



More Americans Rethink Marriage, Singleness

The Wired Word for the Week of May 24, 2026

In the News

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Americans are getting married later than at any point in recorded history. While the median age at first marriage for men was 22.5 years in 1956, today it is 30.8 years. The shift for women went from 20.1 years in 1956 up to 28.4 years in 2026.

This represents an increase of 8.3 years for both genders over the past seven decades and reflects a global trend toward viewing singleness as well as marriage as a valid lifestyle option. Two in five adults in the United States are single today.

According to Barna's August 2024 survey of more than 3,500 adults, "The State of Today's Family," 74% of Gen Z adults (those born between 1999 and 2015) believe they can have fulfilling lives without kids and 67% said marriage is critical for raising children in a stable environment.

The U.S. Census Bureau reported that five decades ago, 66% of U.S. households consisted of married couples, while only 47% fit that description in December 2025. Today, 50% of adults in the United States are unmarried.

As of 2023, the last data available from Pew Research Center, there were about 111 million single adults ages 18 and up in the United States, a big jump from 70 million in 1990.

Opinion columnist David Brooks, in his commentary, ["We're Living Through the Great Detachment,"](#) says he sees this development as part of a larger movement toward detachment from commitment to relationships, seen in declining birthrates, disaffection with religion and the body politic, increasing loneliness as people report having fewer friends, and decreased involvement in community organizations.

People delay or opt out of marriage completely for a variety of reasons. Many no longer feel social pressure to marry young. Some choose cohabitation before or rather than marriage. Some want to pursue educational and career goals to bolster their earning potential in the hope of reducing money-related stress later in life. Others may be concerned about whether they and their intended partner are prepared to do the work necessary to maintain a relationship over the long haul. They may not have grown up in healthy families, and consequently, aren't sure they know how to build one of their own. The high cost of living, financial instability and job insecurity make marriage seem unattainable for many.

The hunger for romance and intimacy remains, but disappointment and what seems like a shrinking pool of attractive partner prospects have caused many to become disillusioned with the dating scene.

In 2023, Alia Rose Ginevra, a 22-year-old classical singer from Richmond Hill, Ontario, wrote, "From how I see it, Gen Z ... is generally risk averse. ... I believe that this aversion to risk will seep into Gen Z delaying or outright avoiding saying 'I do.'"

On the other hand, she wrote, "there is also a faction of Gen Z that anticipate marriage for the stability. ... we're already tired of the dating culture ... and ... we crave real commitment."

Dr. Wendy D. Manning of the National Center for Family and Marriage Research says, "Marriage is still hugely regarded. I think we value marriage so much that we want to wait until we're really set. We want to make sure we have all the right resources in place before we begin."

On the plus side, singleness may offer a kind of freedom to seek personal fulfillment, career development and spontaneity many view as impossible to achieve in marriage and parenthood. Peter McGraw, 55, an unmarried behavioral scientist who hosts the podcast "Solo: The Single Person's Guide to a Remarkable Life," wrote of joining "the solo movement, where being single isn't just tolerated, it's celebrated. Not less than, not better, just a different path filled with opportunities to live remarkably."

"The future is about options, not prescriptions," McGraw says. "So let's toast to a world that honors both the choice to settle down or go solo."

More on this story can be found at these links:

[New Data Sheds Light on Gen Z's Majorly Shifting Views on Marriage. *Faithwire*](#)

[Marriage Statistics 2026: Divorce Rates, Age Trends & Key Facts. *South Denver Therapy*](#)

[Why Marriage, for So Many, Is Less Appealing Than Ever. *The New York Times*](#)

Applying the News Story

Pastor John Lee points out that God observed, "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18). Yet Paul tells unmarried people that "it is good for them to remain unmarried, as I am" (1 Corinthians 7:8). So is one marital status better than another? Lee then quotes another passage, where it says, "[E]very perfect gift is from above" (James 1:17), and says that "Paul could certainly add, 'even your singleness.'" Use the news to review how people can serve God, whatever their marital status.

The Big Questions

1. Do you see the shifting attitudes regarding marriage and singleness as a positive or a negative development? Explain your position.
2. How might unmarried believers best use their gift of singleness in service to our Lord and the work of the kingdom of God?
3. How can married couples serve God best through their marital relationship?
4. What challenges do Christian singles face that may not be as much of a concern for married people? How might married couples support singles as they seek to follow Jesus?
5. What limitations may Christian couples face that singles don't have to deal with to the same degree? How might singles support married couples in their efforts to faithfully follow Christ?

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Proverbs 18:22

He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the LORD. (No context needed.)

We don't know much about the person who penned these words. How long might he or she have searched for a partner? How hard was the search? Or was this written as a word of advice for a son, to encourage him in his pursuit of a worthy woman to become his mate?

Questions: What makes the search for a spouse challenging today? What happens when singles don't bother to search, and just expect God to drop a suitable partner in their laps? What happens when singles leave God out of the equation altogether, and follow hormonal urges alone? What makes finding a wife (or husband, for that matter) a good thing, and how does finding such a person lead to obtaining favor from the Lord?

1 Corinthians 7:28, 32-34

But if you marry, you do not sin, and if a virgin marries, she does not sin. Yet those who marry will experience distress in the flesh, and I would spare you that. ... I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord, but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman and the virgin are anxious about the affairs of the Lord, so that they may be holy in body and spirit, but the married woman is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please her husband. (For context, read [1 Corinthians 7:1-9, 25-40](#).)

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians about marriage and singleness, he made clear that he was expressing his opinion, not laying down a law that everyone had to follow (v. 25). While he personally preferred singleness, he taught that "each has a particular gift from God" (v. 7), some for singleness and others for marriage.

"Valuing singleness doesn't diminish the value or dignity of marriage," wrote Kelly Simpson in ["Value Singleness Without Devaluing Marriage."](#) Simpson added, "Paul wrote both 1 Corinthians 7 and Ephesians 5. He can exalt the

value of marriage and express his preference for singleness. ... God is bigger than our marital status. He sanctifies some through marriage and others without a spouse. ... One state isn't inherently holier than the other. ... You can use your time, talents, and treasures for yourself or for others both in singleness and in marriage."

Furthermore, Simpson asserted, "Singleness and marriage present theological truths that together give a fuller, more beautiful picture of the gospel." Simpson explained that Christian singles can depict "the sufficiency of Christ's work" because, having no earthly partner on whom to depend, they may be quicker to turn to Jesus when in need.

Advantages of singleness for followers of Christ, according to [John Lee](#), include greater focus, flexibility and freedom: the ability to focus on Jesus and doing his will "without distraction," the flexibility and mobility to respond to calls to service more readily, without having to check with our spouse or family calendar, and the freedom from anxieties and worries that come to those in committed relationships.

Questions: Why does Paul encourage people to think twice before getting married? What about singleness makes it a gift? What does singleness offer that marriage doesn't?

Ephesians 5:25, 29-33

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ... For no one ever hates his own flesh, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, because we are members of his body. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a great mystery, but I am speaking about Christ and the church. Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband. (For context, read [Ephesians 5:18-33](#)).

Here Paul says Christian marriage depicts the union between Christ and the church. God wants spouses to love and serve each other, just as Jesus cared for his disciples, even washing their feet (John 13). Expressing concern for one another and being attentive to each other's needs in the context of a marriage and family are sacred ways of living out what it means to follow Jesus.

Questions: In what ways does marriage reflect the beauty of God's covenant love? How might a healthy marriage serve as an instructive analogy of the relationship between Christ and the church?

Matthew 22:29-30

Jesus answered them, "You are wrong because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection people neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like angels of God in heaven." (For context, read [Matthew 22:23-33](#).)

Once some religious leaders who didn't believe in the resurrection brought a hypothetical question to Jesus about what would happen to a woman who married seven brothers, one after another, becoming a widow (seven times!) after each one died. She had no children, and finally she died as well. The Sadducees wanted to know whose wife she would be in the resurrection.

Jesus knew his inquisitors didn't believe in the resurrection. We don't have time to consider that issue in this lesson, but will focus on what Jesus said about marriage. The Sadducees seemed to think that the unnamed woman, who was passed from one brother to another in this life, would be treated the same way in the afterlife, if indeed there were such a thing.

But in God's kingdom, people are not property! As glorious as earthly marriages can be, they aren't God's end goal. The marriage of Jesus and his

bride, the people of God, is God's aim. All of us, whether married or single, anticipate the wedding banquet of our loving Lord with eagerness.

Questions: Can you even imagine what life would be like without the institution of earthly marriage? How do you think we would relate to each other without that framework?

For Further Discussion

1. Amber Lapp, co-investigator of the Love and Marriage in Middle America Project, asked in her article, ["Can Marriage Bridge the Sex Divide,"](#) "How do we solve a problem of distrust so widespread that it's seeped into the marrow of society? ... What old norms might be reinforced, or what new norms might we forge in order to build the kind of social structure that can help young men and women to do the brave commonplace: fall in love, marry, have children, and sustain and let themselves be sustained by these bonds?" Discuss.

2. Pastor Mike Novotny, author of the new book, *Newlywed: A Christian Guide for Loving Year One*, said he and his wife married when they were both 22, at an age when they could "be young together, get [their] first home together, learn how to do chores together, learn how to make a budget together." If they had waited until they had established greater independence, he said he thought it would have been harder to compromise. Marrying when they did gave them "the opportunity to grow together," Novotny added.

If you have been married, at what age did you wed? What were the pluses and minuses of getting married when you did?

3. So far as we know, neither Jesus nor Paul was married. Their singleness allowed them to focus more intently on the work of spreading the gospel. If

you are an unmarried follower of Jesus, how are you using your period of singleness? What is the focus of your life?

4. "Singleness can feel like the participation trophy in the game of life. The default for the relationally dismayed. The 'gift' no one asked for," wrote Pastor John Lee in [Single but Not Lonely: Living Well While Unmarried](#). "All of us experience singleness. And even for those who do marry, more than half will be single again. God cares about our unmarried years. He desires all of us to make the most of them. So what steps can we take to steward these years well?" Respond.

Responding to the News

Consider how you can spend time with people whose marital status differs from yours. What can you learn from them? What do you bring to the table that might be beneficial to them?

Prayer

Creator God, who made us for relationship with yourself and with one another, guide us in our interactions with people, whether we are single or married. Help us always to treat others with kindness and respect, that joy and love may increase and bring healing to a hurting world. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

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