



# **The Truth About Singleness**

**A Two-Part Seminar**

**Prepared for the Return**

## How to use this resource

This resource has been designed as a do-it-yourself seminar to help Christian women learn what the Bible teaches about singleness and to discuss it together. Here are some tips on how to use it:

- Session One and Session Two are designed to be studied separately. Each session should take between 1 and 1.5 hours.
- These sessions are designed for both single and married women. As one family in Christ we should learn about each others' situations and think how to encourage each other in these situations. Married people need to have a biblical view on singleness, just as single people need to have a biblical view on marriage.
- Each session includes text to read and questions to discuss together. Encourage participants to read through the text before coming to the session, and to start thinking about the discussion questions.
- When you meet you may wish to read the text out together, or if everyone has prepared well you could go straight to the discussion questions.
- Pointers to aid the discussion questions are provided at the end of the material (page 25).
- Session One uses a diagram to illustrate the place of marriage and singleness in the Bible story; the full diagram can be found on page 14.
- This is the English version of a Chinese resource - hence application of the Bible is directed into a Chinese context.
- Bible quotations use the English Standard Version (ESV).

## Session One: Knowing the Truth

### The World's Views on Singleness

Singleness is a subject that everyone has an opinion on! Our opinions have often been shaped by our society, our life experiences, our family's expectations, or the example of other Christians. People have lots of different ideas and feelings about singleness. We will start by exploring some of the ideas that influence us.

#### **Discuss:**

What different opinions do the people around you have on singleness?

*(How are single people viewed? How normal is it to be single? Are these opinions positive or negative towards singleness, and why?)*

How do *you* feel about singleness?

## God's View on Singleness

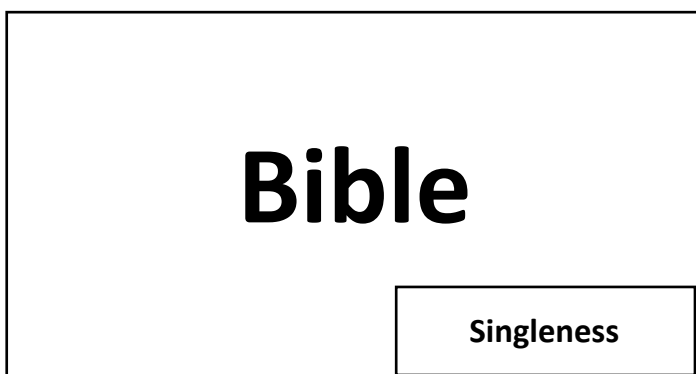
We hear so many different opinions on singleness from the world around us, and even from the church, which can be very confusing! As Christians we know that our society, family, friends and feelings do not have the authority to shape our views on singleness; only God can tell us how to think about singleness and how to live as single people. Therefore these sessions will explore from the Bible what God says about this important topic.

We will trace the Bible's teaching on singleness and marriage through the storyline of the whole Bible. We will see that as the great story of God's dealings with our world unfolds, the role of singleness changes. In order to understand singleness properly, we need to understand this change.

This seminar has two main aims. Firstly, to give us clarity on singleness: to understand the change that happens in the Bible storyline from Old Testament to New Testament, how this change affects singleness, and therefore to see how we as Jesus' people should view being single. And secondly, to change our perspective on singleness. Often our view looks like this:



Singleness is the big issue in our minds, and the Bible's teaching fits into that, perhaps by offering us advice or encouragement. However, the reality is more like this:



God's plan for the world is HUGE! And what happens to single people helps to illustrate what is happening in the Bible storyline. This means that if we understand singleness rightly, we will grasp more of God's salvation plan, be positive about singleness, and excited about living lives shaped by the gospel.

## Creation

Let's start right at the beginning – at the creation of the world.

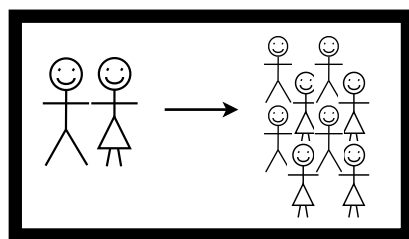
In Genesis 1 we read that God creates a world that is very good - he makes the heavens and the earth; the sun, moon and stars; plants, animals, and then as the high point of his work of creation he creates people.

*Read Genesis 1:27-28 and Genesis 2:15-25*

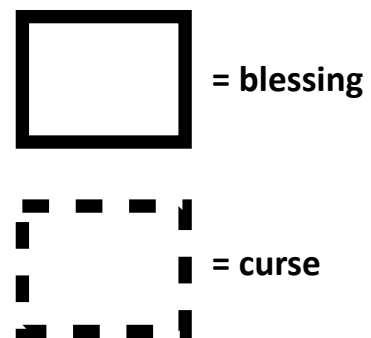
Here we see that right at the start God creates marriage as part of his good creation. Humans were made male and female and were to join together in a unit: 'one flesh' (2:24).

Genesis 2:18 sets out God's vision for marriage: the man by himself was not sufficient to do the work God had given him of looking after the Garden of Eden (2:15), and so God created a suitable helper for him: the woman. Together, the man and women were to serve God. So marriage is for companionship and service, and marriage is also for children: Adam and Eve are commanded to create mini Adam and Eves in 1:28, where God instructs them: 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.'

So here at the start of the Bible God sets the pattern for marriage: one man and one women, having children, so that the earth will be full of people who know God. Marriage and children are key to God's plan to make a good world and to bless it.



**Creation**

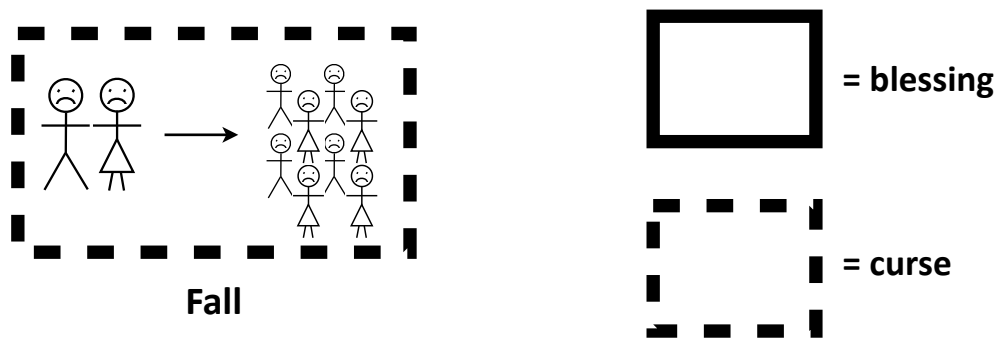


## The Fall

However this perfect world does not last long – soon a big event takes place that changes the rest of the Bible story, and the rest of the whole of human history.

In Genesis 3:6 Eve takes the fruit that God commanded them not to eat, and eats it. This is shocking: Adam and Eve reject God and decide to make themselves mini-gods in his place. This is what the Bible means by sin. As a result of their rebellion, God punishes them, and through them the world and all humankind are cursed.

Under this curse, Adam and Eve lose most of the blessings of Genesis 1 and 2: they are made to leave God's presence, their good relationship with God is ruined, and humans will now die (Genesis 3:19). The situation is very bleak and it is all deserved.



## Promise to Abraham

But this is not the end of the story. God steps in by coming to a man Abraham and giving him a promise. Through this promise comes hope that once again people can be blessed by God.

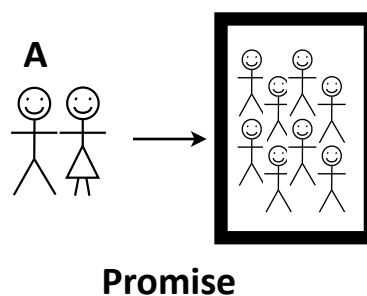
*Read Genesis 17:6-8*

Here we see that God promises to bless Abraham in two main ways:

1. **Children** ('offspring'), who will be given...
2. **Land** (verse 8): the land of Canaan, to enjoy forever.

What's more, Genesis 12:3 promises that through Abraham the whole world will be blessed. Through these promises, God begins to reverse the Fall of humanity.

As in Genesis 1-2, children (and therefore marriage) are still key to the world being blessed. Abraham needed to have children, who needed to have children, so that they can live in the land of Canaan and become a great nation as God had promised. However, there is a key difference between Genesis 12 and Genesis 2: in Genesis 2 blessing came to the world as all people got married and had children, but after Genesis 12 the focus is narrower. Blessing comes through *one man* Abraham and *his offspring*, or descendants. So after Genesis 12, all people must look to Abraham and his descendants as the source of blessing.



## The Nation of Israel: Blessing and Curse

The story then moves on many hundreds of years. Abraham's descendants (who are known as the Israelites) multiply greatly, but the whole nation ends up as slaves in Egypt. In the book of Exodus God rescues the Israelites, bringing them out of Egypt and into Canaan, the land he had promised to give them back in Genesis 17:8.

God then gives them the Ten Commandments and other laws so that they know how to obey God and can live in relationship with him. This law is called the Mosaic Covenant. The key difference between this covenant and God's covenant with Abraham is that under the Mosaic Covenant the Israelites must obey God's laws in order to enjoy his promised blessing. In Deuteronomy 28 God describes the blessings the Israelites will enjoy if they obey his laws, and the curses that will come upon them if they disobey.

So how do marriage, children and singleness fit into this?

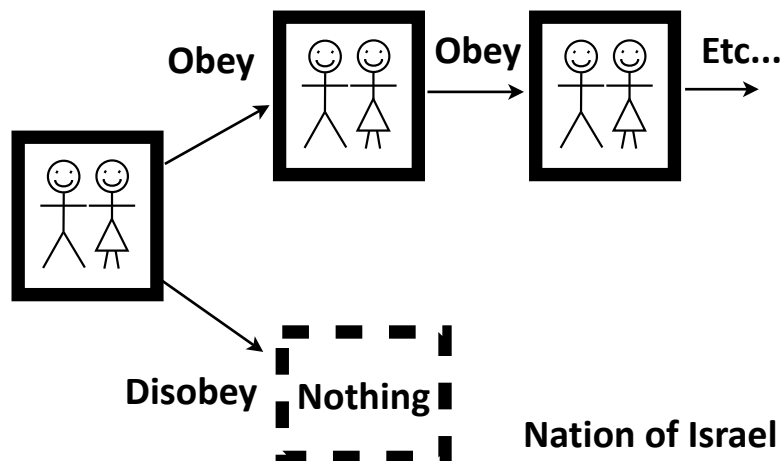
1. **Blessings for obedience:** *Read Deuteronomy 28:1-4, 11*

'Fruit of your womb' is included in the blessings mentioned in verses 4 and 11. This tells us that part of God's blessing is that people get married and have lots of children and the number of Israelites increases.

2. **Curses for disobedience:** *Read Deuteronomy 28:62-63*

In contrast, part of God's curse involves a lack of children, and their numbers decreasing.

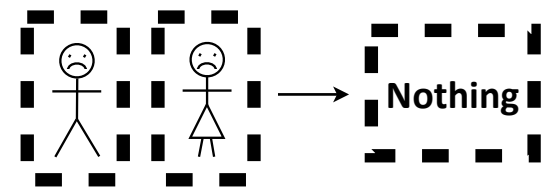
Another important part of God's blessing to the Israelites was their **land**. Remember Abraham: God promised that his descendants would inherit the land of Canaan. Marriage and children were key here too: after someone died their land was passed to their children, ensuring that their family would continue to have a share in God's promised land. If you had children you and your family name would continue to 'live' through them after you died, but if you had no children your land would be lost to someone else when you died - and this symbolised the loss of God's blessing.



**Discuss:**

Why would every Israelite get married?

So the place of a single person in Old Testament Israel was not good! They would have been seen as an outcast, under a curse, whose name would be blotted out after they died.



**The single person in Old Testament Israel**

**Discuss:**

How does Old Testament Israel's view of singleness compare to the views around us which we discussed at the start?

Keep reading: this is not the end of the story!

At this stage in the story, everything looks good for Israel... if they obey God's commands.

BUT when we read the history of Israel in the Old Testament we discover a huge problem: the people cannot obey. Again and again they disobey God and reject him. Eventually they experience all the covenant curses of Deuteronomy 28: they are invaded by foreign nations who take them away from the land of Israel and resettle them in other nations. The Israelites lose all of God's blessings. It should be 'game over' for Israel.

One thing is clear from Israel's history: **the Mosaic covenant which promises blessing for obedience and curse for disobedience cannot be the way by which God's promises to Abraham are fulfilled.** God promised Abraham that all nations would be blessed through his descendants, but Israel's history results in curse, not blessing. Old Testament Israel teaches us about how God's blessing **will not** come to the world: it will not come through people's obedience. We need a bigger solution to the problem of sin. This means that we need to be careful when making comparisons between Christians today and Israel in the Old Testament, because we are in very different situations.



## The Prophets: Judgement and Hope

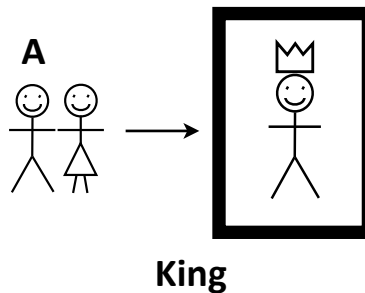
Wonderfully, Israel's destruction is not the end of the story. The Old Testament gives two main sources of hope: God's promise to David, and his message through the prophets.

### a) God's promise to David

David was the best king that Israel had, and at the high point of his reign God gave him a promise which built directly on his promise to Abraham.

*Read 2 Samuel 7:12,13,16*

The key thing this promise adds is that God's blessing will come through a **king** whose rule will last **forever**. Therefore we are now looking for one key figure amongst Abraham's descendants who will bring God's blessing to the world.



### b) God's message through the prophets

As Israel experiences more and more of the curses described above, God sends prophets to speak messages of hope to the Israelites. God promises some huge things: that he will reverse the Fall of Genesis 3, save his people, cleanse them from sin, and make a New Creation for them to live in. And the fulfilment of these promises becomes focused on one person who has two roles:

#### i. The King

*Read Isaiah 9:6-7*

Through the prophet Isaiah God promises the birth of a child, who will be the eternal King that God promised to David. This child is the source of all hope: he will bring blessing. And blessing comes through being in his kingdom.

## ii. The Servant

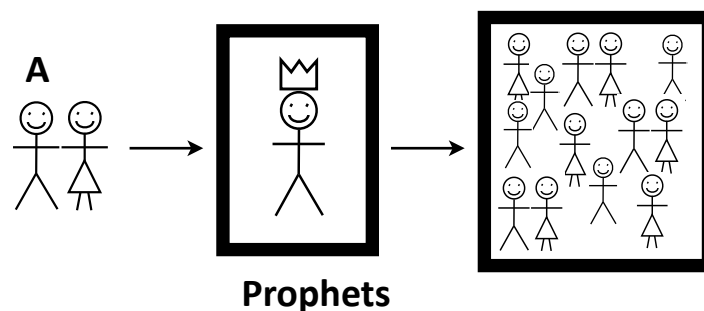
*Read Isaiah 53:7-11*

Isaiah also prophesies that God will send a Servant who will die in the place of sinful people, taking the punishment from God that they deserve. The outcome of his death is described in verse 10 in terms of children: 'he shall see his offspring'. Through the servant's substitutionary death a new people will emerge.

The prophets' message brings about a shift in the way single and married people are viewed. Previously, under the Mosaic Covenant, we saw that all Israelites would marry because only then could they have children to carry on God's line of blessing. However, through the prophets the path of blessing shifts from a focus on children in general to a focus on **one child**: the King and Servant. The impact of this can be seen in Isaiah 54, which is addressed to a barren woman:

*Read Isaiah 54:1-6*

The barren woman here is a picture of Israel under God's curse, with no children, no possibility of having children, and thus no hope. However, the result of the Servant's work is that hopeless Israel can know God's blessing again, which is as miraculous as a barren woman giving birth to many children. This shift means that the place of a single, childless person in Israel also starts to shift. No longer are they a cursed outcast. Because of the Servant's work they are blessed immeasurably as part of God's new people.



But how will this happen?

## Jesus: The Servant and King

The answer is Jesus. He is the Servant King. All God's blessing comes through him. This can be seen in a number of New Testament passages.

### Discuss:

According to this passage, how does someone receive God's blessing? How is this different to Old Testament Israel?

Does it matter if they are married or single? Why?

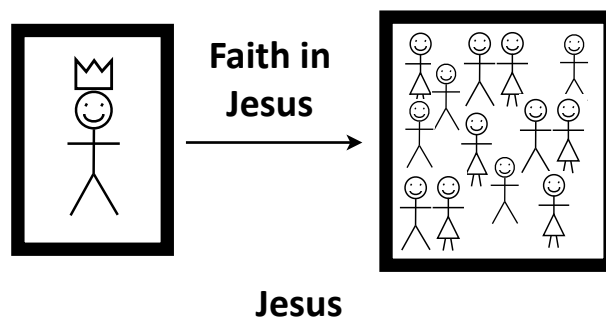
a) John 3:3-6

b) Galatians 3:16-18, 25-29

c) Ephesians 1:1-10

To summarise, in the Old Testament membership of God's blessed people came through being a physical descendent of Abraham. Thus marriage and children were a sign of God's blessing.

But now that Jesus has come, membership of God's people comes through faith in him - we are brought into a new people through a spiritual rebirth. Therefore marriage and children (although good) are **no longer necessary** to receive blessing from God.



## The New Creation

### No marriage?

We are now waiting for Jesus to come to earth a second time. He will carry out the final judgment and bring his people into his New Creation – a perfect world, free from sin, where we will enjoy a perfect relationship with God. It will be amazing.

If we picture our perfect world, I expect lots of us will imagine being married there. But the Bible says something different. In the New Creation, where we will spend eternity, there is NO human marriage. Let's see why:

In Luke 20, a group of Sadducees try to trick Jesus by posing the question: If a woman has seven husbands, whose wife will she be in the New Creation?

*Read Jesus' answer in Luke 20:34-36*

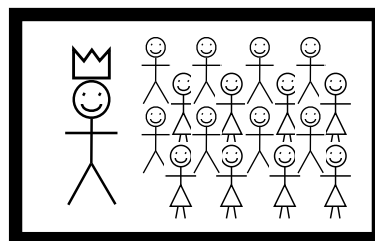
Here Jesus makes the point that in the New Creation there will be no marriage **because** people cannot die anymore. As we've seen in Old Testament, getting married and having children was essential to continue the family line after death. But if there is no death, there is no need for this aspect of marriage.

### One marriage!

Perhaps even more significantly, there is an even greater marriage to come in the New Creation, which earthly marriage is merely a picture of.

*Read Revelation 21:1-3*

In the New Creation the church will be married to Jesus. Human marriage is a picture of this, but when the Lord returns there will be no more need for the picture as we will have the real thing! All the good things about human marriage will be enjoyed forever with Jesus.



**New Creation**

## **Waiting for Jesus to return**

So how should we think about singleness now? In 1 Corinthians 7 Paul applies a biblical understanding of marriage and singleness to a particular church that needed clarity. This teaching is radical and counter-cultural.

In particular, Paul helps them and us to see that:

- **Singleness is a gift**

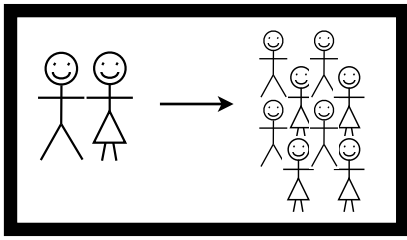
*Read 1 Corinthians 7:6-7*

This probably does not mean that there is a special 'gift of singleness' which some single people have and some don't. Rather, whether our status is 'married' or 'single' that status is a gift. It is something given to us by God in order to serve the church.

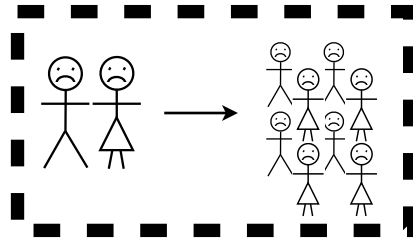
- **Singleness is an opportunity to serve**

*Read 1 Corinthians 7:32-35*

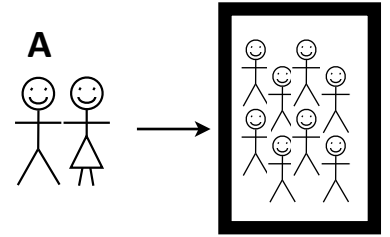
There are genuine benefits to being single – rather than being tied up with concerns about their spouse and children, a single person is free to be wholeheartedly devoted to the Lord, to please him and serve him. Paul says single people have fewer anxieties and an undivided devotion to the Lord. It is tempting to only think about the downsides of being single – if we looked at the benefits in terms of serving God and his people, we would see that they are huge!



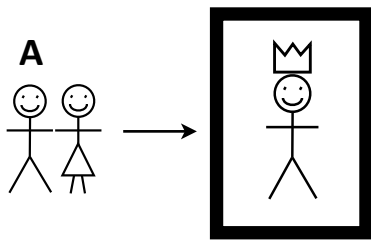
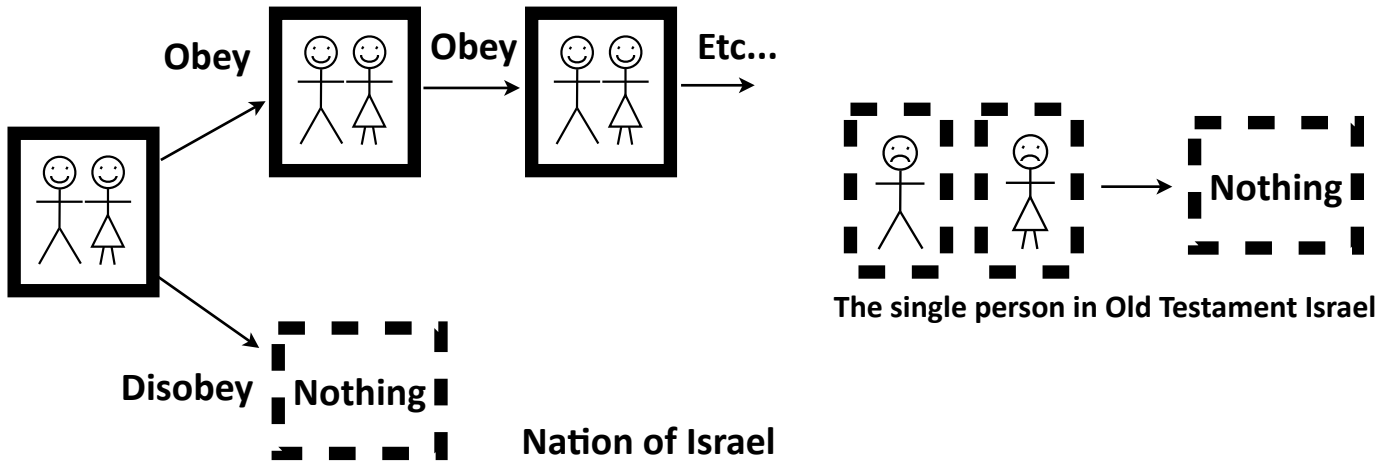
**Creation**



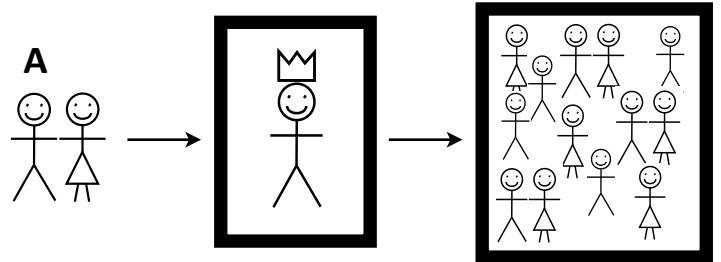
**Fall**



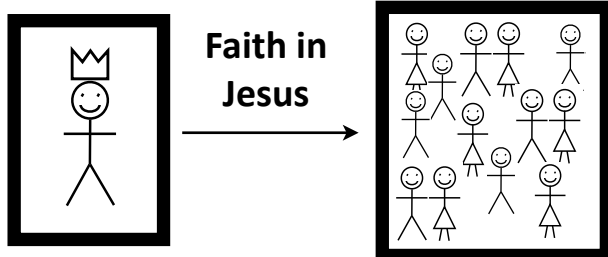
**Promise**



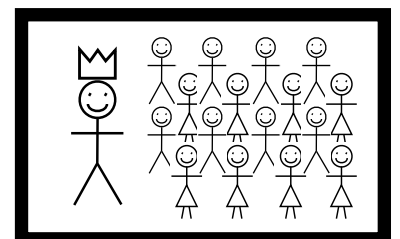
**King**



**Prophets**



**Jesus**



**New Creation**

# So... What does this tell us about singleness?

## 1. Singleness is good

The Bible teaches that marriage is good (I think we all believe that!). But this Bible overview shows us that singleness is also really good.

Our society often views single people as unnatural, cursed, outcasts. In some ways our society's view of single people is similar to the way they were viewed in Old Testament Israel.

But the Bible's teaching shows us that the opposite is true: single people are **not** outcasts nor cursed nor second-rate. Single people are **not** the ones God forgot to bless. Single Christians are made new in Christ, have sins forgiven, have hope of eternity married to Jesus - they have exactly the same blessings as married Christians.

And that's not all! Singleness testifies to God's plan. We often hear that marriage is a picture of Christ's relationship with his church, but singleness can also help us understand our relationship with Christ. This works in two ways:

- a) Single people testify to the sufficiency of Christ for blessing. If I have no earthly family at all, I still have every spiritual blessing in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). What a testimony!
- b) Single people testify to the reality of the New Creation. Single people display that one day we will all be single humanly speaking, yet fully satisfied in our marriage to Christ and our relationships with other Christians.

## 2. Singleness is an opportunity

Often it is hard to be single because our society marginalises single people. The television programmes we watch, the magazines we read and the adverts that we see all tell us that we need to be married in order to be a complete, satisfied person. Sadly, our churches often make Christians feel this way as well, by putting pressure on single people to get married or by excluding them from certain areas of service.

Single people themselves often hold back from serving God, thinking things like, 'If only I was married, then my husband and I could serve God as a team.' Or 'I need the stability that marriage brings, I can't serve God on my own'. The Bible teaches us that singleness is not a reason to withdraw from serving God and his church - in fact it is quite the opposite. We are given the gift of singleness so that we can serve more wholeheartedly!

One single Christian lady writes:

*One of the benefits of being single is huge flexibility over my time – if someone really needs to meet up with me, it's completely possible, I don't need to be home by a certain time. I have more time and head space to think through God's word - what it means for me and how I can encourage others with it. I've seen in my life genuine tangible benefits to being single which help me serve God and his people.*

### 3. Singleness is shaped by the gospel

Our society often sees marriage as our life's destination: we go to school, get into university, get our first job, and then it's time to think about marriage. Marriage is the gateway to all the other stages of life, most of which revolve around children.

The Bible says something completely different: the goal of life is to reach the New Creation and as we travel there we are to serve our Lord. Marriage and singleness are merely states we may find ourselves in while we travel – and both are to be used in service of the Lord and his gospel. And that is exciting news!

#### Discuss:

How has this session helped you to see that singleness is good?

If you are single, what opportunities do you have as a single woman to serve God and his people?

If you are married, what opportunities do your single friends have?

In the Old Testament, marriage was the norm for every Israelite. As Christians, why should our view of marriage be different to theirs?

Finish this session by praying together, thanking God for blessing us all in Christ, asking him to help us see singleness as an opportunity to know him better, and praying for anything that has particularly challenged or encouraged you from the session.



## Session Two: Responding to the Truth

In Session One we discovered that what our society thinks about singleness is very different to what God thinks about singleness. We hear God's voice telling us that being single is good, and we hear our society's voice telling us that being single is rubbish. So *how can we live in response to God's truth in a world that doesn't believe it?* That question is the subject of Session Two.

### In Principle: Believe God's Truth

Before we talk about what we should actually do differently as a result of the truths in Session One, we need to know *how* it is that we can change. How can I go from feeling discontented and second-rate as a single person, to being satisfied and excited about the opportunities of being single?

*Read Psalm 119:17-24*

Psalm 119 is a super-long poem, all about going through the ups and downs of life holding onto God's word in a world that does not believe it. The writer uses lots of different words such as 'law', 'commandments', 'statutes' etc which are all different ways of talking about what God has said in the Bible (in the writer's case, this meant the Old Testament as the New Testament was not yet written). Verses 17-24 are a brilliant illustration of how to listen to God's truth and not to the voice of the world around us. Let's briefly notice three things:

#### 1. The Christian longs for God's truth

These verses model what the Christian should pray as we go through life. Have a look at these verses:

18: Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.

19: Hide not your commandments from me!

20: My soul is consumed with longing for your rules at all times.

The writer doesn't pray for circumstances to be made easier. Instead, he asks God to show him his word and to help him understand it. Why does he have such a deep longing for God's word? Because the Christian is a 'sojourner' or 'stranger' in this world (verse 19) - we don't belong to this world, we belong to God's kingdom. Even in our own country, in our own hometown, we are foreigners, outsiders. It is God's word which reminds us of our true identity and our true home. But God's word is not the only voice we might choose to listen to:

#### 2. The Christian is attacked by the world's lies

The world not only views us as outsiders; it views us as enemies. Verses 22-23 tell us that the writer of this Psalm faces scorn and contempt - even from princes, who plot against him. The

reason for this is that we live in a world which rejects and hates God's word, a world which mocks God's word and the people who believe it. As Christians we are swimming against the tide - and it is very hard! We are foreigners here on earth.

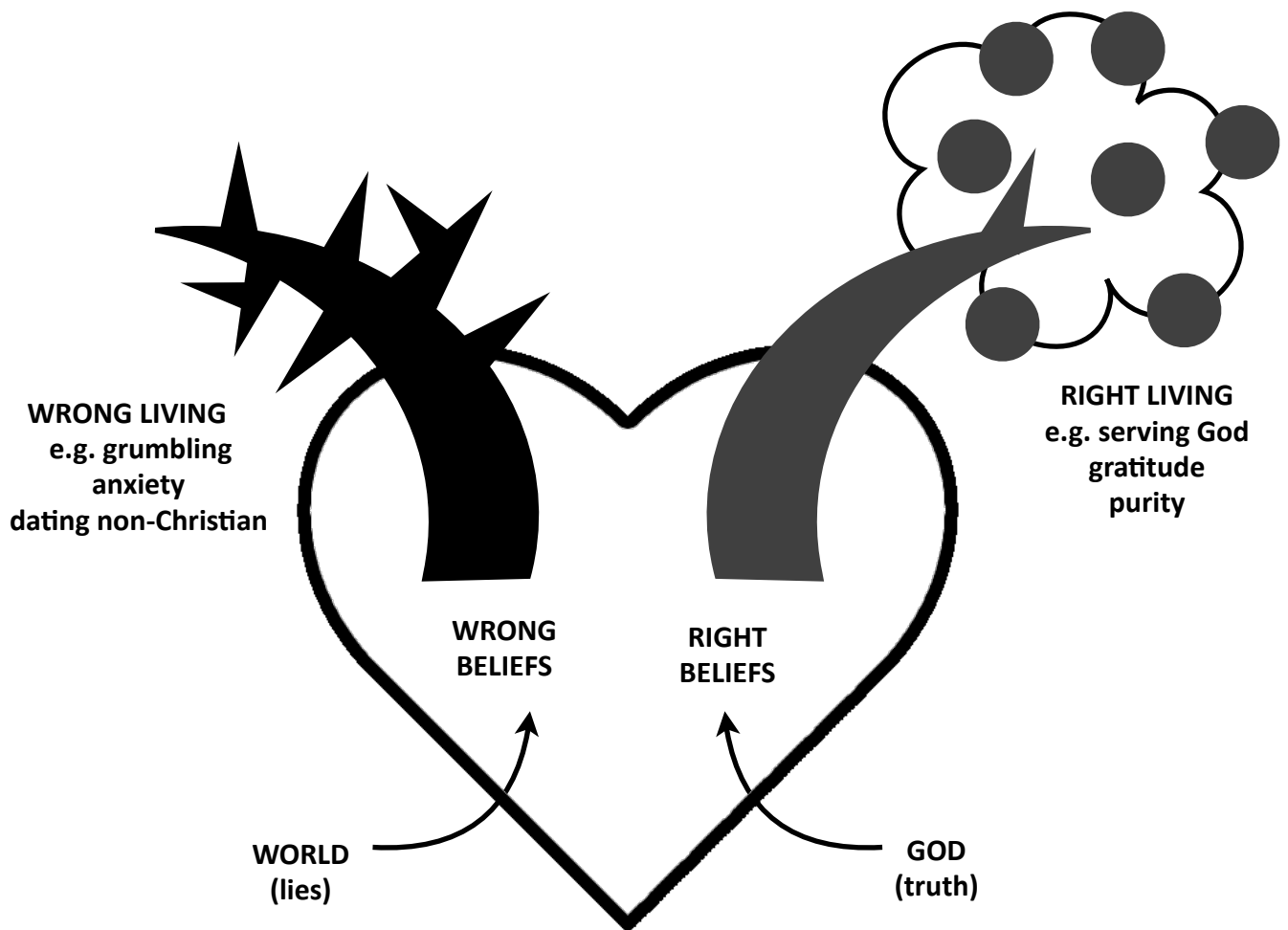
And this is why we so often struggle to believe and respond rightly to what God says about singleness. We live in a world which rejects God's words, and every day we are bombarded with this world's mockery and lies. No wonder it is so hard for us to live out God's truth. So how can we let our lives be directed by God's word, and not by the world's lies?

### **3. The Christian meditates in his heart**

God's truth and the world's lies wage war against each other - and the battleground is our hearts! Whichever voice takes root in our heart will have the greatest influence on our life. So how can we make sure that God's voice drowns out the world's voice? Look at what the Psalm writer does in verse 23: he meditates on God's statutes.

Meditating simply means thinking hard about God's word, turning it over in our minds, applying it to the pressures we face each day. Imagine the situation in verse 23: 'Princes sit plotting against me'. A prince, someone with great respect and authority, is plotting against the writer. This is maybe equivalent to our boss, or the head of our department, turning against us and wanting to get rid of us - pretty frightening. But the writer does not despair or give in; he meditates on God's word, reminding himself that God is the King of Kings, he holds all things in his hands, he is on my side, so the ruler's opposition cannot ultimately harm me, and it should not shake my faith. Applying God's word to our situation in this way is what is meant by meditating. Just as verse 24 says: God's word is the writer's counsellor; God's word gives him wisdom and directs his course of action, and not the words of his parents, teachers, classmates etc.

We can use a diagram to illustrate these three principles:



In the diagram the heart represents our own heart, the control seat of our being, the place where we hold deep beliefs.

However, these beliefs can be right or wrong, depending on whether we let our hearts listen to the world's lies or to God's truth. Our beliefs in turn impact our thoughts, feelings and behaviour, represented on the diagram as the things that 'grow out of' our hearts. Wrong beliefs produce thinking, feeling and behaviour that dishonour God, while right beliefs produce thinking, feeling and behaviour that are in line with God's word.

Therefore, whenever we struggle with being single, the most basic thing we need to do is work at believing God's truth. There are three main steps to this:

- 1. Identify the lies we are tempted to believe**
- 2. Identify the truth we need to believe instead**
- 3. Think about how to respond in practice to the truth.**

Here is a worked example from one single lady of how these three steps work out for her:

### **1. Identify the lies we are tempted to believe**

For me, being single makes me feel really low about myself. The world tells me that our value comes from what others think of us - particularly, if someone wants to marry us, we must be pretty great! I believe that lie and think that because I'm single that means I'm worthless; this leads to wrong living: self-pity, bitterness, a low view of singleness: thinking it's a curse, not a blessing. I want to get married because I think it will make me feel good about myself.

### **2. Identify the truth we need to believe instead**

Firstly, I need to believe that my value comes from God, not from people. I'm valuable cos God has included me in his plan to save a people through Christ - I need a bigger view of God's love for me. Secondly, I need to believe how great God is - why do I think that I would be satisfied by a relationship with a person, yet I'm not satisfied by my relationship with him? I need to deeply know the wonder of God's character.

Thirdly, I need to know that marriage and singleness are both valuable in God's eyes: he has designed his church to include both married people and single people for his glory. My singleness now is a taster of life in the new creation, when we will all be single people, yet married to Christ.

### **3. Think about how to respond in practice to the truth.**

If I believed these truths, I would naturally start to live rightly: I would be content with my situation and with who I am. I would live wholeheartedly for God and for his glory, instead of living for people and trying to win their approval. I would enjoy the benefits of being single, looking forward to my marriage to Christ, rather than wishing that I was married.

These are the principles of how to respond to what God's word says about singleness. So how do they work out in real life situations?

## In practice: Believe God's truth in the real world

Below are a three imaginary scenarios - in smaller groups choose one each to discuss, and then share your answers with each other.

### 1. Yuanyuan

Yuanyuan enjoyed being single when she studied in London because there were lots of other single people at church, but last year she returned to China and it feels very different. Her parents expect that her top priority should be to get married... before it's too late and she becomes a 'leftover woman'! They frequently arrange blind dates with their friends' children, and when Yuanyuan says she only wants to marry a Christian they seem both upset and confused. Yuanyuan feels that the Bible's teaching on singleness is easy to live by in the UK, but it can't apply in China - the culture is just too different. She's worried about disappointing her parents, and scared of being lonely.

**What lies would Yuanyuan be tempted to believe?**

**How would the truth of God's word help? (e.g. Psalm 119:19, Revelation 21:2-4)**

**How should Yuanyuan respond in practice to the truth? (attitudes and actions)**

**Related Issues:**

- Why are our parents so keen for us to get married?
- How can we engage with this sensitively in a way that honours our parents?

## 2. Ling

Ling is 33, single, and feels left out at church. Most people her age are in a fellowship for married couples, while the fellowships for single people are mostly full of students. Many of the married people at church have young children so find it difficult to go out in the evenings and she doesn't want to intrude on their family life, so she finds herself very lonely. She thinks that life would be so much better if only she were married, and so she is considering leaving her church and looking for a church with more single men.

**What lies would Ling be tempted to believe?**

**How would the truth of God's word help? (e.g. Ephesians 1:1-10, Mark 10:29-20)**

**How should Ling respond in practice to the truth? (attitudes and actions)**

**Related Issues:**

- How can we help to shape our church's culture so that it is acceptable for people to be married or single?
  
- How can married and single Christians be involved in each others' lives?

### 3. Xiao Qiong

Xiao Qiong has been married for 5 years and there are lots of single ladies in her church. Xiao Qiong feels a responsibility to help them find a good Christian husband and so she prays for God to provide a suitable man for them, she teaches them skills that will help them be good wives and mothers (cooking, looking after children), and gives them advice on how to dress, talk and smile around men. She encourages the single girls to date a non-Christian man if he's interested in the gospel, but they shouldn't marry him unless he becomes a Christian.

**What lies would Xiao Qiong and the single ladies at her church be tempted to believe?**

**How would the truth of God's word help? (e.g. 1 Corinthians 7:32-35, Revelation 21:2-4)**

**How should they respond in practice to the truth? (attitudes and actions)**

#### **Related Issues:**

- What if the guy I like is interested in the gospel?
- There are far more Christian women than men - surely this means some will need to marry a non-Christian?

## Summary

We've looked at lots of wonderful truths that our hearts should believe. We've talked about lots of fruit we hope this will bear. Finally, let's think briefly about *how* we can strengthen our belief in these truths. Let's look back to what we saw in Psalm 119. There are two main things we should do:

### 1. **Pray** to know God's truth

The Psalmist knows he needs God's help to believe God's word - he prays this for 176 verses! Believing God's truth is a work of his Spirit. We can't do it by ourselves. So why not identify one truth that you know you need to believe more firmly in your hearts, and give yourself to praying for that every day this week - or this month? As well as this regular day-to-day prayer, we should also pray these things in 'emergencies': the situations where we think it's just too hard to persevere in believing the truth about singleness, such as at family gatherings, or while watching romantic films....

### 2. **Meditate** on God's truth

This is how the writer of Psalm 119 wages war against the world's lies (verse 23). Why not learn a few verses from the Bible, and choose to think about them, rather than daydreaming about getting married? There are times when I've found I need to literally speak the truth out loud to myself! We should watch out for the first signs of discontent or grumbling in our thoughts, and be ready to fight these lies armed with truth from God's word.

As Christian sisters we can be a real help to each other in this too - let's keep reminding each other to have a positive view of singleness. It's not a curse - we have every spiritual blessing, including unique blessings that we would not have if we were married. My prayer is that God would help more and more single girls to live with joyful freedom, enjoying our many many blessings in Christ and looking forward to an eternity married to him.

#### **Discuss:**

In groups, share one truth that you want to meditate on to help you fight the world's lies about singleness.

Share one thing you would like to do differently as a result of this truth.

Pray together.



## Suggested Answers to Discussion Questions

### Page 3: The World's View on Singleness

What different opinions do the people around you have on singleness?

*(How are single people viewed? How normal is it to be single? Are these opinions positive or negative towards singleness, and why?)*

The opinions we encounter often fit into the following five categories:

1. **Singleness and identity** *(We think there is something wrong with us if we are single: we are unlikeable, insignificant etc. We think that if we were married we would feel better about ourselves)*
2. **Singleness and happiness** *(We think marriage will make us happy, because it provides blessings such as stability, sex, companionship, etc.)*
3. **Singleness and family** *(Our family often gives us pressure to get married, and we feel we are letting them down by being single)*
4. **Singleness and society** *(Our society sees marriage as 'natural' and staying single as 'unnatural', therefore it has no place for single people, making us feel sidelined, and leading to practical worries such as how we will care for our ageing parents, or who will care for us when we are old)*
5. **Singleness and freedom** *(We enjoy the freedom to live for ourselves, to do what we want, free from family commitments)*

### Page 8: The Nation of Israel: Blessing and Curse

Why would every Israelite get married?

*Children were a sign of blessing from God, and so no Israelite would consider remaining single and therefore childless. Childless Israelites were a sign of God's disapproval on the nation for breaking his covenant. Children also assured that an individual's share in God's inheritance would remain in their family after they died - to have no children meant that your family name would disappear from God's people.*

How does this view of singleness compare to the views around us which we discussed at the start?

*Often our culture's view of singleness is very similar to that of Old Testament Israel: that staying single is unnatural and unblessed.*

Page 11: **Jesus: The Servant and King**

**According to this passage, how does someone receive God's blessing? How is this different to Old Testament Israel?**

**Does it matter if they are married or single? Why?**

a) John 3:3-6

*To be part of the kingdom of God someone must be born again by the Spirit. This is not physical birth but a spiritual work that God does within us. We can have this new life whether married or single.*

b) Galatians 3:16-18, 25-29

*Christ is the offspring promised to Abraham. All God's promises to Abraham are received through him. We are united to Christ through faith in him, which makes us Abraham's offspring, and therefore we share in the blessing God promised to Abraham. It does not matter whether we are single or married.*

c) Ephesians 1:1-10

*We have been adopted as God's sons and therefore have every spiritual blessing in Christ. Membership of God's family becomes more significant than whether or not we have an earthly family.*

## **1. Yuanyuan**

Yuanyuan enjoyed being single when she studied in London because there were lots of other single people at church, but last year she returned to China and it feels very different. Her parents expect that her top priority should be to get married... before it's too late and she becomes a 'leftover woman'! They frequently arrange blind dates with their friends' children, and when Yuanyuan says she only wants to marry a Christian they seem both upset and confused. Yuanyuan feels that the Bible's teaching on singleness is easy to live by in the UK, but it can't apply in China - the culture is just too different. She's worried about disappointing her parents, and scared of being lonely.

### **What lies would Yuanyuan be tempted to believe?**

- *The mainstream of our culture has more authority than God's word*
- *Our loyalty to our parents is more important than our loyalty to God, thus family harmony should be maintained at all costs*
- *Marriage is the natural goal of life*

### **How would the truth of God's word help? Can you think of a helpful Bible passage?**

- *We are 'sojourners' in the world, so we should expect God's word to go against our culture (Psalm 119:19)*
- *The goal of life is eternally knowing God in the new creation, not earthly marriage (Rev. 21:2-4)*
- *God has promised to provide for us abundantly, whether married or single, particularly through our Christian family. We carry on our family through spiritual children, not physical ones (Mark 10:29-30).*

### **How should Yuanyuan respond in practice to the truth? (attitudes and actions)**

- *Peace and trust, not anxiety - she should pray for God to provide for her needs.*
- *Think about how to talk positively about being single to parents and friends: Christ and the church really are sufficient for the single Christian.*
- *Keep meeting with other Christians who will encourage her to listen to God's truth about singleness, not to the world's lies.*

### **Related Issues:**

- Why are our parents so keen for us to get married?
  - *They want what's best for us: security, being provided for*
  - *They fear the family losing face*
- How can we engage with this sensitively in a way that honours our parents?
  - *Let them see that we have a loving family in the church, therefore they don't need to worry we will be alone and unprovided for. Introduce them to our church friends.*
  - *Explain the Bible's teaching on singleness to them patiently - it is a great witness to Christ and the new creation.*

## 2. Ling

Ling is 33, single, and feels left out at church. Most people her age are in a fellowship for married couples, while the fellowships for single people are mostly full of students. Many of the married people at church have young children so find it difficult to go out in the evenings and she doesn't want to intrude on their family life, so she finds herself very lonely. She thinks that life would be so much better if only she were married, and so she is considering leaving her church and looking for a church with more single men.

### **What lies would Ling be tempted to believe?**

- *Married people are self-sufficient and don't need the fellowship of single people*
- *Marriage is the solution to all life's problems*
- *Church should be easy and comfortable*

### **How would the truth of God's word help? Can you think of a helpful Bible passage?**

- *God cares for us and is with us in hard situations (Psalm 23)*
- *As Christians we have every spiritual blessing in Christ - even if we are not married! (Ephesians 1:1-10)*
- *God has made the church as a body with different gifts to serve each other (1 Corinthians 12:14-20)*

### **How should Ling respond in practice to the truth? (attitudes and actions)**

- *Get on with serving her church family using her gift of singleness - e.g. being an older sister to the students; helping the young parents look after their children.*
- *Seek deep, fulfilling friendships as a single person with other brothers and sisters at church: life does not begin when we get married!*

### **Related Issues:**

- How can we help to shape our church's culture so that it is acceptable for people to be married or single?
- How can married and single Christians be involved in each others' lives?

### 3. Xiao Qiong

Xiao Qiong has been married for 5 years and there are lots of single ladies in her church. Xiao Qiong feels a responsibility to help them find a good Christian husband and so she prays for God to provide a suitable man for them, she teaches them skills that will help them be good wives and mothers (cooking, looking after children), and gives them advice on how to dress, talk and smile around men. She encourages the single girls to date a non-Christian man if he's interested in the gospel, but they shouldn't marry him unless he becomes a Christian.

#### **What lies would Xiao Qiong and the single ladies at her church be tempted to believe?**

- *Single women are less blessed than married women*
- *Marriage is part of our life's goal as Christian women*

#### **How would the truth of God's word help? Can you think of a helpful Bible passage?**

- *The Bible has a high view of singleness: it is an opportunity to serve God (1 Corinthians 7:32-35)*
- *Marriage is good - but it is ultimately fulfilled in the new creation, not earthly marriage (Revelation 21:2-4). Therefore our great goal as Christian women is to get to the new creation and to see others get there - not to get married.*

#### **How should they respond in practice to the truth? (attitudes and actions)**

- *Xiao Qiong should not assume everyone will get married (nor that they all want to get married) - so she should avoid conversation about "when you get married..."*
- *When Xiao Qiong prays for single girls she should ask God to make them content, not just to give them a husband.*
- *They should be careful of 'flirt to convert' - our feelings are often stronger than our good intentions. If we start to date a guy who is not a Christian, we are likely to fall in love with him - and then it will be very hard to break up with him if he does not become a Christian.*

#### **Related Issues:**

- *What if the guy I like is interested in the gospel?*
  - *Encourage him to get to know Christian men at church*
  - *Be careful not to let your emotions lead your decision-making: take precautions, e.g. don't spend time alone together, talk to a Christian friend about your feelings*
  - *Don't put him under pressure by saying "I'll marry you if you become a Christian"*
- *There are far more Christian women than men - surely this means some will need to marry a non-Christian?*
  - *No: God does not promise that all Christians will get married*
  - *There are good reasons why God tells us not to marry a non-Christian. Most basically, as Christians we are living for Jesus, while non-Christians are not living for Jesus. If the two get married, they will pull in opposite directions which will hinder the Christian's service of God and cause disagreements in the marriage.*

## Further Reading/ Listening

Books (English):

*The Heart of Singleness*, Andrea Trevenna (a short and encouraging book to help women be single and satisfied!)

*Redeeming Singleness*, Barry Danylak (this book traces the theme of singleness through the Bible in detail, expanding many of the ideas of Session One of this seminar)

*Married For God*, Christopher Ash (this book gives a biblical perspective on marriage, it also has a helpful chapter on singleness)

Sermons on 1 Corinthians 7:25-40:

English: <http://www.st-helens.org.uk/resources/media-library/src/talk/52269/>

Mandarin: [http://www.gospelhome.org.uk/downloads/?sermon\\_id=251](http://www.gospelhome.org.uk/downloads/?sermon_id=251)