

Singles Serving the Lord Without Distraction - Part 1

by Bob Hoekstra

Singles can serve the Lord without distraction by seeking God for an undivided heart and receiving a new heart and spirit through regeneration and daily transformation.

Duration: 49:27

Scripture: Genesis 2:18, Psalm 118:8-9, Ezekiel 36:26-27, John 3:3, 1 Corinthians 7:35, Colossians 2:9-10

Topics: "Singles Ministry", "Spiritual Wholeness"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of serving the Lord without distraction, focusing on seeking an undivided heart and finding completeness in Christ. It delves into the significance of being born again by the Spirit, trusting in the Lord rather than people, and understanding that personal wholeness is ultimately found in Christ alone.

Transcript

Well, let's pray together, shall we? Lord, what a blessing already to worship you, to fellowship together in you, to have the great blessing of your presence, not only in our midst, but even more personally right in our hearts and lives. And we're so thankful, we're so grateful, and we're glad to be here, Lord. We thank you for this time, this place, and we thank you for the vision and sacrifice and diligence that has provided such a place for us.

And we do not take it for granted, we do not presume upon it, we receive it with thanksgiving, Lord. And we pray that you'd work now as we open up the work in our hearts. Lord, this great salvation, this great biblical faith is about you working deep in the heart of men and women.

And Lord, this is what we come seeking. We're not just looking for information, though you give us great information. We're not just wanting our minds exercised, though you want us to learn to think with you.

Lord, we are yearning for a deep work of your Holy Spirit through the light and truth and power of your word, deep down in the core of our being. Nothing else will suffice, and you want nothing less. So Lord, we call upon your name, we open up our hearts, we ask you to open the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing of light and life by your spirit that we couldn't even contain, that it would just flood our hearts and minds and overflow our lives, we pray, Lord, in Jesus' name.

Amen. Our subject for the day, Singles Serving the Lord Without Distraction. It could be titled Serving the Lord Without Distraction, because these truths pertain whatever our individual status.

Yet at the same time, most of the saints gathered here at this time are not married, are single, and the word of God has an amazing statement directed to those who are not married, from which our title, study title, came. In 1 Corinthians chapter 7, where the Apostle Paul was talking about married life and single life, he was comparing the challenges and advantages of married and or single life. He made this statement by the guidance of the Holy Spirit at the end of 1 Corinthians 7.35, which is directed to the single state in life, and here's the phrase, addressed to those who are not married, that you may serve the Lord without distraction.

By the grace of the Lord and the guidance of the Spirit, that's what we're going to study today. That phrase at the end of 1 Corinthians 7.35, that you may serve the Lord without distraction. Now, the God-appointed time of singleness in our lives is really revealed here.

It's for the God-ordained purpose of securing and establishing a relationship with the Lord that is characterized by undistracted devotion and service. For the majority of people, for the majority of their lives, God has ordained marriage as the plan. But it's not exclusively so.

Some he's called to a single life. Everyone he's called to a single life for a season. You know, you're not born married.

And however long from birth that you got married, pretty soon along the way, it seems like it wasn't quite enough time to get ready. And then God has other seasons of being single. Some after marriage, if they lost a mate, went home to the Lord or something.

But in this very chapter, 1 Corinthians 7, we're reminded that marriage in itself can be a distraction from our relationship with the Lord. Marriage is a gift of God for most people for most of their lives. Some people, God's ordained to never be married.

They have a spiritual gift for that calling. And God builds in special advantages for them. And with what might seem to some a missing ingredient, the Lord adds just special grace and the bond with him is the partnership that is comprehensively strategic in such a life.

But when a person is single, whether it's a young person anticipating marriage, or an older person with perhaps either a calling to single life ministry, or an extended season before or after marriage along the way, when a person is single, here's what the Lord wants to be aiming at in and through our lives above all. Establishing an undistracted relationship with him and service of him. Undistracted devotion and service to the Lord.

And it's not just a particular marital status either that dictates this issue. In Ezekiel 36, we're reminded that seeking God with an undivided heart, you might also say an undistracted heart, they're somewhat synonymous terms, is strategic for all. And that's what God wants to do in the lives of all his people and then call those who are not his people into that great reality.

Seeking God with an undivided and undistracted heart. Ezekiel 36, 26, and 27. God is speaking, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you.

I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh, not a carnal heart, but contrasted with stone. Not a heart of stone, hard and resistant, but a heart of flesh, soft and pliable and responsive to God. Verse 27, I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and you will keep my judgments and do them.

Here God promises a new heart. These are actually words related to the new covenant promised to Israel, not like the old covenant of law, Jeremiah 31, 31 and following, but a new covenant. The covenant Jesus said that we're to remember every time we take the Lord's Supper.

This cup is the new covenant, the new arrangement for life with the Lord. Not the old covenant of law, perfect standards of infinite holiness by which we're measured. And some thought, okay, you just do your best at that and you make it home to glory.

No, you try your best before that and find out how miserably you fail and you throw yourself upon the mercy and grace of God. A new covenant of grace and what does that involve? A new heart. Verse 26, a new heart, you know, the core of our being, new desires, new motivations, new reasons to live, new resources to draw upon.

God says, I'll give you a new heart. I'll give it to you. A gift from God.

Have we noticed in the scriptures? Have we taken seriously the picture of the kingdom of heaven is built by the work of God giving to us? Oh, it's a pleasure, a joy, a privilege, an honor to give to God, but we have nothing to give him but that which he has already imparted to us. What do we bring? Just an empty vessel, busted, broken, guilty, stained? And we say, Lord, help. And he starts to go to work.

And then out of what he works in us, we can offer up service and worship unto him. But a new heart, God promises. Great time to be developing that new heart in a single life.

People who are married need to do the same thing. But as challenging as a single life is, you just add some more dimensions when there's marriage, there are other responsibilities, you know, things to take care of, a mate, eventually probably children. I never mowed a yard before I was married.

Never had a yard. What a great time to seek God for the working of a new heart and the working in that new heart where there are less distractions. A new heart also I will give you.

And a new spirit will I put within you. A new spirit. Really, it's a new life.

It's a regenerated spirit, a revived spirit that was dead in trespasses and sins. And a new spirit, God says, I will put within you. I will put within you.

Life with God. Boy, that's so typical of the way God works. Life with God.

It's not like the religions of the world, which is some effort, some producing, preparing, achieving, performing to try and merit and deserve the favor of God, a relationship with God, a place in God's family, a place in heaven above someday. And so often people realizing their shortcoming, their failure, so typically they fall into externalism. You know, I'm not doing too good, but don't want anyone else to know, so I'll put on the Moses shine cologne or something, you know, and somehow look, you know, very, very spiritual.

No, this is the way it happens. A new spirit I will put within you. God at work in the heart of man.

There's nothing like it in all of creation. No religious approach will ever substitute for this. A new spirit I will put within you, a work of God deep within us, and I will take away the stony heart.

Again, we're talking about God at work. I will take away the stony heart, the hard, resistant, rebellious, natural heart of those who have only life that Adam could give, and they're in Adam and need to be found in Christ Jesus. God says, I'll take away the stony heart, that unresponsive heart that cannot please God, cannot fellowship with God, does not walk with God.

I'll take that out of you, and I will give you a heart of flesh, a soft heart. And again, it's a gift. I will give you.

Not here's something you have to produce, not here's something you might deserve if you're really, really good. I will give you. It's a gift of His glorious grace.

A cooperating heart, a pliable heart, a heart that says, Lord, shape me into what you want me to be, and Lord, would you do it from the inside out, the inside out. The religions of man are just externalism, things pasted on or tied on by appearances, by activity, by garb, uniforms, robes, hats, scepters, you name it. External things.

This is about God at work. He says, I will put my spirit within you. The Holy Spirit of God residing in the revived, regenerated spirit of man.

Oh, this is phenomenal. Now, now we've got a whole different possibility, a whole different life can now develop. I'll put my spirit within you, God's Holy Spirit dwelling within us, working in and through us.

And notice the next great statement there. I'll put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes. Result, and you will keep my judgments and do them.

Oh, the natural humanistic religious striving after the flesh to try to live up to the infinitely perfect standards of God. What a frustration that is. What a defeat that is.

And you can only carry on the act so long, you know, and then you kind of start to get thoughts like, you know, it's probably showing that I'm not doing this all that well. Hey, come to think of it, maybe somebody else is struggling. And then as the years go by, you find out everyone's in agony over that path.

Everyone's looking for a greater way, a higher way, a way of life that will work. This is it. I'll give you a new heart.

I'll put a new spirit within you. I'll take the heart of stone out of you, give you a soft, pliable heart. And in that new life, I'll put my spirit to reside.

And my Holy Spirit will cause you to walk in my statutes. Result, you will begin doing those things you were trying so hard to perform in and failed so consistently and so miserably. What a plan.

This is part of seeking God with an undivided, undistracted heart. Him giving us a new heart, then dwelling at the core of our being, being the dynamic, motivating force to cause us to walk in his will and his way. God stirring us.

God enabling us from within to walk increasingly obediently in his paths. You might say, wow, this sounds great. Why is it that maybe I'm not living like that or that I have other Christian friends or loved ones who aren't living like that? Well, the answer is not on the Godward side.

It's on the manward side. This is available to all of us. Have we noticed it in the word? Have we responded to this? How do you respond to this? Try harder, do better? No, no, no.

No, actually, there's a way to live better and better. If it hinges on God, if he's the dynamic motivation, where do you think that leaves us? Hopefully, humbly, persistently, consistently seeking after God to do this. You may think, wow, that was less complicated than I thought it would be, you know.

Yeah, legalism is complicated. You better have at least somewhere between 101 and 1,001 things on your mind. The very minimum, don't go below 10.

They're all commandments. But to see all of that swept up in, hey, God wants to be the dynamic behind the development of that kind of a life. Hey, these commandments are about holiness.

Wait a minute, God is holy. Oh my goodness, the Holy Spirit's there dwelling as the dynamic, and he's the holy spirit. Hey, this all fits together.

We have reason to expect, anticipate, seek, and be assured we will find such a walk as this. God wants to give. What does man then do? Oh, be seeking that giving work of God, willing to receive it, willing to humbly cry out, Lord, nothing short of this could ever develop in me more and more life that pleases you and honors you.

Seeking God for an undivided, undistracted heart. Psalm 86, very similar. Psalm 86, verse 11.

Teach me your way, O Lord. It's a prayer. Then it has this confident confession based on the Lord answering the prayer.

Teach me your way, O Lord, I will walk in your truth. Or you could imply, and I will walk in your truth. Unite my heart to fear your name.

It's a prayer. Teach me your way, O Lord. Teach me how it works to live with you.

Then I have this confident expectation that I'll actually walk, you know, have a life developing that is in your truth and demonstrates your truth. And at the core of all this, we're back to the heart. Unite my heart to fear your name.

Fear, not terror and dread, not fright and apprehension. This is our Heavenly Father speaking to us. But fear in the sense of humble reverence, a meek heart that wants to honor God and please God, and only has this great apprehension that I might dishonor and displease Him.

Lord, unite my heart to fear your name. Unite my heart. Bring every aspect of my inner desires, my motivations, into one single, undistracted direction.

What's that? That I might fear your name. That I might reverence your name. That I might honor your name, respect your name, and live a life that demonstrates that.

Some of the modern translations translate unite my heart to fear your name as give me an undivided heart. I think that's a good translation. And that theme is found elsewhere in scripture as well.

Give me an undivided heart. You know, a heart that isn't split off with conflictive motivations or allegiances or interests or perspectives or habits. Give me an undivided heart.

You know, it's so right to seek the Lord for an undivided heart. It's according to His will. You know, and we have these sayings, get to the heart of the matter.

We need to get to the heart of the matter. Well, the heart of the matter is the heart. That's why we use that term, you know.

You haven't even seriously engaged the Lord on what He wants if we're not talking to Him about heart issues. The real life with God takes place out of sight of everyone but God Himself. And if it's developing there, then it will eventually be seen by anyone and everyone who hangs around with us very much.

Life with God is not a religious cloak or paste on or add on. You know, it goes to the core of our being. And God is so good in the scriptures.

Notice how often the heart is referred to. And God wants to touch the heart. And you say, oh, boy, did you want to encourage me or what? You don't know my heart.

Yeah, I don't. I don't even know my own heart. But I know who knows your heart and mine.

And He's the very one who can change it into what He wants it to be. Oh, to seek God for an undivided heart and then seek to serve Him with an undivided heart. Now, certainly, this requires, first of all, obtaining this new life from the Lord, this new birth.

No doubt, most of us studying the Word at this moment together have this new life. But there might be someone who doesn't. And if all of us do, it's always good to review what's actually happened to us that has begun to change everything.

It's good for us. And it's a good reminder of what others need to hear from us if they don't have this new life. So these things cannot happen without a new start, a new life from God.

Really, Ezekiel 36, verse 26, is about regeneration. And then verse 27 is about daily transformation and sanctification. In fact, passages like Ezekiel 6 is why Nicodemus in John 3 should have known about new birth.

He came to Jesus, you know, and questioning Him. Really, Jesus knew just exactly what He's after. He wanted to know what is the way of salvation.

It's kind of hard for the teacher of Israel, which Jesus called Him, the teacher of Israel, like the number one Bible expert in Judaism at that time. You're the teacher of Israel, and you don't know these things? And, you know, He's maybe thinking, how would I know these things? Well, did you ever read Ezekiel, for example? And Jeremiah? And the Psalms? And on and on it goes, a new life, a new heart. Of course, in John chapter 3, verse 3, Jesus answered and said to him, to Nicodemus, Most assuredly, I say unto you, except the man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

And in verse 6, that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. The kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, that realm, that domain where God rules and hearts bow to Him as Lord and King, the only way you can see that kingdom is to be born again. And again, don't ever get confused on the religious jargon of the world, you know, yeah, well, I'm into Christ and His kingdom, I'm just not one of those born-again people.

Well, if you're not a born-again person, you've not yet seen the kingdom of heaven. The only way to enter it is by birth. Well, no, I didn't go that far, I just signed up at church, you know.

No, I say unto you, except the man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Why is it like that? Because that which is born of the flesh is flesh. It can't ever be changed, it has to be displaced.

You can't promise the flesh into spiritual revival and revolution. You can't educate it, you can't coax it, you can't bribe it. It must be displaced by a new life.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh. Anything birthed by natural human resource can only be just more natural human resource. That which is born of the spirit is spirit.

The kingdom of heaven is spiritual, God is spirit. Those that worship him must worship in spirit and in truth. To enter a spiritual kingdom, you have to have a spiritual birth.

And of course, John chapter 1 is one of the great corollaries to John chapter 3. John 1 verses 12 and 13, but as many as received him, to them he gave right to become the children of God. See, the kingdom of heaven is a family. It's not a religious empire, it's a spiritual family.

God is the heavenly father, we're his children, we have to be begotten of God. That happens by receiving the Lord Jesus Christ, bowing down to him as Lord and Savior. That gives us the right to thereafter be called to become the children of God.

It's for those who believe in his name, who believe in that name. Jesus, Jesus, Yeshua, Jesus, the promised Messiah, the savior of the world, the anointed king of the everlasting kingdom, receiving him the giver of life. Those are the ones who are born not of blood.

You can't get in to the kingdom of heaven by bloodline. Some of us have been blessed with spiritual testimony and heritage in our bloodline, some not. Well, we all have to start the same way, whether or not we have that heritage.

God blessed me with a wonderful father, loved the Lord, knew the Lord. When I was born, he was a young pastor with a heart for inmates, because an ex-inmate had led him to the Lord. And he was a teenager, and his friend was a teenager, and they immediately just submitted their lives to the Lord for lifelong vocational Christian service, if the Lord wanted that.

And for 60-some years, my father pastored. He had such a love for inmates that they eventually nicknamed him Chaplain Ray. He was never a, quote, official office holder in chaplaincy.

But of course, those things don't matter to God. It's a hard issue. They called him Chaplain Ray.

In fact, one year they gave him Chaplain of the Year Award, and I thought, well, is God humorous? He's not ever been a chaplain, you know. That's great. So you can't ride in on natural descent, born not of blood.

Can't get in that way. You might be blessed to have that heritage. I thank God for that heritage, though it's kind of humiliating to my own flesh that I watched that phenomenal witness of God right in our household for 25 years before I gave my heart to the Lord.

Of course, the Lord had some contributing developments that were of crisis nature to help me along that way, you know. You know how you can break down your heart, and all of a sudden you look up, and your great plan is to be the captain of your own salvation, you know, have just come to disaster and destruction. That was me.

Born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh. You can't get in the kingdom of heaven just by human resolve. I'm going to do better.

I'm going to be pleasing to God. I'm going to be a spiritual person. I'm telling you.

I promise you. Oh, how we like to make promises to God. Our promises to God do not change things.

His promises to us can change everything, everything, if we will but humbly believe them, stake our entire time and eternity upon His faithfulness and ability to fulfill them. Can't get in by the will of the flesh, nor the will of man. You can't go to another human being.

You can't go to the priest. You can't go to the pope. You can't go to the pastor and say, would you make a way for me in the kingdom of heaven? Only God can grant this to us.

Born again starts there. And by the way, if you have to be born again of the Spirit, you see the implication there from Ezekiel 36 verse 27? If you have to be born into this by the Spirit, how do you think you have to live day by day and walk in this? By the Spirit. By the Spirit.

Galatians 3.3, are we so foolish having begun by the Spirit? Are we now going to be made perfect by the flesh? Are we that foolish? Well, sure, we've all been that foolish at times, but we do not need to remain there. Scriptures like this can renew our minds and move us on, turn it around. All right, a call in the Word to a single person to serve the Lord without distraction.

A call to them and every other Christian to be seeking God for an undivided heart, serving Him with an undistracted heart. How about this issue of dating and seeking a mate? You think that could ever be a distraction? Sure it could. I was reading in the Psalms one day, and kind of a humorous way the Lord laid this on my heart, Psalm 118 verses 8 and 9. Psalm 118 verses 8 and 9. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man.

Boy, that's a great revelation. Wow. Of course, the most typical way that we put confidence in a man, that is a human being, is ourselves, you know.

In many cultures, in many eras, one of the great philosophies of man is self-confidence, you know. Oh, what people will do to try to get self-confidence, how they will exhort to help another person. You just got to learn to believe in yourself.

Listen, it is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. If your reasons to put confidence in yourself have not been shaken often, you haven't lived very long. And if you think there's still hope in that direction, you haven't been paying close attention to the Bible.

It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes, you know, those who have advanced or have a lofty position among humanity. Psalm 146 verse 3, Do not put your trust in princes.

I was thinking one day of this very context of being single and the distractions that develop, and this thought came, do not put your trust in princes, even Prince Charming. Don't trust him. Entrust him to God, but don't trust him.

You might say, well, your wife probably looks good, Prince Charming. You know, she loves me very much, but she's a wise woman, and in our 40 plus years of marriage, she early on learned from the Word and had it demonstrated in life. Don't put your hope in Bob.

Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man in whom there is no help. You know, in the marital situation, in thinking about members of the opposite sex, and relating to them, and we're thinking maybe of spending some time with them, or hanging out with them, or going out with them, or as the world would say, I say the world because this is not a biblical term actually, dating them, or just the general hidden nurtured yearning to search out a mate. If we're in that situation, and our hopes are placed in a person to be our hope or fulfillment in life, we're being distracted from serving the Lord with an undivided heart.

It doesn't mean if we know a believing member of the opposite sex, and sense something stirring there, it doesn't mean that God is not possibly at work. You know, sometimes it's just our hormones or something, or it's our imagination or something, or it's our fantasy or something at work. It doesn't mean that God can't be at work.

He does work in us, both to will and to do of His good pleasure, and when He's drawing someone toward marriage, and another person toward marriage, and then drawing them toward each other, stirrings can come from God in the heart. But if we're just, you know, wanting to put our hope in man, if we're thinking that, oh, if I were just married, my problems would be resolved. That's right, it's time to laugh.

That's not the way it works. In the Word of God, it's not described that way, and many have found out by experience or observation, it doesn't work that way in life. God must be our hope, and if God does have for any of us at a given time marriage, let it be after the prototype.

Remember the prototype, the first marriage of all, Genesis 2? Oh, if the Christian community, the believing household of saints, would let the prototype of the first marriage ever be the pattern, how many heartaches and agonies and gigantic mistakes even we would be spared from. Genesis 2.18, and the Lord God said, it is not good that man should be alone. I will make him a helper comparable to him.

God didn't assign Adam to resolve this problem. And if you live a lifetime and you're not called to a single life and calling on God for the resources that enable a single life, you'll find out it's not good to be alone. If you're called to be alone and are seeking God for what it takes to sustain one in that very one-on-one life with God, you'll be blessed if God's calling you, you'll be cursed if you take it over yourself.

I will make a helper comparable to him. And look, verse 21, and the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept, and he took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man, he brought, he made into a woman, and he brought her to the man.

And Adam said, this is what I was thinking about. This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. Here we see God in charge of bringing Adam and Eve together.

God in charge of it. And he is still capable of doing the same today for all who let him take charge of that process. And one last big thought before we take a break and then pick up right here, and that's this.

Personal wholeness and completeness is not found in people. Now, people who find their wholeness and completeness in Christ can be a great blessing to other people. But it's not found in people, is it? Colossians 2, 9 and 10.

For in him, in Christ, dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily and you, that's you believer, you who are in Christ, you are complete in him. Single Christians are complete in Christ. Married Christians must know their completeness is in Christ, not in another person.

How many relationships are just devastated or decimated because one person puts the other person in a place that only God should hold? Well, if we put our hopes in people, our hopes are going to be shattered eventually. And if we think our full development as a child of God is going to be found in another person, we're going to eventually be disillusioned. Oh, God can use other people in our lives.

He can use us in other people's lives. But what he uses is what has been found in Christ and worked in their heart. In him, in Christ, dwells all the fullness.

All that the Godhead in heaven above has for man to know and enjoy on earth below, all of that is found in Christ. For in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And you, believer, Christian, are complete, are complete, not can be complete, might be complete, but right now are complete, a present ongoing reality in the sight of God, are complete in him, already whole in him, not in ourselves.

You know, you read words like, and you are complete in him, you think, not me. Well, wait a minute, let's not argue with God. You are complete in him.

But the key phrase there is what? In him, exactly, in him, not in us, not in our flesh, not in just our humanity, but in him. See, the fullness dwells in him. We are in him.

And when we're drawing on him for daily living, we're drawing on a whole, complete life, a godly life, a Christ-like life. We're already whole and complete in him due to his fullness and our access to that. So our need is to seek after Christ with that undivided heart, to learn of him and all that he wants us to walk in and live for and live by, all that is ours to draw upon in Christ.

And what is the temptation? What is the clamoring noise and invitation around us to become distracted by getting into myself, my interests, my plans, my personal development, and my resources? All of those things are different categories of the flesh. There is not a whole life there to draw on or to build up. Personal wholeness and completeness is found in Christ.

Lord, we pray that you would be enlightening our hearts and minds on these very matters, making us receptive and responsive to them, and that you would work these things in and through us, Lord, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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