

HOW CAN THE CHURCH SUPPORT SINGLE PEOPLE SEEKING TO LIVE GODLY LIFE?

It's all very well to say with St Paul that singleness is 'better' than marriage (see previous article). But, just like marriage, singleness is a challenging calling, especially for those who believe that singleness entails sexual abstinence. We can live a fulfilled life without sex, but very few people can live without intimacy – not everyone is called to be a hermit! Jesus himself needed friends with whom to share his life. And, just like marriage, singleness requires careful preparation and ongoing investment in order to ensure that it is a life of intimacy and deep relationships. We all instinctively recognise that a healthy marriage doesn't just happen. Similarly, a healthy and fulfilling life as a single person does not just happen.

Here are just a few suggestions how churches can support single people to live a healthy and fulfilling life.

1. Be a place of healthy, appropriate physical touch and affection between friends and in church (in one survey, twice as many single people identified lack of touch as one of the hardest things about being single rather than lack of sex).
2. Consider living together in intentional communities (which may include couples as well as single people).
3. Teach biblically on the value of singleness, as well as practically on how to live a fulfilling and godly single life, and providing space for discussion of how this can be done well in your context.
4. Don't use language that makes it sound as if singleness is second best (e.g. 'Are you still single?' or offering platitudes such as 'It's not too late' which send the signal that the person is waiting for something else to happen, as opposed to enjoying life and serving God right now).
5. Don't assume that single people have lots more free time to serve in church or less stressful lives than married people.
6. Teach about good friendships and not just about sex and romantic relationships – everyone needs friendship, not just single people.
7. Intentionally ensure that staff and leadership teams (or equivalents) contain a mixture of married and single people, and never speak in terms which assume that leaders need to be part of a couple.
8. Encourage couples (especially those with children) to visit single people at home rather than expecting single people to come to them.

This article draws on suggestions made by Kate Wharton in her book *Single Minded: Being Single, Whole and Living Life to the Full* (Monarch, 2013). Find it with Bookfinder.com, around £10:

<http://goo.gl/LyL0mB>

RESOURCES:

Some recommended pieces from Spiritual Friendship:

[Surprised by Celibacy](#), Julie Rodgers

[When Singleness Isn't Loneliness](#), Julie Rodgers