

Good Marriages Need a Whole Church

Ask many Christian singles in Beijing today to describe how they feel about being single, and the responses you hear may surprise you. Many feel frustrated, confused, or even hopeless. They want to find a good Christian spouse, keep themselves pure, and honor God in the pursuit of marriage, yet things don't seem to be moving that direction, and it doesn't seem like it will change anytime soon. In short, they are suffering for Christ. That's not to say that they are being persecuted by the authorities, or afflicted with a disease (though it may seem like it to some), yet in choosing to pursue Biblical marriage, they are left with fewer choices of potential spouses, delaying sex (hopefully), and starting families much later.

I say "suffering" to acknowledge that choosing to following Jesus in pursuit of Biblical marriage comes with a cost. It is an act of the will to follow God in this way, and He is pleased with His children when they obey. Suffering can be used by God for our sanctification and good, or it may be used by the enemy as a tool to deceive us into believing that God is not good enough in Himself for us or doesn't "really" love us. It is not in our power to decide what happens in life, but it is our choice to decide how we will respond.

Most singles have been taught about dealing with suffering, but are left to figure out how to get married on their own. The truth is, while marriage is upheld as the most intimate human relationship we will know on earth and a picture of Christ and the Church, the church does not usually take an active role in helping singles prepare for and move towards marriage.

Let's face it – singles need help and guidance, and who better to help than those who are already married and have families? Couples can provide mentoring, relational support/advice, and opportunities to learn and prepare for marriage. However, this doesn't just happen on its own. It takes intentionality on both sides to build relationships between singles and families. It will require some thought and some measure of sacrifice to make it happen, but the benefits to the Body and individuals can be tremendous. It can be as simple as a single person offering to help a family out on a Saturday morning. Or a family can invite some singles over to join in a family game night, or just join in a regular week-day dinner. There are endless possibilities, but it requires someone to be intentional and ask.

As relationships between singles and married people develop, perhaps a couple says, "Hey, have you considered asking out so-and-so?" Or maybe they'll say, "You know, if you want to avoid conflict in marriage, you might want to work on this particular bad habit." Or even, "Let's teach you how to change a diaper."

In addition to being mentored and gaining practical skills, singles are not helpless to move towards marriage, though many times they feel that way. Some practical suggestions:

1. Pray – How much we talk with a person about what matters to us demonstrates how much faith and trust we have in the person: so how much do you pray about marriage? Is your God big enough and good enough to answer?
2. Serve – Believers are called to serve within their local body just as a family member contributes to the family – personal (or organizational) ministry is not a substitute for being

a serving member of the local church. Serving is also a practical way to get to know others in the body, whether single or married, young or old. Give it a try.

3. “Marriage doesn’t just happen” – Both men and women can do things to take steps towards marriage. I.e. Looking attractive is not a sin, and asking someone to have coffee is not a marriage proposal. Guys, six words: “Would you like to grab coffee?”

This is far from comprehensive regarding how singles are doing within the Church and how the Church can help them, but hopefully it will spark a few discussions and some action. Let’s together ask God how we as a church can help singles move towards marriage.