

SINGLENES: The Misunderstood World Of Single Adults

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What is it like to be single in today's complex and changing world? Singleness is often portrayed as a carefree life of glamour and adventure. But is it really like that? What's it like to be single in the 2000s? Adult singles themselves are not always sure.

Statistics tell us that more than 47 percent of all adults in the US are single. We suspect that the new singleness deeply impacts the church. And we know that the world of singleness is often misunderstood.

Dave Egner, who has a heart for adult singles, has written this booklet to take us into their unique world and, with the help of the Bible, to bring some understanding.

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SINGLENESS TODAY

It's Saturday night—date night for many singles. Ken, a 29-year-old computer analyst who lives in Toronto, knows where the action is and that's where he's headed. He's looking for a girl and a good time. He's also hoping for something special that will lead to a satisfying long-term relationship. He goes out almost every Saturday night. Perhaps tonight that lasting relationship will begin.

Jill, a 33-year-old graphic designer who lives in Kansas City, is attending a concert with a new male friend. She'll go slowly, though, because she's been through all this before. Jill watches her diet and works out at the health center. She is attractive and smart. But no relationship has "clicked," and she

sometimes wonders if there's something wrong with her. She chooses not to date as often as she used to, but deep inside she still hopes to find someone.

Across town, 28-year-old Debra is also getting ready to go out. She is actively looking for a husband, and her datebook is always full. "Finding a husband is my parttime job," she says. "I sell clothing during the week, and on the weekend I look for a man."

But Saturday night is not date night for every adult single. Steve, for example, prefers to stay home, prepare his own gourmet dinner, and strum his classical guitar.

Sandra, a 32-year-old single parent, doesn't have time to go out. Her husband deserted her after their second child was born, and the divorce was final a year ago. Sandra has sole responsibility for herself and

her girls, ages 4 and 1. Her job, the children, cooking, and laundry leave her with little energy and even less money. On Saturday night she rents a movie, eats popcorn, and crashes.

For Marguerite, it's a night for memories. She and Frank had enjoyed so many wonderful Saturday nights together and with friends. But after 43 years of marriage his weak heart finally stopped. Now she's alone. Oh, she goes out to dinner with friends sometimes, and gets together to play Yahtzee, but mostly she is content to be alone.

For James, a retired preacher, it's a night to look forward to. He knows that one of his children will call and ask if he can babysit his grandchildren while Mom and Dad go out for the evening. His grandchildren love his jovial spirit, his hearty

laugh, and his entertaining stories. Besides, when they play games they always win. Being with the grandkids helps James to get over losing his wife, whom he loved so deeply.

Singleness includes people of all ages and stations in life. They may be 22 or 38 or 67. They are engineers and chefs and typesetters and convenience store clerks and executives and salespersons. They drive Escorts, pickup trucks, old Chevys, and Lincolns. They wear Nikes and wingtips, Calvin Kleins and Levis. They shop at Saks Fifth Avenue and K-Mart.

Some of these singles offer a multitude of gifts and talents and experiences. Many of them are carrying deep hurt and going through intense struggles. Few match the media stereotypes.

And chances are, they are misunderstood.

A MISUNDERSTOOD WORLD

Many factors contribute to the misunderstanding of singleness today. Two that deserve special attention are the media and the church.

I. Media

Misrepresentation. The media, in conjunction with high-impact marketers, presents an inaccurate caricature of singleness. Television and magazine ads often portray singles as shallow, pleasure-seeking, impulsive, and materialistic. They show them as flitting from one relationship to another amid an endless round of parties, good times, and hedonistic experiences. Even a casual observer can see the connection between that kind of image and the high-ticket products these advertisers want single adults to spend their money on.

While this profile does describe many single adults, it is an exaggerated view. Being single does not automatically mean that someone is extravagant, self-centered, or promiscuous. Being single today involves asking hard questions about life and looking for answers that work. But singles are not finding them in the mixed messages of the media. On one hand, they are encouraged to follow a free-spending, drink-it-up, sexually unrestrained lifestyle. But on the other, they are warned about the dire consequences of financial excess, drunk driving, and AIDS. It reveals a misunderstanding—and some manipulation.

2. Church

Insensitivities. The church is equally at fault when it is not sensitive to the struggles of today's single. It's important to recognize that single adults

are the same sensitive human beings as anyone else, with similar joys, hurts, cares, and need for God and His people. They come to the church for God, for fellowship, and for a sense of family. And they expect to find more love and concern among believers than they get in their workplace and society. But all too often, single adults tell about experiences like these:

Jane, who is 31 and never married, agreed to be a bridesmaid for a younger friend. She dreads going to the church shower because these are the kinds of comments she'll hear:

- "I've been noticing that new guy Kevin. Have you tried to make friends with him? He looks so lonely. He needs a girl like you."
- "You've got your sights set too high. Time to lower them. After all, you're 31 aren't you? The odds are turning against you."

- "Well, we're all waiting. When's it going to be your turn to be the bride?"

Remarks like that add to feelings of inadequacy and inferiority. And they hurt—even though they may not be intentional.

Brian is 34. He finished his schooling a number of years ago and is working for a military aircraft contractor. He capably heads a department that has 32 employees and he programs anti-missile guidance systems for F-18 jet fighters. He has a good sense of humor and is one of the first to volunteer for church work projects. He has generously given of himself on two short-term mission trips. But when some of the men decide to get together for an early breakfast, a round of golf, or an occasional Canadian fishing trip, Brian's name is overlooked. For some

reason, the married guys don't even consider him. If you asked them, they'd say they just don't think they have that much in common with Brian. After all, he has his own single friends.

A similar problem develops when nominations are taken for the church board. Married men without children are readily considered. But no one has ever really talked about whether Paul's qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 rule out singles.

Marcie, an attractive 27-year-old divorced woman with a child, was feeling that she must have leprosy. Sunday after Sunday she ended up sitting in church alone. It was quite a while before she "overheard" this loudly whispered comment: "I'm not going to let her take my husband away from me!"

The church has a great opportunity to reach into the world of adult singles with

the gospel of grace, a message of hope, and warm family acceptance. But for

"When we are blessed by God, we are in a sense self-contained; that is, our happiness does not come from circumstances, or by accident, or through diligent search. It comes because we stand approved before the Creator of the universe."

Haddon Robinson

the most part it's not trying. Singleness remains, in all too many churches, a misunderstood and unconsidered world.

THE PATH TO UNDERSTANDING

Many of today's television shows portray the changing place of singles in society. Although they are often exaggerated and obviously fictional, they do show flashes of the real world of single adults today. Beneath the casual intensity, sexual allusions, and persona of confidence are very real emotions and needs that are part of singleness. Loneliness, hardness, discontentment, insecurity, brittleness, desire, and fear are all covered by a mask of self-sufficiency and composure.

One woman in her thirties, who could have been speaking for many singles when she responded to some questions about being unmarried, said, "I love my career. I adore my apartment and my friends.

I'm basically content. But deep inside I have a desire to be part of something bigger than myself. Sometimes I feel so wrapped up in my own world. I guess I'm saying that I'd like to be part of a family."

Single adults need to be a part of a family. And the church can help to provide for that need. Unfortunately, there are certain unseen barriers that hinder effective fellowship between single and married people in the church. These barriers are primarily due to misunderstandings about today's single life. The purpose of this booklet is to clear up some of these misunderstandings by:

- Getting The Facts
- Exploding The Myths
- Searching The Scriptures
- Facing The Issues



GETTING THE FACTS

As the number of single people continues to grow, it has an increasing impact on our society. Retailers, advertisers, housing developers, legal entities, government agencies, and the church are finding that they have to consider the concerns of adult singles more than ever.

In Western society, more than 40 percent of the adult population is single. Think of it—at the minimum, 4 out of every 10 adult Americans, Canadians, and Europeans are single!

These singles fall into four categories:

- Never married
- Divorced

- Separated
- Widowed

Of these single adults, more than 60 percent have never married. The percentage of divorced or separated is 25 percent, and 15 percent are widowed. Some say the fastest growing segment is those who decide to separate but do not divorce.

These adult singles are impacting society as never before. They have enormous buying power, with their total spending estimated at over \$400 billion per year. This greatly influences the marketing techniques of those who sell automobiles, clothing, beverages, and sports equipment.

The entertainment industry, fitness centers, ski resorts, and other enterprises are directing more and more of their ad dollars to singles. Some restaurants and bars appeal

to singles exclusively.

Today's single adults are more self-analytical and introspective than those of the past. They are taking the time to know themselves. They are looking at the multiple options society offers them before making life commitments—vocational, marital, or residential. One woman said, "We are the first 'wait and see' generation of singles."

More single people are choosing not to marry, more single women are purchasing homes and adopting babies (or having their own), and more professional singles are turning to dating services to help them find companionship. They have turned it into a multimillion dollar business.

Statistics indicate the growing place adult singles have in today's world. The

following figures are taken from the 2000 US census:

- 47.2% of all households are headed by singles.
- 31% of all households with children are headed by a single adult.
- 31.3% of all adult men and 25.1% of all adult women have never married.
- 25.5% of all adults live alone.
- 20.4% of single adult women and 5.6% of single adult men are widowed.
- 6% of married adults are not living with their spouse.

Another factor is important in understanding singleness today. In 1970 the median age for women getting married was 20.8 years of age; in 2000 it was 25.1. For men in 1970 it was 23.2; in 2000 it was 26.8. An increasing number of men and women are choosing to live together

before marriage, and at a younger age than those who marry. When those who chose to “play house” do marry, they have a significantly higher incidence of divorce than those who did not. This seems to indicate that the primary argument given for cohabitation—to avoid divorce—is not valid.

Another interesting fact is that singleness is concentrated in urban areas. For example, 61 percent of the people who live in the city of Chicago are single. When they marry, they move away from “where the action is” to the suburbs.

How about singleness among Christians? In a survey taken by Carolyn Koons and Michael J. Anthony (*Single Adult Passages*, Baker, 1991), 1,300 Christian single adults were asked about the advantages and

disadvantages of singleness. They indicated that the following *advantages* of singleness, in order, were:

Women

1. Mobility and freedom
2. Time for interests
3. Social life in general
4. Privacy

Men

1. Mobility and freedom
2. Time for interests
3. Privacy
4. Social life in general

The *disadvantages* of being single were:

Women

1. Loneliness
2. Financial insecurity
3. Self-centeredness
4. Restrictions on sex life

Men

1. Loneliness
2. Restrictions on sex life
3. Self-centeredness
4. The dating grind

The point of listing all these facts and statistics is

to get a better context for understanding the world of single adults in today's church—those adult single men and women who identify themselves as followers of Jesus Christ. They are more apt to be looking for moral and spiritual peace and direction. Many of them are serious about knowing the Bible, walking in the Spirit, and pleasing the Lord Jesus in their jobs, their leisure time, and their social activities. They need the fellowship, interaction, and encouragement that can come only from other members of the body of Christ—both married and single.



EXPLODING THE MYTHS

Singleness today is misunderstood in part because of some myths about single adults that are accepted as facts. A second step to clearing away the misunderstandings about singleness is to identify and reject some of those wrong assumptions. These myths are not just believed by married people about singleness, but also by singles about married life. Let's look at several of them.

MYTH #1: Singles are more unfulfilled than married people.

Marriage is not the basis for a fulfilled life. Fulfillment

comes from a close relationship with Christ. Many of today's singles know that marriage does not carry with it a guarantee of happiness and fulfillment. One reason people give for staying single or delaying marriage

The only true guarantee of happiness has little to do with marriage or singleness and everything to do with being obedient to the will of God.

is that they saw their parents go through a divorce and they know the pain it produces. They also hear horror stories from their friends who married young, and they are waiting

until they feel they can make a mature choice for a lifelong mate.

In addition, an unmarried person today has a wide range of choices for a fulfilled life apart from marriage. Women especially have educational, vocational, and financial opportunities that were not available a few decades ago. Women and men are choosing to find fulfillment through employment or service to society or other ways that bring them into relationships with people.

Married people need to be aware that some of the single men and women sitting next to them in church can choose to remain single and be just as fulfilled as those who are married.

MYTH #2: Marriage solves all the problems of singleness. The reality is that marriage brings with it many new problems.

Even at best, two people who marry can expect a period of marital adjustment. The first few years can be filled with turbulence as they go through the period of communication and compromise—no matter how well they thought they knew each other. “Moonlight and roses” becomes “daylight and dishes,” and the adjustment, as any married couple will attest to, continues for a lifetime.

God never promised anyone a life without pressure or difficulty. Everyone must learn to grow in relationships. The thing to remember is that the better a person can manage life as a single, the better chance that person will have of establishing a successful marriage relationship.

MYTH #3: Marriage is God’s highest calling

for men and women.

Some contented married adults today may sincerely believe that a single person could not possibly be living a fulfilled, satisfying life. This concept is fostered by a couples-centered society. The Bible, however, does *not* teach that marriage is a higher calling than singleness.

Consider Jesus’ words to His disciples in Matthew 19. In response to Jesus’ teaching about divorce, the disciples said, “If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry” (v.10). Jesus replied:

Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can

accept this should accept it (vv.11-12 NIV).

In other words, not everyone can or should be single, but those who can, should. In 1 Corinthians 7, the apostle Paul added:

I wish that all men were [single] even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that. But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord. But he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he may please his wife (vv.7-8,32-33).

While it's true that the majority of people get married, it's actually a higher calling to be single "for the kingdom of heaven."

MYTH #4: Singles struggle with loneliness more than married people.

There's no question about it:

Loneliness is a major element of singleness.

The survey cited on page 10 indicated that loneliness is one of the major disadvantages of being single. But it's not accurate to assume that all adult singles struggle with loneliness more than married people do. A recent study identified young wives, college students, the elderly, and prisoners as being among the most lonely people in society.

In reality, singleness gives ample opportunity to be with people and create strong friendships. One 26-year-old single said, "Find a good friend. That's the best thing if you're single." She's right. Adult singles can form strong networks of friends of all ages that can help

them face times of loneliness.

A 35-year-old single man said, however, that it became increasingly difficult for him to develop strong male friendships as he grew older. That's because eventually his friends would find a woman they liked, date, then marry. His friends always promised that they would maintain the friendship after the wedding, but it seldom happened. The loss of a good friend can be like losing someone in death. This man got tired of the mourning.

Sometimes, single adults (especially those who have been previously married) are seen as threats by those who are married. For example, a divorced woman may be treated coldly by some of the married women in the church because they view her as a threat to their marriage. These women simply do not realize that

singleness can include strong friendships, and that taking someone else's spouse is probably the farthest thing from the single person's mind.

It is possible, and even healthy, for couples to befriend singles. Strong guidelines of propriety and communication must be followed, of course, and the result can make life richer for everyone.

MYTH #5: Singles have more time and money than married people. Some adult singles do have more discretionary time and income than their married counterparts. But many singles are kept extremely busy by family, friends, and church commitments. And some singles who choose to purchase their own homes will probably have less discretionary income than married people with two incomes.

Further, when the single person is divorced or widowed and there are children involved, expenses can be overwhelming. Many single mothers do not have job training or experience, and they face the additional burden of child-care costs.

In terms of spare time, a single mom has almost no time for herself. Widows may find every minute filled with responsibilities they are not used to. And the never-marrieds can fill their lives with family, friendships, and meaningful activity. In other words, busy people are going to be busy regardless of their marital status.

MYTH #6: Singles are more self-centered than married people.

This myth is based on the belief that single people do not marry because they want to spend their income on themselves and be free

to do whatever they want whenever they want. While that is true of some singles, the fact is that all adults can choose to live selfishly, married or single, and all too many do.

The advertisers don't help. Those singles who buy into a carefree, high-flying, materialistic and hedonistic lifestyle, committing themselves to expensive cars and pampering themselves, are headed for disappointment.

*Where would the
cause of missions
be without the
adult single?*

Many adult singles are selfless, giving people, inside and outside the Christian community. Much volunteer work is done in hospitals and other

agencies by widows and other adult singles. Where would the cause of missions be without the adult single? How many singles are in your church orchestra? Your choir? The staff of your Sunday school and children's programs? These volunteers are certainly not selfish. They're wonderful examples of those who faithfully serve their church and community.

MYTH #7: Singles are more sexually frustrated than married people.

When Koons and Anthony surveyed Christian adult singles, they discovered the following issues to be ranked above sexual frustration:

- (1) proper entertainment,
- (2) managing money,
- (3) making good friends, and
- (4) raising children.

True, some singles are promiscuous, but so are some marrieds. Married

adults are subject to sexual frustration too. But both married and single people have to learn how to control this part of their lives.

Singleness means susceptibility to certain temptations, especially the way society sends sexually charged signals today. Married people are receiving those same signals. One of the important challenges for the church is to help its entire adult congregation deal with the sexual pressure of today's world.

Myth #8: Singles can't lead as effectively as married people. This myth probably arises out of an interpretation of the qualifications for church leadership in 1 Timothy 3. Paul stated that church elders and deacons must be husbands of one wife (vv.2,12) and it's assumed that they have children (vv.4,12). This probably is a

restriction against unfaithful husbands and irresponsible fathers. But even if it is thought to disqualify single men from these two offices, that doesn't mean singles can't lead effectively in other areas. What about Jesus? And what about the leadership ability of one of the greatest leaders of the Christian church, the apostle Paul?

Married people are often placed in positions of leadership over adult singles. But singleness does not automatically mean immaturity and irresponsibility—just as marriage doesn't mean maturity. Adult singles can lead, and they do it very well.

These eight myths contribute to a misunderstanding of singleness in today's society. They need to be replaced by the truth of God's Word.



SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

A third way to understand singleness is to search the Scriptures. The Bible gives some direct teaching to the issue of adult singles (1 Cor. 7 for example). But most of what it tells us about the subject is spoken through the *example* of godly single adults, who include no less than the apostle Paul and Jesus Christ Himself.

The Old Testament.

Adam was the first adult single. God placed him in a lovely garden, provided him with meaningful activity, and gave him the privilege of divine companionship. But something was missing—human relationship. “It is

not good that man should be alone,” God said (Gen. 2:18). Man needed relationship and interaction with his own kind, so God created for him Eve, who was a perfect match.

Genesis 2:18 has been misapplied by some to teach that it's God's will for everyone to have a mate. The verse has been used against singleness as a lifestyle and to pressure men and women to marry. “After all,” they say, “the Bible says it's not good for man or woman to be alone.” They imply that a man or woman who chooses not to marry is out of the will of God and headed for trouble.

But before Eve was created, Adam was alone in a way that no other single human being is alone today (Gen. 3:8). God gave him Eve, not only for companionship but also for procreation. Before they

sinned, they were given the command to fill the earth (Gen. 1:28). Marriage was ordained by God and essential for the race and for Adam.

Does that mean marriage is mandatory for every human being? Does that mean marriage is God's will for everyone? No. To imply that, or to say that singles are incomplete, is to misunderstand the verse and to create guilt and anxiety in those who choose singleness. It also ignores the teachings of Paul and Jesus.

The passage does, however, underscore our need for relationship. It was not good for Adam to be alone. God Himself made that observation. He created us to be with and enjoy other human beings—and He gave Eve, a suitable companion, to Adam to make that possible.

The story of Noah has been similarly misapplied. People have pointed out that because only pairs of animals were taken into the ark, and because only couples were saved from the flood, God honors marriage above singleness.

This passage should not be taken as a mandate that all should marry. God was rewarding Noah's uprightness by saving him and his family. His sons happened to be married. Couples were essential for the earth to be repopulated (Gen. 8:17). So God spared their wives and them. But again, because that was the case with Noah and his family, it does not mean it applies to everyone.

The Old Testament gives us some examples of godly adult singles that speak volumes to singleness today and in every age. Consider Joseph, whose conduct in Egypt as an adult single

was exemplary (Gen. 37-41:44).

Look at Elijah, a bold and dedicated prophet of God who stared down the likes of Ahab and his prophets.

Look at Daniel, who was highly respected as a man of God. He was a governmental leader for many years during the exile in Babylon. Numerous prophecies were revealed through him.

Look at Hagar, a single mother. She and her child were taken care of by the Lord.

Look at Naomi, a resourceful widow who followed the Lord and cared for her daughter-in-law.

Look at Ruth, who showed faith, courage, and loyalty as an adult single.

Yes, the Old Testament gives stirring examples of how the Lord strategically used adult singles to do His work. He showed no

partiality to married people, and there is no hint that He considered adult singles to be of any less value in His eyes.

The New Testament. The New Testament gives additional insight into God's mind regarding singleness. Consider the teachings of Christ and Paul.

In His important discourse about divorce, the Lord Jesus said that singleness is a gift from God (Mt. 19:11-12). A person who marries is to leave his or her parents and remain married (vv.5-6), but the person who remains single does not carry the pressures and responsibilities of marriage.

An adult single looking for a model needs look no further than to Jesus, who obeyed the Father in everything He did (Jn. 15:10). Even though He was God, in His humanity

He was our example (1 Cor. 11:1). His selflessness, His compassion, His purity, and His contentment with doing the will of God in everything are especially relevant to singleness today.

In his first letter to the believers at Corinth (see chapter 7), Paul clarified and expanded on what the Lord Jesus said. What Paul taught about singleness may be summarized as follows:

- Singleness can be a gift from God (v.7).
 - A married person is concerned about serving God and pleasing a spouse (vv.26-35).
 - Celibacy brings the freedom to serve God unencumbered (vv.32-35).
 - Unmarried persons can develop a deep relationship with God because they have fewer distractions (v.35).
- Some New Testament

singles we can study and admire are the sisters who were good friends of Jesus—Mary and Martha—along with their brother Lazarus. The sisters were as different as night and day, yet both served Christ faithfully and were His good and loyal friends.

Mary Magdalene was an adult single with a past, and her devotion to Jesus was unquestioned.

Paul gave his life in complete dedication to the gospel. He suffered unbelievable hardship as he went into Europe with the story of Christ. Could he have done it as a married person? Probably not. As a single he was free to do the great pioneer work of taking the gospel to the Gentile world.

The biblical teaching about singleness can be summarized by the following statements:

1. We need one another.

We need companionship and relationships—whether single or married.

2. God accepts and respects singleness. Nothing in the Bible indicates that a person who chooses not to marry has any less worth than a person who marries.
3. Singleness has advantages for the person who wants to give his or her life to God's service.
4. God gives wonderful gifts. One of them is the ability and choice to be single for many years or for a lifetime.
5. God is all-sufficient. His sufficiency sustains the adult single. It's okay to want to be married, but it's far more important, single or married, to lean on the sufficiency of Christ and walk in obedience to Him.



FACING THE ISSUES

Now that we have looked at the facts and some myths about singleness in today's society, and we have examined the Scriptures, we are ready to identify and speak to the primary concerns adult singles are facing today. What are the struggles? The pressures? The needs? And what can be done to produce understanding and acceptance? If you are single, here are two principles to follow in facing the issues of your singleness.

Principle 1: Accept Your Singleness. It's not a sin to be single. A man or woman is free to choose

singleness and should find full acceptance by the community and the church. An increasing number of adults are choosing to remain single. Others have been left single by an unwanted divorce or the untimely death of a spouse. Singles must work in cooperation with married people to remove any barriers of prejudice or fear that might hinder acceptance.

Look around you. Think about the place where you work, your neighborhood, your church. How many adult singles can you identify? One pastor was amazed to discover that 28 percent of his children's workers and 33 percent of his adult choir were singles.

You may be dealing with deep and painful issues. If you have never married, you may have experienced a number of disappointments and you

may have a dismal self-image. If widowed, you may still feel deep sadness, and you may need help to work through your grief. If you are divorced, your dreams have been shattered and you may have been rejected. Perhaps your trust and love have been betrayed. You may be facing crushing financial burdens, especially if you have the children, and you may have housing needs. You are probably working through difficult emotional issues. If you are a single parent—managing a household while working and rearing children alone—you probably feel unbelievable tension and anxiety. If you are separated, it may be because you could no longer take the physical and emotional abuse you or the children were subjected to again and again.

You know all too well

that you're not perfect. You've made mistakes and you fear that you may make them again. You need the solace and grace and help that only God can give. He gives it, but in large measure it comes through His people. You need people of God who are willing to accept you where you are. You need to be free to grow from that point. Sure, you'll have to make yourself vulnerable. Sure, you'll have to let some people enter into your pain. It will take patience and love and understanding and, most of all, being accepted for who you are right now.

You need to find a church where people make an effort to open their arms and hearts and accept you as you are—without prejudice or suspicion. Help them form small groups for grief recovery or single parents or divorce

recovery. Encourage them to offer social activities that welcome singles into fellowship with married couples, and to give them opportunities to serve the Lord with their God-given gifts.

It would be wonderful if you could see your church as a sanctuary—a place of safety and healing and service to God. Singles need to be welcomed in, not legislated out by suspicious attitudes or legalistic, nonbiblical limitations.

You may have trouble accepting yourself as a single. You may let attitudes around you undermine your confidence and sense of self-worth.

Stop! Don't let yourself feel inferior or incomplete! As we have seen, it's okay to choose not to marry or remarry. Yours is not an "alternate lifestyle." So you're widowed or divorced, or you've been forced to

separate. God is willing to accept you where you are and go from there. You should be willing to do the same. No apologies!

Principle 2: Face Up To Your Needs.

Singleness carries with it certain needs. You have to face those needs and not dodge them. We will look at six of them: a sense of purpose, loneliness, sexuality, contentment, service, and ministry.

1. A Sense Of Purpose.

As an adult single, you may be struggling with seeing God's purpose for singleness. You may have put your life on hold until Mr. Right or Miss Wonderful comes along. You say to yourself, "When I get married I'll become serious about God," or, "After I'm married I'll look for a steady job and get out of debt." "After marriage I'll purchase a home." So you are wandering aimlessly,

waiting for something to happen.

You must see the importance of formulating a strong life-plan right now. Set realistic and specific personal goals. Some of those goals should be spiritual. It's wise and necessary to forge ahead with life—to get established in the church and community, to move ahead with a career, to purchase a home. The Bible makes it clear that we are all to be watchful (1 Tim. 4:16), to make good use of our time (Eph. 5:16), to use our gifts for the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31). Seek opportunities for growth and service to Christ. Form and follow a clear and satisfying life-plan.

2. Loneliness. Billy Graham once said that loneliness is the greatest problem facing humanity today. Two recent national surveys identified loneliness

as the number one issue in singleness. It ranked ahead of managing time, for example, and sexual issues. Closely linked is the need for companionship and intimacy. You may be lonely because you're in school or have long hours of employment or shyness or the untimely loss of a mate. Face your loneliness and do something about it. Don't deny those feelings; acknowledge them, and take action.

You might begin by finding a church that has established a healthy atmosphere where friendships can develop. Look for opportunities to fellowship in smaller groups. Find a church that sees the importance of mutual trust and respect, privacy, toleration of differences, and realistic expectations of one another. You'll fit right in!

Help your church

become a safe place where single adults can risk making friends. At the same time, do not forget the advantages of solitude. Jesus went often to be alone. How many mothers would give anything for “a moment’s peace”?

Singleness gives you an opportunity for solitude.

You might also make friends with couples who have a healthy marriage. You need to learn about the struggles they face. At the same time, married people need exposure to you and your needs. If you can find a church where singles and marrieds can walk beside one another, bearing one another’s burdens and doing good to one another, your loneliness will be significantly eased.

But remember, the greatest deterrent to loneliness is an intimate relationship with Christ. No amount of involvement with

people will ever take the place of fellowship with God. When loneliness assails you, acknowledge your feelings to the Lord and draw close to Him. The apostle James said, “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you” (4:8).

3. Sexuality. As an adult single, you need solid biblical teaching about sexuality that takes your situation into account. Look for a church that does not accept the myth that all singles are living sexually frustrated lives, or that there “must be something wrong with them.” Rather, a wise church will reinforce healthy sexual attitudes for its entire congregation by:

- Standing up to the liberalization of sexual attitudes in today’s society.
- Showing what is wrong with the media’s view of sex and obsession with it.

- Differentiating between intimacy and sex.
- Realistically warning of the heartbreaking results of cohabitation.
- Teaching the biblical truth about human sexuality.

This last recommendation is of primary importance. But how can it be accomplished? Some of it can be done from the pulpit and in the Sunday school classroom. Seminar speakers, Christian videos, and discussions in appropriate small group settings are also effective.

The church can help in another, more painful way. When it learns that one of its singles has embarked on an unwise sexual relationship, it must have the love and courage to confront that person, lead him or her to repentance, then forgive and restore. Sure, it's difficult. The

church might lose that person. But single people, as well as the entire congregation, will know it's a church that really cares and means business spiritually.

*A lot of singles
yearn to be
married; a lot of
marrieds wish they
were single again.*

4. Contentment.

Contentment is a key issue of singleness. You may long for a mate. You yearn for children. You want affection and acceptance and love—just someone to hold you. You want a nice home in the suburbs, not a shared apartment.

Contentment is not a singles' issue exclusively. Everyone wrestles with

dissatisfaction and envy. The Bible teaches that contentment begins and ends with God (1 Tim. 6:6).

“Godliness with contentment is great gain.”
1 Timothy 6:6

Living by two key principles will help you deal with the issue of contentment. First, *contentment is not an end in itself*. No one can begin to let himself believe that he will be content if he purchases a certain sports car, achieves a certain rank, marries a certain woman, or earns a Ph.D. Those things simply do not guarantee contentment. Besides, before they are even achieved, the person has gone on to set new goals for contentment.

The second principle is

that *contentment is found in enjoying God*. Paul had the secret (Phil. 4:11-12). He said, in essence, that he could be content in prison or out, in rich garments or rags, surrounded by friends or alone. Why? Because for Paul, contentment was found in obeying and enjoying Christ.

It does us little good to live in the “if only’s” of life. How much better to find our contentment in God rather than in something we decide will make us happy! You must have the courage to ask yourself, “Have I ever thought that I should accept my circumstances as coming from a loving, caring, good God?”

You also need to train yourself to think more about the things you have than what you do not have. Remind yourself that “godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Tim. 6:6).

5. Service. Look for opportunities to serve. Avoid the tendency to seek respect and recognition as an unmarried person. Look instead for ways to help others see Christ at work in a godly single adult. Be an example and an advocate for others who tend to be overlooked in the church planning process.

***Singleness is not
a good reason
for inactivity or
uninvolvement.***

Karen, a single, was concerned about her church. It had a growing number of singles, and they were enjoying the teaching and fellowship of the church. But Karen felt more was needed. So she went to the pastor and expressed her feeling that

the singles needed to give as well as receive. This meeting led to a food distribution program that bonded the singles, brought blessing to the whole church, and helped the community.

6. Train For Discipleship And Ministry. Singleness is not a good reason for inactivity or uninvolvement. As a child of God, you can be actively involved in the ministry of your church and community. Get some leadership training. Connect with areas where you can serve—children’s work, music, drama, teaching, the elder or deacon board. You may even feel called to accept the chairmanship of a key committee or board. The Bible places no limits on what you can do in your church or the community.

A CHALLENGE TO SINGLES

If you're single, perhaps you're saying, "I wish my church would start a ministry for adult singles." Or you may be thinking, "All this sounds good, but it will never happen in my church."

Why not? Do you really know it won't happen? You may be the one God uses to increase the sensitivity in your local congregation to its singles. He may want you to take the lead in creating single awareness. More and more churches are ministering directly to singles. An increasing number are creating a staff position for a pastor to singles. Some excellent publications, available through most Christian bookstores, tell what is being done in some churches and give good advice for getting started

with a ministry to singles.

Even if your church is not large, you can do some things to bring more single people into your church and encourage an understanding ministry.

In a proper attitude and spirit, and after prayer and knowing you are led by the Spirit of God, begin by talking with the pastor or Christian education director. You might even go to the church board. Perhaps two or three of you could present your burden and ideas.

Indicate your need. Tell of your love for Christ and your desire to grow and reach others. Without criticizing or judging, offer some suggestions for getting started. Volunteer to serve on committees. Offer assistance in any way you can. That kind of action has led to a better singles' ministry in many churches, and it can in yours as well.

JESUS: FRIEND OF SINGLES

What kind of person are you? Athlete? Musician? Outdoorsman? Administrator and organizer? Computer whiz? Mystery reader? Automobile mechanic? Painter? Decorator? Volunteer?

And what about inside? Is your heart empty? Do you sometimes look at others and long for what they have? Is there an ache, a longing? Is your life definitely “on hold”?

Jesus Christ is the friend of singles. A single Himself, He walked through life with a sense of purpose and mission. It took Him to the cross, where He died for you. Sin is a universal problem. “All have sinned” (Rom. 3:23). Jesus died to pay the penalty for your sin. Start by inviting Him

into your life. Receive Him as your Savior.

But Jesus does more as the friend of singles than just save them. Perhaps you have trusted Him, but you still struggle with feelings of inadequacy, envy, frustration, and loneliness. A wonderful verse says, “Our sufficiency is from God” (2 Cor. 3:5). We have the assurance that Christ will give us all the grace we need to serve Him and live happily (see 2 Cor. 9:8; 12:9).

Make friends with the friend of singles. Trust Jesus. Put your hand in His hand. Draw His sufficiency into your heart and life. Give yourself to Him. You will discover that He is a friend who will never desert or betray you—a friend who will satisfy your heart’s deepest need.



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