

the **+**Helper

Singleness

Including:

Singles Serving
Back to Singleness
Singleness in the Church



Book Reviews and Church Reports from around the country

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Editorial

When you hear the word “singleness” I wonder what first comes into your mind? Maybe you have fond memories of a time when you felt carefree, had few responsibilities and enjoyed travelling round the world meeting new people and discovering new places. For some of you singleness may have been a time you passed through briefly, establishing your career and then moving on to marriage.

For others just entering your adult years you might be feeling perplexed and puzzled by the myriad of choices that you have in front of you, wondering just what your attitude to singleness should be. Perhaps you have been in your adult years for a while and are struggling with waiting around to find the “right” person.

Or maybe you find yourself suddenly single again as a result of divorce or widowhood and you feel overwhelmed by all the challenges and desperately miss the companionship of a life partner.

Down through the ages the Church has vacillated between promoting either the benefits of marriage or of singleness as being the best way to serve the Lord. In Old Testament times there was a heavy emphasis placed on the importance of marriage and producing an heir to carry on the family name. To not be married was considered catastrophic and to be barren was shameful.

When Jesus entered Jewish culture he shattered many cultural expectations and prejudices. Jesus taught that salvation and eternal life are found in trusting in Jesus. Marriage is for this life and is unnecessary in the kingdom of heaven.

“Dignity and personhood come not from marriage and progeny but from identity within the kingdom of God.”¹

Jesus taught that as his followers we are called to be part of a new family – the church – which transcends family ties.

GRACE *Ladies*

“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” (Matthew 10:37) Jesus’ call to radical discipleship gives new value to the single person. Jesus taught both married and single people are equally able to serve God. Lack of being married does not make single people any less whole as a person.

“Singleness and marriage are parallel routes for loving and serving in the world and preparing for life in the resurrection community.”²

Singleness in the 21st century varies greatly. Due to the massive social changes in the last few decades of the 20th century (feminism, sexual revolution, higher divorce rates, greater educational and work opportunities for women) today’s world is a complex one. Single women can feel the pressure and tension to conform to competing expectations from themselves, their family, their ethnic culture, their church and societal pressures. As a church it is very easy to focus on marriage and family life and many single people feel that they don’t really fit in anywhere. Do we have a thoroughly biblical view of both marriage and singleness? Do we have a tendency to be caught up in traditional views or cultural stereotypes? Is the church a place that ministers to those on their own; to those who are

lonely and hurting and that includes them as part of the wider family of God?

Given that approximately half of today’s adult population is single, it is time for us as a church to examine our attitudes to both marriage and singleness.

In the last edition of *The Helper* we spent time discussing the raising of children for the Lord. In this edition we want to devote a whole issue to consider what it means to be single. How does God view singleness? What are some of the challenges and opportunities? We have also asked some of our sisters in Christ to share their life stories and how the Lord is using them for his glory.

We pray that you may find this edition of *The Helper* stimulates helpful discussions and spurs us on to think more deeply about how we relate to one another in Christ. We greatly appreciate those who have courageously shared their stories and insights.

On behalf of *The Helper* team,
- Anne Camp

¹ Albert Hsu, *Singles at the Crossroads* (1997) IVP: USA p.35

² Ibid p.37



John Stott on *Singleness*

Noted evangelical pastor, teacher and author John Stott (1921-2011) spent a lifetime of singleness. In 1997 he was asked by Albert Hsu if he would share his thoughts on singleness as part of research for a book Hsu was writing on the subject. Stott readily agreed, and later expanded the transcript of the interview into a form that was included as an appendix to the book.¹ We have summarized the gist of Stott's comments for readers of *The Helper*.

Singleness is Abnormal

John Stott began by saying that singleness was an abnormal state. Marriage is the norm; singleness is abnormal. The biblical account of creation establishes that. After repeatedly declaring the work of his hands to be "good" in Genesis 1, God suddenly says in Genesis 2:18, "It is not good for the man to be alone." Adam's aloneness is the only thing pronounced "not good" and is something God remedies in providing a woman to be a companion and helper. This establishes that "God's general will for his human creation is marriage".

Given that, there is no foundation for "exalting singleness" and saying – as has often been the case – that "it is a higher and holier vocation than marriage". "We must reject the ascetic tradition" Stott says, "which disparages sex as legalized lust and marriage as legalized fornication."

So too must we reject the notion that singleness is inherently bad. While it is not good for a man or a woman to be alone, the unmarried state is not in itself sinful or bad. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "it is good for a man not to marry" (1 Corinthians 7:1). On this basis we can say that "both the married and the single states are 'good;' neither is in itself better or worse than the other".

Reasons to Remain Single

Jesus' words in Matthew 19:11-12 provide three reasons why people might not marry. "Some are eunuchs," Jesus says, referring to people who remain single and celibate, "because they were born that way". This, Stott explains, could include "those with a physical defect or with a homosexual orientation."

Jesus continues, adding that "others were made that way by men", alluding to the ancient practice of forcible castration. Then

thirdly, "others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven". These people, Stott explains, "are under no pressure from within or without, [and] voluntarily put marriage aside, either temporarily or permanently, in order to undertake some work for the kingdom which demands single-minded devotion".

Singleness as a Gift

When asked if he considered the ability to remain single a gift, Stott answered affirmatively. He pointed to Jesus' words immediately before the statements mentioned above: "Not everyone can accept this word [that it is better not to marry], but only those to whom it has been given" (Matthew 19:11). Similarly, he spoke of finding personal comfort from Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 7:7: "each man [or woman] has his [or her] own gift from God: one has this gift, another has that". Whether we are single or married,

"We need to receive our situation from God as his own special grace-gift to us".

In speaking of singleness as a gift from God, Stott draws back from saying that single people are given "supernatural power" to cope with their state. He rather thinks of singleness as a "vocation" than an "empowerment", although he adds that we can be sure that "God is faithful in supporting those he calls" (1 Thessalonians 5:24).

Singleness and Sex

Is it possible to achieve sexual self-control without being married? Stott acknowledges that human sexual desires can be very strong and that they are made all the stronger "by the pressures of the sex-obsessed culture in which we live in the West". But as Christians, he adds, we must insist that it is possible to control our sexual urges. "To say that we cannot is to deny our dignity as human beings and to descend to the level of animals, which are creatures of uncontrolled instinct."

Central to developing such self-control is the advice of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount "where he spoke of plucking out an offending eye or cutting off an offending foot" (Matthew 5:28-

30). That is, we are to avoid whatever becomes a source of temptation and “be ruthless in dealing with the first approaches of sin” – something the New Testament calls the process of “mortification”.

Furthermore, contrary to what some argue, Stott believed there is no sense in which refraining from sexual intercourse is dehumanizing. Sex is not so indispensable to our humanity that we are less than human without it. Jesus proves that. He neither married nor experienced sexual intercourse, yet “he was and is the perfect model of humanness. His example teaches us that it is perfectly possible to be single, celibate and human at the same time!”

Singleness and Loneliness

Like other singles, Stott struggled with loneliness. “God created us as social beings,” he says, and made us with the capacity to love and be loved. We need other people and need to be with them.

Yet marriage and family are not the only antidotes to loneliness. Single people, Stott writes, “are wise to develop as many friendships as possible, with people of all ages and both sexes”. In his own case, he enjoyed friendships with colleagues in ministry, a faithful secretary of forty years, research assistants and “hundreds of adopted nephews and nieces all over the world, who call me Uncle John”. Together, these “affectionate relationships... greatly lessen, even if they do not altogether deaden, occasional pangs of loneliness”.

Singleness and Self-Centeredness

When asked to name dangers associated with singleness, Stott names, next to sexual temptation, the peril of self-centredness. Single people who also happen to live alone are often at liberty to plan their schedules and conduct their affairs “with nobody else to modify it or even give us advice”. When that happens, he says, it is easy to end up with the world revolving around ourselves. To offset this danger he found it a help to have a group of six to eight friends with whom he could meet several times a year for advice regarding his schedule and speaking opportunities.

Singleness and Freedom

When it comes to the matter of singleness and freedom to serve, Stott refers to 1 Corinthians 7:32-34. Unmarried people, the Apostle Paul wrote, “are concerned about the Lord’s

affairs” and how they can please him, whereas married people “are concerned about affairs of this world” – how they can please their spouse, and consequently their interests are divided. “Single people,” adds Stott, “experience the great joy of being able to devote themselves, with concentration and without distraction, to the work of the Lord.”

Reflecting on his own life John Stott sees this as a significant factor in his own singleness.

“Looking back with the benefit of hindsight I think I know why [God’s purpose was for me to remain single]...”

... I could never have travelled or written as extensively as I have done if I had had the responsibilities of a wife and family.”

Advice for Singles

In closing his comments on singleness John Stott offers the following advice to those facing this situation: First, “Don’t be in too great a hurry to get married... Be patient. Pray daily that God will guide you to your partner or show you if he wants you to remain single. Second, lead a normal social life. Develop many friendships. Third, if God calls you to singleness, don’t fight it. Remember the key text: ‘Each person has his or her own gift of God’s grace’ (1 Corinthians 7:7)”.

¹ Albert Hsu, (1997) *Singles at the Crossroads*, USA: IVP p.176-181



FREE TO SERVE AS A SINGLE

If I were married, I would not have the same conversation again and again. “Do you have children? Are you married?” To my answer of “No” the responses include; “I am single” or “I will find someone for you to marry” or “You should marry my brother, or cousin or son”. If I was married though, these interactions as I barter in the crowded markets, sit down with my patients or share tea with my colleagues would probably not be happening at all.

In the culture I live amongst an unmarried woman is at the bottom of the social structure. It is terrible if you do not get married and many of those I interact with cannot understand why I am not married. In the language I am learning there is not even a word for an unmarried woman (as far as I am aware the only options are girl or wife). Many girls are married by sixteen, their husbands often much older (as it takes time to save up the number of cows needed to buy the girl), and sometimes are not the only wife.

How then should I view my singleness as I live amongst these people?

Firstly, it provides the freedom to serve. I was able to rather easily pack my bags and come here without the major complications of trying to move a family to another country. I can work irregular and long hours (and then sleep for long hours) and not have to worry about caring for a family. I can interact and

support the families I live with as the single ‘aunty’ in a way that I could not if I were married.

Secondly, my singleness provides a platform from which to show and talk about my relationship with God. In a culture where identity is defined by marital status, I can point to the more important identity of our relationship with God. Where life is seen as incomplete without a husband, I can show that God is sufficient and all satisfying. Where having children is the most important thing, I can declare that obeying and loving God is more important.

Do I make the most of my singleness?

Not at all! It is easy to focus on the negatives and give into frustration or self-pity or fear. Paul’s challenge in 1 Corinthians 7:34, “an unmarried woman is concerned about the Lord’s affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit” always convicts me because I realise how far short of this I fall. Yes, I have left my own country to serve in another place (though I am simply living out the desire of my heart, even if it is God-placed desire), but I can still easily use my singleness to indulge in selfishness, my freedom to only do what I want, and become devoted to books, pleasure, doing things or earning a great name rather than to God. But, to be devoted to the Lord, that is what I aim for and we will see what the Master, who is shaping my heart and giving me this task, will do from here.



So, when I get asked the inevitable questions, I laugh or smile or ignore my questioner, depending on who they are (while hoping that my language limitations and lack of cultural understanding mean I do not accidentally agree to something I do not intend). I remind myself that God in His wisdom has chosen that for now I am in this place and I am single. And, in this, as in all things, God is good.

- Katherine Young
Redeemer Presbyterian Church



I was encouraged recently by a visiting speaker to develop my writing skills and to look for opportunities to write work that would be published. Very shortly afterwards, an email arrived in my inbox asking if I would consider writing for *the Helper*. Well, there it was, an obvious opportunity presenting itself, though with possibly the topic I would least want to write about: singleness.

However, it is always wise to stop, contemplate and reflect on how God is at work in our lives and how our hearts are responding to His work. As I began to write I found myself drawn more towards our calling to service for God than my specific situation, although I will share some of the joys and difficulties of this with you below.

I currently work full time with students at Grace Church in Dunedin, and I am single. Although I do not feel called to singleness in the least, this is the circumstance in which God has placed me at this point of time. I would be foolish to waste this chance to serve His Kingdom. Working in full time vocational ministry and being single does not mean I am necessarily more called or more equipped for service than other women, it just means this is how God is choosing to use me.

There is no question of 'to serve or not to serve'. Every woman in our church is called to serve God, His people and His world. The difference is not *if* we serve, the difference is *how* we will serve in each different stage and circumstance of our lives. Yes, we function differently; an eye is an eye and not a foot. A young mother with lots of little children may serve God differently than an older woman without children or no children at home. We should not try to be what we are not. I encourage you to investigate what gifts, talents and strengths God has given you by which you can serve others. This is what our gifts are for 'to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good' (1 Corinthians 12:7). How you use them might look different at each age and stage, but they should still be used.

Sisters, we all are called to serve God and each other. Let us do this in the unique way God has called and shaped us so that our body functions healthily and brings glory to God.

The calling on our life to be imitators of Christ as dearly loved children far exceeds our relationship status. Christ, the ultimate servant made himself nothing and came not to be served but to serve. It is He whom we are to emulate, let us do it with joy. 'Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord' (Romans 12:11).

Paul does of course address singles and service in 1 Corinthians, but really what he is encouraging us to see is that we should not be consumed by this present age and things of it, e.g. marriage. Instead we are to be concerned for God's eternal Kingdom. Marriage points, in part, to the 'not yet' of the Kingdom, whereas singleness points to the 'now', the present reality of God's Kingdom in our world. Our hearts should not be divided in service for God.

One of the great joys that this time in my life brings me is the abundant amount of time available to me. I am free to invest deeply in the lives of many young men and women. I am able to change my plans easily and respond to needs as they arise. I can offer transport beforehand or stay till the end to clean up (although don't be mistaken, just as you may have to go home to cook dinner I also have to go home and cook dinner). I can have three hour Bible studies with groups of young women without concern of neglecting other duties.

Tied to this is the number of lives I can be significantly involved in. I am free to love and care for many young women because my time and energies are not tied as much to other relationships. I have numerous girls I consider my spiritual daughters, many more than I could possibly have naturally and even some granddaughters which I think is no mean feat for someone who has not hit 30 yet.

In many ways the difficulties are linked to the joys. Because I have few concrete boundaries in my life it can be very easy to become consumed by 'doing ministry'. There are boundless and never-ending ways in which I could care for people, but that would not be a healthy or God honouring way to live. In order to be able to serve God long term I need to have boundaries and structure in my life, which can be hard to have when you are the one in charge of creating them (if you are me anyway). It can be lonely at times, and ministry and serving God is working in a spiritual battle which highlights the importance of a strong team and church, of which I am very thankful to be a part.

So in closing, sisters I urge you, be willing to live lives that are poured out like a drink offering on the altar of service to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We do literally owe Him our lives; hold nothing back so that when we stand before Him each one of us will hear 'well done my good and faithful servant'.

- Irene Bayne
Dunedin Grace Bible Church

Getting Married in your Thirties

“My Journey of Not-So-Singleness”

Hi there readers, I'm Alisa. I guess people (myself included) would agree that I am not your typical woman. I am certainly not your typical Christian woman.

I'm not sure if it is because I was born stubborn and difficult, or whether going to a progressive, feminist girl's school had anything to do with it. Or perhaps it is just that I thought I had seen enough male behaviour and attitudes to become uninterested and underwhelmed by men in general. Of course, there were always exceptions to the rule amongst wise and gentle, cerebral men, but I would have happily lived in a man-free zone for most of my teens and early twenties.

In my early twenties I found myself living in Germany for postgraduate study. I was ready for a fresh start. I had recently lost my teenage blubber and was excited by my new learning. I was surprised at how popular I was amongst my peers in this new country, and some of the hurt that had troubled me in my old life was cut free.

It was during this time that I fell in love and entered into my very first relationship. It was with someone intelligent, talented and very fun, but most importantly, someone who had been hurting in similar ways to me and understood me. Due to reasons far too complicated to unravel here, I had finally rejected men and now threw myself into a relationship with my new girlfriend. I was so humbled that someone would love me for who I was that I ignored what I knew God thought about my relationship.

My friend loved my mind, my sense of humour and my musical gifts – things that never seemed to attract the attention of men – and she really challenged me to think about all kinds of things. It was on a visit home to New Zealand during this time that I noticed that guys were starting to find me interesting – I put it down to the fact that I had lost weight and that only confirmed to me how superficial they were. I still had the same mind and



talents as before so why should they only be interested because I had lost 30 kilograms?

On some levels I was blissfully happy in my relationship. But at the same time, just as much as my friend was pulling me head over heels in her direction, God was anchoring his feet and pulling me back in his direction. It really felt like my life was being ripped in two down the middle. I had to decide on who I had to let go. I actually tried to let go of God, but I didn't realize that it was he who was holding my hand, not the other way round.

He didn't give up on me. I was in this relationship for 18 months and all the time I had a great support network of friends from my church who I loved and who loved me – straight, lesbian or whatever I was. I was truly humbled by their commitment to me and by their support for me to do the right thing, all the while loving me just as I was.

It took quite a few months, but in the end I had to let go of what to me had been a beautiful relationship. I had to have peace with God again. I needed him to be closer than any person. So I mourned my friend, mourned losing the feeling of being loved deeply, and stepped out into the confusing world of trusting God first and figuring out my sexuality in his time. I doubted I could

ever really be attracted to a man, and even if I could physically, I doubted I would ever find one I liked in personality or character. What's more, I was afraid I may never fully feel that I was truly straight.

These were all legitimate fears. It took about three years before I became remotely interested in men. I found myself occasionally attracted to other women during the first five years after breaking up my relationship; it was six years before I realised I was truly and undoubtedly attracted to a man.

Through all those six years of ups and downs, God was there. Various people and ministries and books were also there. I realised that my female Christian friends were vital. They taught me boundaries, trust, vulnerability, and so many other things. During that time I learned there was a sense in which God Himself was not enough! But what he provided was enough. It wasn't God who hugged me in some weird spiritual way; no, he hugged me through the arms of my friends. He didn't zap me with an interest in men; no, he incited my male friends to show themselves to me in their weakness and vulnerability. And in doing so, I learned, I trusted and I grew.

I was certainly not expecting a miracle when it came to finding a possible marriage partner, so I did not sit back and avoid men. Instead, I signed up to an online "find someone" internet site to see if there were any interesting guys out there who hadn't met

the person for them yet. I learned there was definitely a difference between lovely guys and the right guy. I met a few lovely guys along the way, but it wasn't until the third time through that I met the "right" guy, Florian.

He accepts me for who I am, despite my past, my stubbornness, my relative poverty and all kinds of negative traits. In return I get a bubbly, fun, kind, straight-up honest, internally strong guy who is not afraid to tell me what I need to hear. He turns very quickly to God in the circumstances of his life without coming across as pious or self-righteous and he leads me well. I feel valued for the things I value in myself, and I can now see how we make the two halves of a fantastic team. Our personalities are a great complement and our skill sets complete each other's. We are getting married in April and I am very happy about how our life will be. If you would have told me 12 years ago that I would be getting married to a wonderful man in 2013, I would never have believed you.

God is the one who never let go, and I believe that He will provide all we need in the future. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. The suffering of the journey He allows and accompanies us on is for our good in the end. He has turned my mourning into dancing.

- Alisa Willis
City Presbyterian Church



Photography by Melissa Macpherson
from Sight for Sore Eyes

SEASONS of Singleness



Romans 8:28 "And we know that all things work together for good for those who have been called according to his purpose."

The Lord has blessed me with singleness. I never expected to be single all my life, and it seems quite strange to be writing about it. But, by His grace, I have never once coveted marriage. I am sure I would have approached marriage with the same attitude and enjoyed its blessings because it would have come from Him. There are great blessings in both situations. In my singleness, God has provided me with all my needs and more, and I have been able to support and encourage families in time of need. What I love most about singleness is the freedom to choose what I want to do, when I desire, or now more latterly when He enables me.

As a child, I was always playing families and nurses with my dollies. I always liked people and socialising; anything for a cup of tea. As a young child, I would go for self-invited tea parties with the older people in the village,

knocking on doors and making myself at home. If we were at a park on family outings I would be off to meet new friends. I think this may be how in my work life I have no problems going into stranger's homes and accepting them on all levels.

I attended Sunday school from the age of three, and I loved the stories and choruses. I remember my Gran taking me to church, and I would play in the back pew with my toys. I still like the back pew and watching families together.

As a family we emigrated to NZ and eventually settled in Manurewa, becoming neighbours with Midge Thompson and family. I was the same age as her middle child, and I soon became an extra member in the family. When I was around 9 and my mother was ill, it was Aunty Midge who taught me how to cook a few basic dishes.

As a family and neighbours we attended St Andrews together. I became a committed

Christian at 13 years of age at a youth camp. In church there were many of us around the same age which was encouraging and a lot of fun. We had great teaching and leadership in Bible Class and Youth Group. Our leaders were great readers and passed on the teachings and challenges to us. I believe these teachings made me contented with life.

My career pathway was strangely planned. I wanted to become a Drafts woman as I did so enjoy working with the men, but that choice was frowned upon and an area hard to get into as a woman. Although I was one of the top in the class, I did not get a position. Teaching was my second choice, but I had left it too late to apply, so as nursing had a few intakes a year, and as a child I had desired to be a nurse, that is where I headed. It took me five years to know I would not have wanted it to be any different and it was the Lord's overruling.

While at school, I walked away from Church for a short time. Sport and school friends were the dominant factor. I partied, clubbed and drank a little, but I did not like the life. I was conscious of my Christian commitment and the prayers of friends and church family and so I returned to the church. Once I had settled back into church, I was asked to teach Sunday School. I declined as I was still a student nurse doing rostered duties. I was asked again, so I prayed about it and decided to test the waters. To my amazement I was freed up for Sunday mornings and so was able to do this.

My early 20's were busy. I was nursing, having completed my hospital training. Then, my parent's marriage broke up, suddenly and traumatically. My father, who I had thought was perfect, developed a relationship with another woman. This would be a time when I was drawn closer to God, as I could do little. I had been closest to my father, but my mother shared all her

fears with me and I wanted to support her. I severed ties with my father when he left, to protect my mother from more grief. I did not approve of what he had done. I eventually asked my father for his share of the house, as I wanted the house for security for my mother. I wanted Mum to continue to live as she had, so I paid the mortgage and bills. She eventually got some work and became independent again.

I had been so busy I did not think of relationships, but I had already felt a call to the mission field. I was accepted into Bible college of New Zealand (BCNZ), but I decided to defer and go to England to do my midwifery training. While in training I made some great Christian friendships and was involved in a super church. As my midwifery course was finishing, I had a phone call from Auntie Midge to say my Mum was in hospital and they did not expect her to survive the three months until Christmas. My friends got me packed and on a plane for home the next day. I shed buckets of tears on the plane, but I was never angry with God and never asked why. I knew He was in control. This was another period where only God could help, and He did sustain my needs and my mothers.

My mother came first, so my desire to go BCNZ was put on hold for another year. That was a privileged year. I had precious quality time with my Mum and freedom to teach bible in schools, bible class, sit with my mother's friend who was also dying of cancer and take on other little jobs. After nine months caring for my mother at home, I went back to work part-time in the Emergency Department. This gave me some survival money.

My dreams and expectations were quite different. Life was now directed for me, taking one day at a time. I did assume I would one day marry. My mother wanted grandchildren and she had said she would

live with me and my family. I was not sure about that idea of her living with us. But it was not going to be anyway.

In the end my mother lived for 10 months. For the six months after her death, I continued to live the part-time work lifestyle. As the new year approached, a position was advertised for a local district nurse (DN) in Manurewa. It involved all the work experience I had and the position seemed made for me. But what about attending BCNZ? I prayed and applied for the DN position. I was very young and if they could get someone with more experience I would not get the job. But, I did get the position. I loved every minute of it. I really felt this was where I was to work at this time.

My career has had a few changes in direction as it has evolved since then. I have always taken the line of work with the least support and with the greatest need. Currently, I work in a specialised field, mainly Urology and woman's health, supporting the DNs when they have patients in these areas. I enjoy the people I work with, and I am succession planning at the moment as someone will need to follow on after me. I have always considered it a great privilege in district nursing to go into people's home, their private space. My skills and patience in my work are only of God. I am often praying about the next potentially difficult situation asking for enabling. I could never have taken on the work that I do without the Lord's enabling

Nursing has been wonderful for me. Over the years I would take school holidays off, and I shared Auntie Midge's grandchildren or supported other friends with families. I never ever had a feeling of loss of not having my own family. I was busy and fulfilled. My life has been too full to have had doubts or fears about being single. I have been truly blessed, and my needs have

been well provided for.

After my mother died, I was given the home, but I needed to sell it as it took up too much time to maintain. Midge too was considering selling her home. We decided to sell our homes and build as neighbours, using our homes as the Lord directed. The Lord provided every step of the way. At one stage we considered re-siting to reduce our costs. Ian and Audrey Gordon became aware of this and they purchased and built the third unit for Audrey to have a smaller place when Ian died. I had a missionary family sleeping in my unit before I had slept in it. As the years rolled by we would move into one another's home as there was a need. We put up many a family in transit, and it was a privilege, never a bother. It served as a good ministry for the time, and the Lord used and blessed it.

In my final season I did not expect to be experiencing a chronic illness before my retirement. I did plan to be useful in retirement. I do not doubt the Lord is in control. Why should I? I do not have plans for the future now as it is not my concern and could potentially be a worry. I am endeavouring to take one stage at a time and pray that I can rest in Him when challenges come, counting my blessings.

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage do not be discouraged for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” Joshua 1:9

- Jane Stewart

Covenant Presbyterian Church

BACK TO SINGLENES

A Widow After Forty-Four Years



I became a widow after forty-four years of a loving marriage. Losing my life's companion five years ago was very sad, although a relief since I knew that Peter would not suffer any more. He had become increasingly immobile with Parkinson's disease, diagnosed twenty years earlier, and the end of his life came suddenly but not before a special time of closeness. During these single years, God has provided for me a wonderful set of memories as well as children, grandchildren and a Christian family to give me companionship.

During our last year together my own health suffered with a return of breast cancer. It was while recovering from surgery that I was prompted to think about the history of both our families; to write a family tree and to record family memories for those who would follow. Working on this brought a wonderful sense of closure and a greater understanding.

I thought of the widowed mothers Peter

and I left behind when we travelled to Malaysia to serve as missionaries with our young family. In those days we did not have a telephone, so there were no calls home. I wrote letters to our mothers once a week, but their widowhood was much lonelier than mine is.

These days we have access to many forms of communication. My advice to those who find themselves alone is to make good use of as much modern communication technology as you can. Make phone calls, learn to use the computer and send e-mails. They are quick and instant and convenient for more frequent contact with friends and family. Keep writing cards and letters too as these are made more precious by modern technology. These can be displayed on noticeboards especially when they contain encouragements and reminders from God's Word.

I have always kept a diary and my latest is the best! My eight year old grandson gave it to me for Christmas saying, "You

will like it, Oma, as it has lots of pages for notes". Yes – I love to write notes – shopping lists, suggestions of creative things to do, people to ring, ideas for church women's ministry activities, floral arrangement ideas for church, etc. Note-writing and journaling can be a great source of inspiration when lonely and/or bored.

I have also written up my own life story after a friend shared with me a special Mother/Daughter book. It prompts you with a series of questions to record your life story in your own words to pass on to your children. I cried a lot during the process, especially writing about our first date, wedding day etc., but I found it left me with an enormous sense of thankfulness. I even shared a copy with my Maori son – adding his special part of being chosen and adopted.

The greatest blessing of widowhood for me has been the necessity of depending on the Lord. I have had to hold on to and to prove for myself the truth of His Word. He has promised, "Never will I leave you or forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5) and "Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27).

One way He works out His promises is through people. He has given me three children who have always included me in their lives, even more so since their Dad died, and I have been able to form and build relationships with five of my grandchildren who live in Auckland. There is also the wider family of God. I am blessed by those in my church family at Covenant in Manurewa as well as being supported by friends from my former church of St Andrews. As a retired

missionary from the Overseas Missionary Fellowship, I am a member of that "One Marvellous Family" too. Some "brothers and sisters in the Lord" from our days in Malaysia still keep in touch. My address book is full. A phone call is easy if I need to talk to someone.

I hope you find these thoughts mostly positive, but let me be honest. I do not want to minimize the challenges of widowhood, particularly at this stage of life. All phases of life have challenges and opportunities to prove the Lord, but widowhood, with ageing and failing health, is a difficult and testing

circumstance. Romans 5:8 says "...We also rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us".

The hardest practical challenge for me has been associated with the need of eating and cooking for one. As my health has deteriorated and with now having secondary cancer, my appetite has diminished. I do not feel very motivated to cook and to freeze extra

meals like I used to do. Being invited out is wonderful for me!

One thing I look forward to though is my morning cup of coffee, taken at a table which is often bathed in sunshine. As I read my Bible there and pray, my nausea is calmed, and I am cheered; being daily reminded that whatever lies ahead will not be able to separate me "from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:38-39).

- *Ronalda Warner*
Covenant Presbyterian Church

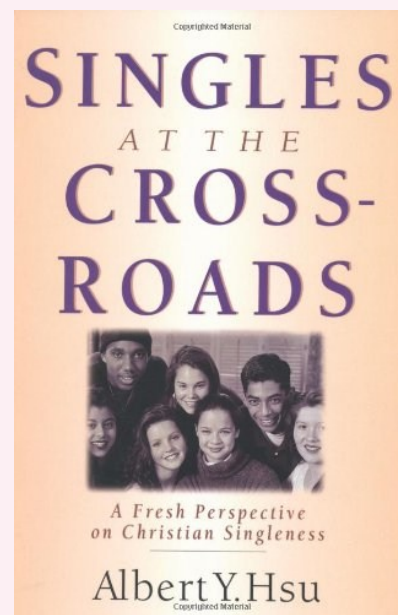
BOOK REVIEW

Singles at the Crossroads - A Fresh Perspective on Christian Singleness

In our postmodern world with an ever increasing number of adult singles, Albert Y. Hsu's book 'Singles at the Crossroads - A Fresh Perspective on Christian Singleness' provides a much needed theology of singleness. Hsu's overall aim is to seek to answer, from a Christian perspective, the following questions: "What does it mean to be single?" and "What should the single life look like?"

The opening chapter provides some statistics which highlight the decline in the number of marriages occurring in the past five decades as well as the steady increase in singles who have never married. Hsu explores some of the societal and generational shifts that have led to this (fear of divorce, abundance of career options, cohabitation), the competing expectations from self, family and church as well as the different types of singles (e.g. temporary/transitional, volitional). The next three chapters focus on the 'pendulum shift' the Church has had towards marriage and singleness (often promoting one as more godly than the other); how singleness and marriage are both equal gifts; and the fact that whether we are married or single does not ultimately define us - our true identity lies in Christ alone. The

remaining chapters then address the positive and negative things Christian singles experience. For example - the opportunity to travel, to come alongside families, to be involved in various ministries but also struggles with loneliness, overcommitment, and self-centredness.



As someone who is currently single, I found this book to be thought-provoking, challenging and encouraging. I am challenged to keep in mind that my true identity is first and foremost in Christ, and that regardless of my marital status I can serve God and bring glory to Him. I am also encouraged that both Christian singles and married couples need each other - no one is meant to walk the Christian life alone.

Let us, as the body of Christ, strive to be a community where all members are valued: Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female - married and single.

- *Reviewed by Priscilla Camp*
City Presbyterian Church

Singleness in the Church

The body of Christ is made up of people from all ages and stages of life. We spoke with several single people from different life stages asking them to share their experience of being single in the church. We pray that this may help us to better appreciate and care for our sisters in the Lord.

What are the special challenges of being single in the church?

People not fully understanding that this status is often not of your own choosing & that whilst trying to remain content in the Lord & to not lose hope it is hugely discouraging when people comment "oh you're still not married" or "do you have a boyfriend yet".

Sometimes, it can feel as if you are a spare part. Not having a partner can feel a bit awkward at times as though you don't fit in.

Often activities and just the general life of the church are focused on families and family life. If you don't have a family of your own then you can feel a little irrelevant or a bit of an afterthought.

Does belonging to a church family make singleness easier or harder? In what ways?

I think it is easier, simply because I 'belong'. I feel blessed to be a part of a Church family who have lifted me up at times, assisted me in difficulty, provided support and wisdom in raising my children. But most of all I have felt protected.

In my experience it can make it easier - it's a huge blessing when families include you in their lives i.e. inviting you for dinner, allowing you to help with the kids. These are important insights into how family life is lived out. It gives you a better understanding of how to support families and to learn from them.

The answer is both! It is often harder because there is pressure to marry young in church circles. Singleness is often seen as a

problem to be solved or a situation to be pitied. If you reach 25+ and you're not married then it is seen as quite unusual. This is a contrast to outside the church where it is quite common to be 30+ and single. People often feel like they need to comment or step in to 'help'. Although it comes from good motives, it is usually not that helpful and can even be damaging. It is easier because the church is often a comfortable place to be - a place of belonging and your own ready-made family. This is especially helpful I think for people who don't have their own family close by and are single. There are definitely benefits of being part of a church family who care for you and help to keep you accountable.

By encouraging words that they are praying for you and showing a genuine interest in your life and by including you in their families.

Being invited over to join family lunches and other celebrations help to make me feel connected in church life.

How have people in the church family made you feel connected? If not, what could be done?

I have been invited to dinner, church events and other special celebrations. I have been included in planning events and have been asked to be a part of various ministries. These things have made me feel connected and a necessary link in the chain. I have also benefited from friends (and a spiritual mother) who share with me things they have learned in their walk with the Lord and have invested their time to pray for me and with me.

Are there particular ways in which the preaching and ministering of the Word can encourage singles?

I think it's important to not stereotype - God's Word is for all people regardless of marital status. It is more encouraging & helpful to receive teaching on how the scriptures apply to us as children of God and our role as God fearing women whether we are wives or not.

I think just general messages on how to seize the day and make the most of where God has placed you right now. Also how to deal with frustrated dreams or plans that seem good but God has not caused to happen. Preaching on how to be a good



husband/wife and parenting issues comes up quite regularly but singleness and the surrounding issues don't come up as often.

Maybe also some helpful suggestions of how others can be an encouragement to singles in the church. There are a range of people who would be dealing with similar feelings and issues: divorced, separated, solo parents, widowed etc.

I have appreciated preaching that has helped me learn 'how' to be content and learning to trust in God, rather than in myself. This has spurred me on to search the scriptures for myself. I have lots of passages which I feel pertain to women/mothers in my situation, however, I am always finding new passages which encourage me and set me right. On the whole, Scripture reminds and assures me that God is the father to the Fatherless, He is a husband to the widow, and he is my Jehovah Jirah.

Do you think there is any value in having singles groups in the church?

I personally enjoy small groups and young adults groups and being part of others' lives no matter what stage/age they are. However there could be some benefit in having some casual encouragement meetings where people can share openly their feelings/thoughts on singleness etc.

I personally feel there may be a place for these in very large churches but in smaller congregations I think there is more value in groups being all inclusive in a relevant age bracket. We are all going through similar things and can encourage and learn from one another.

I don't think this is necessary. I think I would feel embarrassed! I love being part of a home group with other families. Being a single mum this is a way to be among others and under the Word.

Booklist

Altrogge, Stephen	The Greener Grass Conspiracy
Barrs, Jerram	Through His Eyes: God's Perspective on Women in the Bible
Benyon, Graham	Mirror, Mirror: Discover Your True Identity in Christ
Brownback, Lydia	Fine China is for Single Women Too
Butterfield, Rosaria	The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert
De Young, Kevin	Just do Something
Farmer, Andrew	The Rich Single Life
George, Elizabeth	Loving God with all your Mind
Hsu, Albert	Singles at the Crossroads
Kassian, Mary	Girls Gone Wise
Keller, Tim	Every Good Endeavour Counterfeit Gods The Meaning of Marriage
Rosenau, Doug & Wilson, M	Soul Virgins: Reclaiming Single Sexuality
Piper, John & Taylor, Justin	Sex and the Supremacy of Christ
McCulley, Carolyn	Radical Womanhood
Nelson, Tom	Work Matters
Ruvolo, Carol J.	Before the Throne of God: Focus on Prayer



start at 9.30am and kick off with an interactive music session using the

to their family. Yes, one way to grow the ministry! Another way has been through word of mouth and advertising at Preschool, School and Plunket. On a busy morning, we have about 27 children and 18 mums.

It's fun, vibrant, energetic, loud, creative, eventful, delightful, messy and so much more, but most of all, Music and More is purposeful. This ministry aims to reach out to Mums and children aged 0-5, located in Manurewa and beyond, to provide a place of encouragement, enjoyment and a Christian witness.

wonderful resources from Preschool. We then move onto a fun craft session which ranges from messy paint to edible necklaces. The children absolutely love being creative and proudly take home their artwork.

We are very excited about 2013 and the many more years that God enables us to run this ministry. Although it seemed a daunting task at first, we are grateful that we stepped out in faith to reach out to those on a similar journey. There is something very powerful, when a Mum meets another Mum; there is an instant connection, compassion and understanding.

Our local community is our mission field and we give thanks to God for bringing many to this group where His story can be shared. This may not be extremely direct, but in all of the subtle things we do (such as pray for those who come, sing Christian songs, give thanks before morning tea, hand out Bible stories at Christmas, share/celebrate the Easter story and build friendships with Mums from all walks of life) we pray that the Lord will use these opportunities to plant seeds for His kingdom.

Last but not least, we finish off with delicious morning tea which is kindly provided by about ten ladies from church. This is a huge blessing and Mums continually comment on how well they are looked after. Not only do the ladies provide the children with tasty, healthy snacks, they also provide the Mums with great baking and take charge of the kitchen. We thoroughly appreciate the help that we receive and this frees us all up to interact with the other Mums which is equally as important.

I pray that the Lord will use this ministry to further His kingdom in the small corner of Manurewa. Also, that He impresses greatly on our hearts, compassion for those who do not know Him. May our eyes be opened to the ripe harvest that is in our local community so that God's good news is preached to all.

We meet every fortnight, on a Tuesday morning during the school terms. We

This is the third year that the ministry has been running at the church. Two years ago was particularly busy for all the leaders as each one had a new addition

- Carmen Verheij
Covenant Presbyterian Church

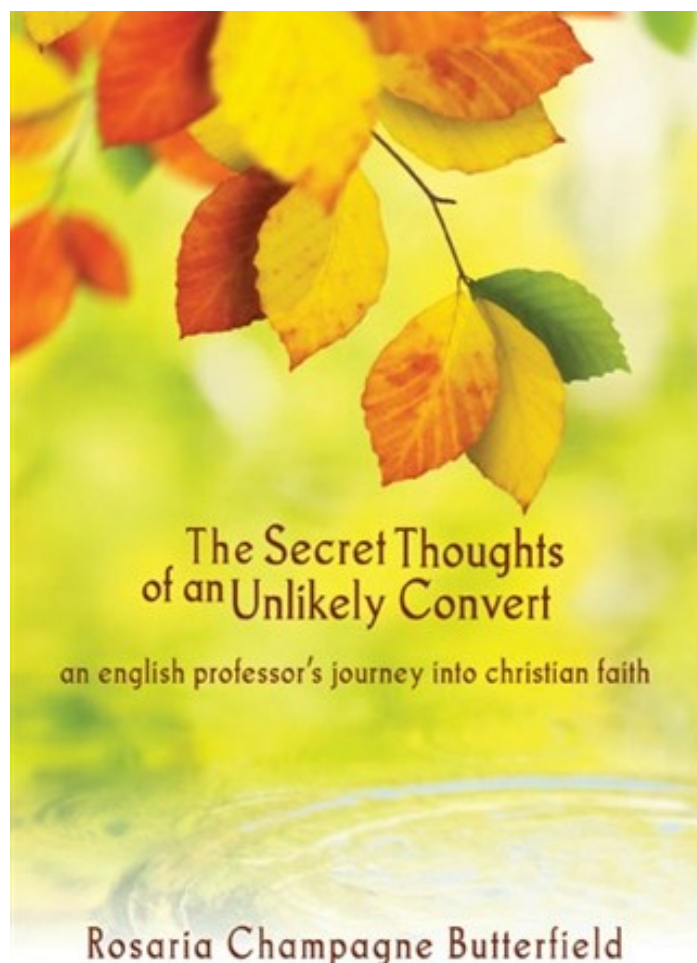
Book Review

The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert

The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert by Rosaria Champagne Butterfield is an intriguing autobiography that records the amazing journey of an English literary professor, who specialised in Queer theory and was herself a committed lesbian whose world was turned upside down when she realised that Christianity might be right about who God was. Through the gentle, humble ministry of an elderly pastor and his wife over many months, Rosaria came to know Christ which shattered her whole world – her reputation, her lifestyle and her group of friends which she describes as “comprehensive chaos.” It traces God’s providence at work in her life and her eventual call to marriage to a reformed pastor and their ministry in church planting and adopting and fostering four children. She writes: “Making a life commitment to Christ was not merely a philosophical shift. It was not a one-step process. It did not involve rearranging the surface prejudices and fickle loyalties of my life. Conversion didn’t ‘fit’ my life. Conversion overhauled my soul and personality. It was arduous and intense. I experienced with great depth the power and authority of God in my life.”

Rosaria gives us powerful insights into how the gay and lesbian community perceive Christians and helps us think through our attitudes and behaviour and what it really means to love those who do not yet know Christ. Her discussion of sexual sin and gender politics is insightful and extremely helpful for Christians as we seek to deepen our understanding of both sexuality and sin. She reflects on faith, grace, worship, sexuality and culture (both Christian and non-Christian) and the importance of being in a local Church family that has its roots in historical and Biblical Christianity.

I found this book to be a gripping read. It is beautifully and simply written, but with a depth of reflection that is not readily



apparent in many autobiographies. There is so much that is challenging and helpful as Christians face great social and political changes (particularly here in New Zealand at the present time). It would make a great reading book for group discussion and would be suitable to give to both Christians and non-Christians.

Reviewed by Anne Camp
-Covenant Presbyterian Church

“I tried to toss the Bible and all of its teachings in the trash — I really tried. But I kept reading it, reading it not just for pleasure, but reading it because I was engaged in a research program trying to refute the religious right from a lesbian feminist perspective.

- Rosaria Champagne Butterfield

Quote from: <http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/from-radical-lesbian-to-redeemed-christian>

You may also like to watch an **Interview with Rosaria Butterfield; January 11, 2013 and **Marvin Olasky** on www.youtube.com*

In Brief

News & Prayer Points from around the Country

While not all our congregations feature in this edition, please still be faithful in praying for them in their work of the Kingdom as well as those listed below. We trust you are encouraged by what you read, gain new ideas for what would also work for you, and are helped to pray more effectively for each location.

Northern Presbytery

MANGERE

Providence Presbyterian Church

At Providence we are commencing our monthly ladies Bible study on Sunday March 10th. We meet at 8:45am prior to the service and commence with breakfast cooked by the pastor. This year we will base our studies around John Piper's book – *Fifty Reasons Why Jesus Came to Die*. Pray that all of us will grow in the knowledge and love of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 3:14-19)

Give thanks for a good start to our playgroup this year with all the families returning from last year. Pray for Megan Levi as she leads it and also for weekly visits she makes into the community to gain contact with more Mums.

Give thanks also for an excellent holiday programme run in January with good contacts with many of the local children. Pray particularly for the young people and parents who were involved in leadership and grew in their faith though the story of Pilgrims Progress and the use of the Wordless book. Pray for on-going teaching at our Friday night Youth Programme.



MANUKAU

Redeemer Grace Presbyterian Church

Girls Netball Group Report:

Our Redeemer Girls Netball group has got off to a fantastic start this year with at least 20 girls in the group and new girls from the community coming each week.

Firstly the girls are picked up from the Flat Bush area and we begin with a half hour bible study. At the girls' request, we have been looking at different women in the Bible and what we can learn from them. This term we have been studying Ruth and the characteristics and decisions she made that made her a beautiful woman of God.

We aim to teach the skills needed to play the game of Netball but also show the girls that they are learning valuable skills for later in life. This includes being part of a team and learning to not work as individuals but to help each other for the success of the team.

We give thanks to the Lord that late last year the Auckland Council approved a grant for \$1800 to go towards the cost of uniforms and equipment which will allow us to participate in a local competition coming up in the winter. This has been particularly exciting for the girls, who would not otherwise get this opportunity. It also means we can bring our ministry to the sidelines of the Netball courts in Otara.

Please pray for:

- Ongoing eagerness to come to Girls group to study the Bible and enjoy learning a competitive sport.
- The upcoming competition we will be participating in and the contacts we are establishing with the girls and their families.
- The Leaders of this group – Kelly Rickus, Krista Tuli, Bonnie TeAmo and Rebecca McGimpsey as they lead these girls and seek to be an example to them as well.

*Mainly Music Programme
at Owaka Grace Fellowship*

Southern Presbytery

WYNDHAM

Wyndham Evangelical Church

On the 21st of December we had a BBQ tea outside the church and invited the children & parents who have been to the Holiday Programme throughout the year to join us and hear the Christmas Story. It was a lovely evening so there was a good turn out from the community and some good contacts made with parents.

We are enjoying the preaching & fellowship of Vincent & Jackie Tracey from Blackpool, England. They are with us for a few months while they enjoy their sabbatical break. They are also taking the opportunity to explore the beautiful Southland landscapes.

Please pray for the work of Bible in Schools as it starts up this year. We have a programme running in all the local schools and trust that the Principals & Board of Trustees will be supportive as they have been in the past.

OWAKA

Owaka Grace Fellowship

- Please pray for our Mainly Music (MM) Programme. This is our second year and we all enjoy presenting the programme each Monday from 10-11am. It has brought us in touch with the young mums around Owaka, with one or two coming from Balclutha and Kaitangata (about a 20-30 minute drive). On average we have 16-17 children per session.



In Brief

DUNEDIN

Grace Bible Church

- Give thanks for the new marriages of Marilyn & Denys Gray, Jennifer & Chris McLean, Ashley & Peren Mountfort, & Jenny & James Stowell. Pray for these couples as they settle into married life seeking to make Christ the centre of their lives together.
- Give thanks for new babies Mary Richards (to David & Kristy Richards) and the early but safe arrival of Wisdom (to Dami & Jumo Magbagbeola).
- Give thanks for Launch 2013. Pray for new students that they will continue to grow in their walk with the Lord and settle into Christian community this year.
- Pray for Emily Rounce & Megan Sparks (& Chris McLean) as they settle into ministering on the university campus with Engage. Pray for Emily & Chris as they complete raising support.
- Pray for our women that meet in various small groups during the week, that they would be growing in the knowledge & the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Pray for the women who are using their crafts & hobbies as a means to connect to our community. Pray that God would bless their ministry & give them wisdom & boldness to share Christ in the relationships they form.



Dami Magbagbeola opens her gifts at her 'post' baby shower after the early arrival of her little boy Wisdom.



Students at Launch 2013 in the midst of some Bible Study.



Some of the girls during some of the more relaxing moments at Launch 2013.



The Helper is a publication of the Christian Education and Publications Committee (CE&P) of the Grace Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, through its Women's Sub-Committee. Comments or inquiries are welcome and can be sent to:

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