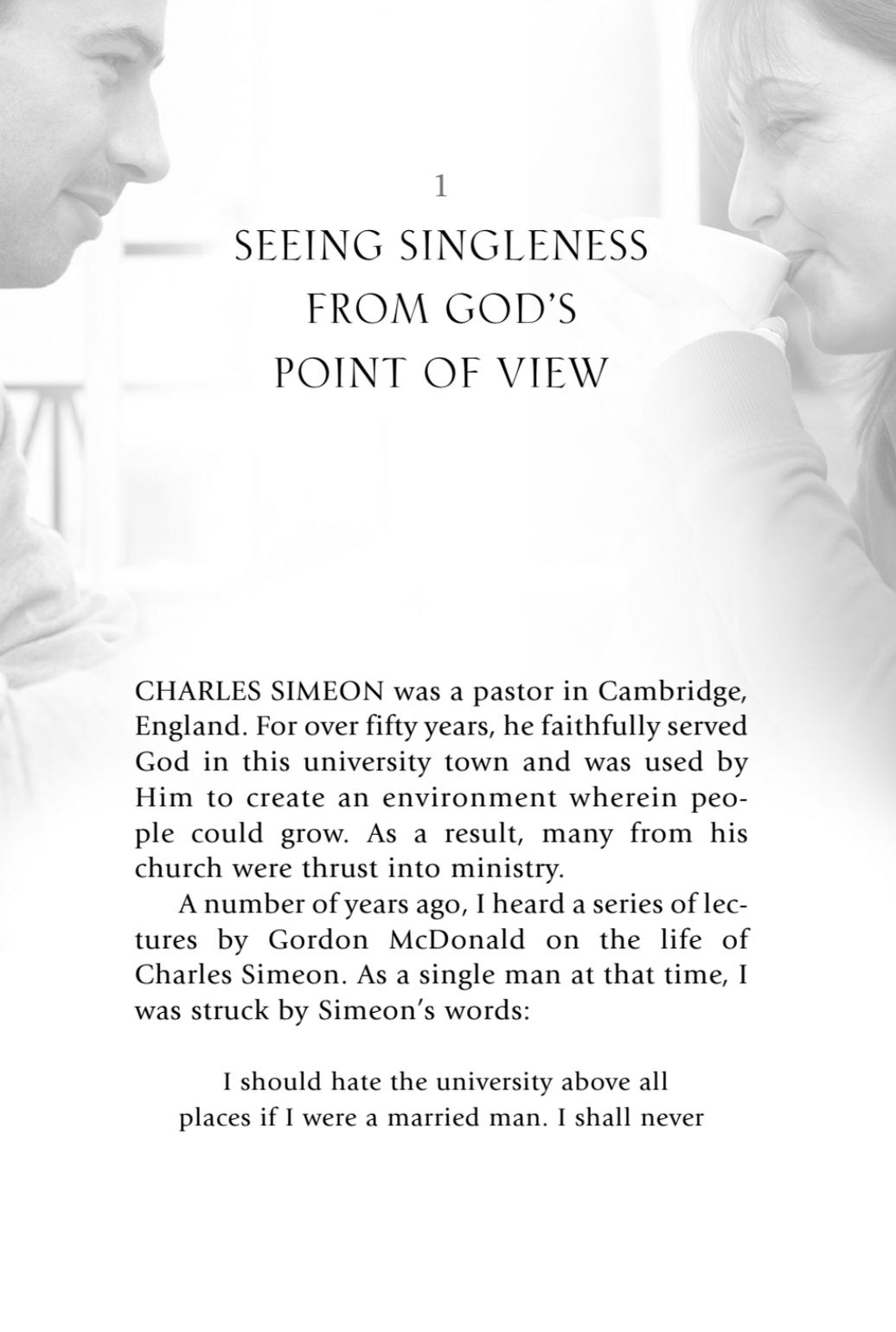


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SEEING SINGLENESSE
FROM GOD'S
POINT OF VIEW

CHARLES SIMEON was a pastor in Cambridge, England. For over fifty years, he faithfully served God in this university town and was used by Him to create an environment wherein people could grow. As a result, many from his church were thrust into ministry.

A number of years ago, I heard a series of lectures by Gordon McDonald on the life of Charles Simeon. As a single man at that time, I was struck by Simeon's words:

I should hate the university above all places if I were a married man. I shall never

marry. In my present state, I am quite a rich man and almost as free from care as an angel. Had I married, I would have had to resign my fellowship and with it my usefulness. I have never felt it a great sacrifice but have appreciated the opportunity to invest in men.

While I did greatly benefit from my own longer season of singleness, I could never fully identify with Simeon's words. Yet they were helpful along with the examples of other godly single men and women who were clearly taking advantage of the practical benefits of their single status.

First Corinthians 7 is a special chapter of Scripture. If it were the only portion of Scripture we considered in relation to marriage, we might come to some wrong conclusions. On the other hand, if we ignore its contribution, we will clearly miss an important part of God's message on this subject.

On three occasions in 1 Corinthians 7 the goodness of singleness is affirmed (verses 1, 8, 26). This is the balancing truth to the general principle that it is "not good" for man to be alone—and thus, the provision of marriage (Genesis 2:18). God, therefore, sees the single state as one of special opportunity because a person's life can be less encumbered with the

responsibility of pleasing his or her mate (1 Corinthians 7:32–34) and in this sense more available to the Lord.

A married person cannot function as if he were single. He cannot or at least should not ignore his family responsibilities in order to be available to everybody who needs to be visited or counseled. In this way a person who has no spouse or children can play a more involved role in the life of the church.

The teaching of 1 Corinthians 7 is needed in order to give balance to the subject of marriage. Usually people do not need to be exhorted about the benefits of marriage. This is somewhat innate to the way God has made every person. Making the most of one's time of singleness is the best preparation for marriage in the will of God. Even 1 Corinthians 7 is not attempting to restrain a person from marriage but rather to promote the opportunity in singleness to devote oneself to the Lord (1 Corinthians 7:35).

While I was going through graduate school to prepare for ministry, it was obvious to me that God did not want me to pursue marriage. In my first week of graduate school, my attention was drawn to Proverbs 24:27, which we will look deeper at in chapter 3. While I was resting in the truth that I was now in a preparatory time that allowed my singleness to be an advantage,

I continuously needed this conviction reinforced. The joys and privileges of marriage were obvious, and I was also being reminded that ministries often prefer their positions to be filled with married men. I had to “fight” to rest in the benefits of my present state.

I devoted a day to studying 1 Corinthians 7 in order to realize afresh the advantage of my singleness. After a time of study I took a walk and was praying through portions of this chapter. I quoted 1 Corinthians 7:32–35:

But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and his interests are divided. The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband. This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is seemly and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord.

As I was walking down Swiss Avenue in Dallas and quoting these verses, I looked up at the beautiful sky and pondered the awesome privi-

lege of being able to enjoy undistracted devotion to the Lord who created the universe. This gift is given to all for a period of time and to some for a lifetime.

I later returned to my dorm room and discovered a note from a young lady whom I had noticed that summer. She was asking if I would be willing to take her to the airport. Her godliness and beauty had caught my eye, and I was willing! Momentarily, my meditation of 1 Corinthians 7 was forgotten.

That evening I was a little restless, so I got up to seek the Lord. I had been studying Proverbs and was on chapter 5 of this book of wisdom. I was struck by Proverbs 5:18, which encourages the married man to "rejoice in the wife of [his] youth." I made no connection of this verse to the lovely girl that I would take to the airport the next morning, and after that I would never have any further contact with her. I did, however, make a connection with it to my meditation of 1 Corinthians 7, which led me into a time of worship.

I worshipped God for His beautiful plan. He says that singleness is good and has many spiritual advantages. To affirm the goodness and advantage of singleness is not to deprecate marriage. He also says that marriage is good, and when God gives it, it is to be enjoyed to its fullness.

BELIEVING GOD FOR HIS BEST

To affirm the goodness of marriage is not to belittle the exalted state of singleness. I worshipped God that whatever His will was for me in this matter—to be single or married—it was good, acceptable, and perfect (Romans 12:2).