Perspective on "the Gift of Singleness" [1]

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You have heard it before, especially if you *are* single, or have been for a long time: the "gift of singleness [2]". It should be treasured, appreciated, cherished. (While it lasts, of course!)

During one of the evening sessions of this year's Equip conference [3], the topic of singleness was raised. I sat half bemused as some of the delegates—some nearly a decade my junior—displayed their angst over their singleness. One person, in particular, was making an emotional plea for someone to explain to him what exactly this "gift of singleness" is, because it certainly does not feel like a gift. Indeed, at times it can certainly feel like a curse instead. That evening, many people wore their hearts on their sleeves, and bemusement gave way in me to empathy and concern.

A Right Perspective

We need to keep a few things in mind when using the language of "gift of singleness [4]". Gifts are not always wanted. Gifts are not always appreciated. The value of a gift is not always appreciated at first sight (or, in the worst case, ever). A gift can be a burden. When we hear the word "gift", our hearts leap as we imagine receiving what we desire. How often are we disappointed for no reason other than our own narcissism? Even if you do not want or like the gift, you should be thankful for it, and work at being a good steward of it. This applies to myself as well. So I understand how hard it is. It is unpalatable. It is God-given. It is not in vain.

A New Perspective

That evening, a friend shared another thought, which has been incredibly useful. Instead of waking up in the mornings and asking, "how am I going to appreciate my 'gift' today", it points us to a better way. And this perspective is found in the book of Lamentations, a book which bares a people gripped by heartache, loss and abandonment:

> The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases;
> His mercies never come to an end;
> they are new every morning;
> great is your faithfulness.
>
> Lamentations 3:22–23 (ESV)

A Deeper Problem

Perhaps, I realised that evening, the problem was not only singleness, but loneliness [5]. What an indictment, what a charge is it against the church—the body of the bride of Christ itself—if you can fill a room with people all struggling with a deep seated loneliness? Especially in a denomination which, I have speculated for a long time, houses many introverts. Culture tells us that a partner and spouse should fill that gap but, alas, that is not always the reality: a relationship can also be lonely and isolating, for various reasons.

I do hope, and pray, that the church will realise that there exists a serious need inside of it.

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