

Singleness in Life & Ministry: A Personal Testimony

Elective for P&A conference. February 5, 2018

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Resources / Further reading

Books & Resources on Identity, Singleness, Sexuality, Friendship

- Allberry, S., *Seven Myths of Singleness* (Crossway) Expected early 2019
- Allberry, S., 'How celibacy can fulfil your sexuality' (26/08/16), <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/how-celibacy-can-fulfill-your-sexuality/>
- Benton, A., *If it's not too much trouble* (Christian Focus), <https://faithinlaterlife.org/fill-resource/if-its-not-too-much-trouble-second-edition/> [looking after the elderly] 2016
- Cameron, J., *John Stott's Right Hand: The Untold Story of Frances Whitehead* (Piquant Editions) 2014
- Harrison, G., *A Better Story: God, Sex and Human Flourishing* (IVP) 2017
- Jenkins, B., 'Turning 40 while single and childless', <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/turning-40-while-single-and-childless/> (2016)
- Mansfield, D., *The Chappo Collection: Life, Laughter, Leadership, Love in the Lord Jesus Christ* (Grace Abounding Books) 2017 (especially p 93-108)
- Meynell, M., *What Makes Us Human? And Other Questions about God, Jesus and Human Identity* (The Good Book Co.) 2015
- Orpwood, M., *Chappo: For the Sake of the Gospel: John Chapman and the Department of Evangelism* (Eagleswift Press) 1995 (especially p 181-204)
- Roberts, V., *True Friendship: Walking Shoulder to Shoulder* (10Publishing) 2013
- Rosner, B.S., *Known by God: A Biblical Theology of Personal Identity* (Zondervan) 2017
- Shaw, E., *The Plausibility Problem: The Church and Same-sex Attraction* (IVP) 2015
- Trevenna, A., *The Heart of Singleness: How to be Single and Satisfied* (The Good Book Co.) 2013
- Wilson, T., *Mere Sexuality: Rediscovering the Christian Vision of Sexuality* (Zondervan) 2017
- Wax, T., <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/was-bonhoeffer-gay-and-other-adventures-in-missing-the-point/> (2014)
- Webster, D.D., *Soulcraft: How God shapes us through Relationships* (Regent College Publishing) 1999

Covenant Eyes, internet accountability, <http://www.covenanteyes.com>

Ministry Leadership

- Ash, C., *Zeal without Burnout: Seven Keys to a Lifelong Ministry of Sustainable Sacrifice* (The Good Book Co.) 2016
- Birkett, K., *Resilience: A Spiritual Project* (Latimer Studies) 2016
- Brain, P., *Going the Distance: How to Stay Fit for a Lifetime of Ministry* (Matthias Media) 2004
- Moore, R., 'Should you quit?', <https://www.russellmoore.com/2018/01/24/should-you-quit/>, 24/01/2018
- Prime, D., *Pastors and Teachers: The Calling and Work of Christ's Ministers* (Highland Books) 1989

Websites & Facebook pages

Dani Treweek -

<https://www.biblicalsingleness.com>

<https://www.facebook.com/biblicalsingleness/>

Sermons / talk

Numerous talk on singleness by single women, single men, married women, and married men. They include being single in ministry, single and complementarianism, a biblical theology of singleness, and divorce, <https://paa.moore.edu.au/resource-center/>

Garrett, I., 3 sermons on singleness & marriage in the service of God, .., <http://clayton.tv/new/0i0/2909/>

Allberry, S., 4 part sermon series on 'The Gospel and your Body',

<https://www.stmarysmaidenhead.org/churchbuilder/medialib.php?q=The+gospel+and+your+body> (2016)

Statistics

Demographics of living alone, <https://aifs.gov.au/publications/demographics-living-alone> (March 2015)

Marriages & Divorces in Australia, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3310.0> (2015)

Population by Age & Sex in Australia, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3235.0> (2016)

Quiet time material I've found helpful in recent years (K.I.S.S)

- (i) *Explore by the Book* series (The Good Book Co.) (various years, various authors) Short readings, a couple of questions, a couple of praise and prayer points. Space for notes.

- (ii) *The Bible in One Year* (NIV) (various publications). Just readings from both the OT & NT.
- (iii) *The Anglican Prayer Book* (AAPB) (1978). Readings and set prayers.
- (iv) *Her-story: 366 devotions from 21 centuries of the Christian church* by D. L. Severance (Christian Focus) (2016). Mainly US and UK women. Features a different woman each day, a short reading about her and her ministry, and then just one or two bible verses.
- (v) *The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers & Devotions* (The Banner of Truth Trust) ed. Arthur Bennett. (1975) Great wide variety of prayers. It's available for free in electronic form, <https://banneroftruth.org/us/devotional/union-with-christ/>. I would prefer the prayers in modern English and some have attempted to do this e.g. <http://puritanprayersrevised.blogspot.com.au/2010/01/introduction.html>
- (vi) *By God's Word: 60 Reflections for Living in God's World* by P.D. Jensen (Matthias Media) (2007). Short reading by Phillip on a topic and then a bible passage to read.
- (vii) *Through the Bible Through the Year: Daily Reflections from Genesis to Revelation* by J. Stott (Candle Books) (2006). You don't read every verse of the bible, but rather sections from Gen-Rev, very often just one verse. Then a very short reading from John, and he often connects / reminds readers of things read previously and so it's like going on a journey through the Bible with him. After his reading there is suggestions of further bible readings.

Prayer for the Unmarried (Mike Dicker adapted this from Common prayer's prayer for married)

We praise you, God of love, creator of the universe, for making us male and female, and giving us the gift of each other. We pray for those who, like our Lord Jesus Christ, remain unmarried; either by constraint or by their own decision and devotion to you. Lord we praise you for the new family you have created, the household of all who believe in your Son. Father make us to so love one another in deep and meaningful friendship that no one may feel alone or without the joy of companionship. Deepen our commitment to one another and our trust in your provision for all our needs, so that we may live in contentment until we all come to your eternal kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Introduction

What do you think of when you think of a single person?

What are the different types of singleness?

Why does the whole church need to be clear about singleness?

1. **Confession**
2. **Distractions**
3. **Contentment**
4. **Main defining category: *In Christ***
5. **Some unhelpful things some people have said about singleness**
6. **Some helpful things some people have said about singleness**

"One of the things that has always been nice for me in this congregation as a single person is – I always get treated like a person. I don't know if you ever think about me as being single, but I never think of myself as being single and I don't think of you as being married. I mean, it has never occurred to me to sort of categorise people like that. I just think about you as you and that's how I want you to think about me as me, and don't think about me as me in transit to some other condition. I might be in transit (although I think I'm not) but there are single people in this congregation who, I think, probably may be in transit and, if they are, think about them as they are right now. Let me tell you the temptations of single people so that you can pray about them and help them. Their two biggest temptations are that of sexual fantasy and loneliness, and they are not too far removed from each other in my judgment. Can I just say to the singles, it might be the temptation of everybody for all I know, but it is specifically ours and it is unhelpful to dwell on either of them. But you ought to take action and not just mope around. OK? You can always turn your loneliness into something else by ringing somebody or by inviting them to your place. But take action, and take positive action in regard to that." (John Chapman, text from a sermon on singleness to his home church, St Aidan's Hurstville Grove, Sydney, cited in *Chappo*, 191)

"We know we are sexual beings. We know this sexuality is meant to mean something. But unless we know what our sexuality is for, we won't understand how it's meant to work. The best we'll be able to do [...] is try to get some passing entertainment from it. The architecture of the Bible points us to the purpose of why we're sexual beings. Scripture begins with a marriage (Adam and Eve), and it ends with a marriage (Christ and his church)—

and the former is the trailer for the latter. The joining together of the man and woman is a picture of how heaven and earth will one day be joined together through the union of Jesus and his people. This connection is reflected throughout the Bible. Song of Songs uses the mutual delight and intimacy of a husband and wife to reflect the delight of Christ in his people. The prophets frequently use marital language to describe God's relationship with his people; he is the groom, and they are the (frequently wayward) bride. Jesus picks up this language in the Gospels, describing himself as "the bridegroom" (e.g., [Mark 2:19–20](#)). Paul teaches the Corinthians that just as a man and his wife become one flesh, those who join themselves to Christ become "one in spirit" with him ([1 Cor. 6:16–17](#)). And in [Ephesians 5:31](#) he goes on to say that the mystery behind human marriage is—as we now see it's always been—Christ's relationship to the church. Human marriage, then, reflects the big story of the Bible—the big thing God is doing in the universe: making a people for his Son. And this story provides the key to understanding our sexuality. It also accounts for why the Bible defines marriage as between one man and one woman, rather than two persons of the same sex. In [Matthew 19:4–5](#), Jesus connects the phenomenon of marriage with the fact of our having been created male and female. Marriage is predicated on gender difference; it's because we're male and female that we have this thing called marriage. Jesus then goes on to show that the only godly alternative to marriage is singleness. When the disciples balk at the intended lifelong implications of marriage (v. 10), Jesus points them to the example of the eunuchs—the long-term singles of his day (vv. 11–12). If marriage is too much commitment, there's the option of celibacy. Jesus gives no third alternative, whether cohabitation or some alternative construal of marriage. For marriage to be a parable of Christ and the church, it must be between like and unlike, male and female. Change this arrangement, and you end up distorting the spiritual reality to which it points. Alter marriage, and you end up distorting a picture of the gospel itself. This vision of marriage helps us keep it in healthy perspective. Grasping what it points to means we won't demean or trivialize it, and it also means we won't idolize it. Marriage is not ultimate, but it points to the thing that is. Marriage itself is not meant to fulfill us, but to point to the thing that does. So if this is the ultimate purpose of marriage, where does that leave singleness? Are those of us who are celibate wasting our sexuality by not giving expression to our sexual desires? It means singleness, like marriage, has a [unique way of testifying](#) to the gospel of grace. Jesus said there will be no marriage in the new creation. In that respect we'll be like the angels, neither marrying nor being given in marriage ([Matt. 22:30](#)). We will have the reality; we will no longer need the signpost. By foregoing marriage now, singleness is a way of both anticipating this reality and testifying to its goodness. It's a way of saying this future reality is so certain that we can live according to it now. If marriage shows us the shape of the gospel, singleness shows us its sufficiency. It's a way of declaring to a world obsessed with sexual and romantic intimacy that these things are not ultimate, and that in Christ we possess what is. This doesn't mean our sexual feelings are redundant, dangling unfulfilled like the equivalent of an appendix. The consummation our sexual feelings long for can (if we let them) point us to a greater consummation to come. They remind us that what we forego on a temporal plane now, we will enjoy in fullness in the new creation for eternity. Sexual unfulfillment itself becomes a means of deepening our sense of the fuller, deeper satisfaction we await in Jesus. It helps us to hunger more for him. We skip the appetizer, but we await the entrée. Celibacy isn't a waste of our sexuality; it's a wonderful way of fulfilling it. It's allowing our sexual feelings to point us to the reality of the gospel. We will never ultimately make sense of what our sexuality is unless we know what it is *for*—to point us to God's love for us in Christ." (Sam Allberry, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/how-celibacy-can-fulfill-your-sexuality/>)

"In C. S. Lewis's *The Great Divorce*, the narrator and his guide visit heaven and encounter a ghost named Sarah Smith. The narrator immediately recognizes Sarah as "a person of particular importance" because she's surrounded by young men and women. Describing them as her sons and daughters, the guide explains, Every young man or boy that met her became her son—even if it was only the boy that brought the meat to her back door. Every girl that met her was her daughter. . . . Her motherhood was of a different kind. Those on whom it fell went back to their natural parents loving them more. Sarah Smith's motherhood wasn't biological but spiritual. Her children were born through faith, not through sex. As a Christian, I worship a man who was a biologically childless parent. Jesus Christ never married, never had kids, yet he said: "Behold, I and the children God has given me" ([Heb. 2:13](#)). And consider what the prophet says of him: "When his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring. . . . Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied" ([Isa. 53:10–11](#)). Jesus never held a son or daughter in his arms, but he nonetheless came to bear children, to give birth to a people—like me and perhaps you—who now bear his family resemblance. To be clear, having spiritual children isn't the same as having biological or adoptive children. But just because it isn't the same doesn't mean it can't satisfy. The family of God is expansive—uniting the old and the young, the black and the white, the orphan and the widow, the single and the married. When I look upon the families who have brought me into their homes, loving me and giving me children to love, I realize I am already a single mother by choice—even if our only bond is one of faith and love." (Bethany Jenkins, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/turning-40-while-single-and-childless/>)

7. Myths about singleness

8. Things to watch out for as single people

Exercises you may want to do:

1. Choose to listen to 2-7 different sermons – at church and online over the course of a week or so. Choose any sermons, they don't have to be on singleness / 1 Cor 7, they can be on any passage / any topic. And ask yourself: How do these sermons help me understand singleness?
2. Older singles in our churches
Ask them about their ministries; their gifting
What they want to do
What they have done in the past
3. When having people over / inviting people out, ensure there is sometimes a range of marital status if you find you are always spending time with people in the same marital status as yourself.
4. Ask your minister what is the importance of the local church? Listen to some sermons, do some reading on the importance of the local church.

In closing

From Sam Allberry:

Adam in his Garden said, "Not your will but mine" and brought death.

Jesus in his Garden said, "Not my will but yours" and brought life.

Who are you going to put your trust in? A leader who you can give you a 'moment', or the everlasting God?

Where is your faith?