

The gift



of sing1leness

By Dennis Franck

Have you ever heard parents tell their kids, “Someday you’ll grow up and have a wonderful husband/wife” or “God has someone special for you”? Have you ever felt the pressure some people in the church put on a young adult to “settle down and get married”?

It’s very common for parents, church leaders and others to want to see youth do what many Christians think is the “successful thing” — graduate from high school, go to college, find a potential mate, graduate from college, get married, serve God together and live happily ever after.

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Jesus told people that not everyone can receive or accept serving God as a purpose for staying single. It is for those to whom the capacity to receive it has been given. In other words, it is a gift.



There are problems with this thinking, and many young people today know that such a scenario is not always the reality. Divorce is extremely common, many teens are living in single-parent families, and maybe even more difficult, many are living in blended families.

The practice of marrying by age 18, 21 or even 25 is not as common as when your parents married. In fact, marrying by age 25 is becoming less and less frequent these days.

Recent statistics for the United States reveal there are 48.5 million never-married adults over the age of 18 and 83 million total single adults. People are postponing marriage for many reasons, including finishing college, pursuing a master's degree, getting a good start in a career, buying a home and developing their abilities and talents.

A little-known gift

I don't know about you, but I never heard anything about the gift of singleness while growing up in a Christian home. You'd have thought I'd have heard something about this since it is in the Bible ... but I didn't. What does God's Word say about this, anyway?

The gift of singleness is found in at least two places: Matthew 19:11,12 and 1 Corinthians 7:7. In Matthew, Jesus explained the three reasons that kept a person single: some people were born without the ability to have sex; some were castrated; some chose to remain single to serve God.

Regarding the gift of singleness, Jesus told people that not everyone can receive or accept

serving God as a purpose for staying single. It is for those to whom the capacity to receive it has been given. In other words, it is a gift.

Singleness can be a gift for life, or can be chosen for a period of time to develop one's identity, character and direction before marriage.

In 1 Corinthians 7:7, Paul presented further teaching about the gift of singleness. He said, "I wish everyone could get along without marrying, just as I do. But we are not all the same. God gives some the gift of a husband or wife, and others he gives the gift of being able to stay happily unmarried" (*The Living Bible*).

Paul was a single man when he wrote 1 and 2 Corinthians: "I say to those who aren't married, and to widows — better to stay unmarried if you can, just as I am" (1 Corinthians 7:8). So, singleness is a gift and marriage is a gift.

As a pastor to young adults and single adults for 21 years, I have known several people who had the gift of singleness. These people usually have four things in common:

- They are not bothered by staying celibate.
- They are content being single and not having a romantic relationship.
- They give little thought to marriage.
- They find great satisfaction serving God in their spare time.

What can be good about being single?

Jesus was a single adult. Jesus lived on Earth for 33 years un-

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Headed for marriage?

The two-become-one bond of marriage is a complex combination. If you have the desire to marry, how do you prepare for marriage? As many have discovered, being married to the wrong person is worse than not being married at all.

First and foremost, the key to true joy and happiness in any area of life is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. You must first be complete and whole within yourself and within your relationship with Jesus before you will ever have a satisfying relationship with another human being.

Once that relationship is in place, another foundation for any marriage is very straightforward: Be best friends. Our society places so much emphasis on sex and “chemistry,” but so little on friendship. True friendship in marriage is the foundation to a stable, long-lasting, happy union.

What does it mean to be best friends? Simply, it means you like and respect each other and have a lot in common. I believe the more that you have in common with someone the stronger the relationship will be. The common cliché in our society is “opposites attract.” That may be true for magnets in science class, but the most peaceful, harmonious relationship will be with someone with whom you are most compatible — most alike, not most different.

Give the relationship time to grow naturally, and in the process be sure to look beyond a person’s exterior qualities (such as house, car, job, looks) to his or her inner character qualities — faithfulness, honesty, integrity, commitment. Take time to discover true character. Is that person trustworthy? Loyal? Dependable? Caring?

Ultimately, before making any serious commitment to someone, ask yourself these important questions: Do I have inner peace or inner conflict about this relationship? Do I feel good about myself when I am with this person? Does this person bring out the best or worst in me?

If you have a negative response to any of these questions, you need to step back, pray and ask if this relationship is God’s best for you.

Kathy Wegner

KATHY WEGNER is the single adult pastor at Ahwatukee Assembly of God in Phoenix, Ariz.



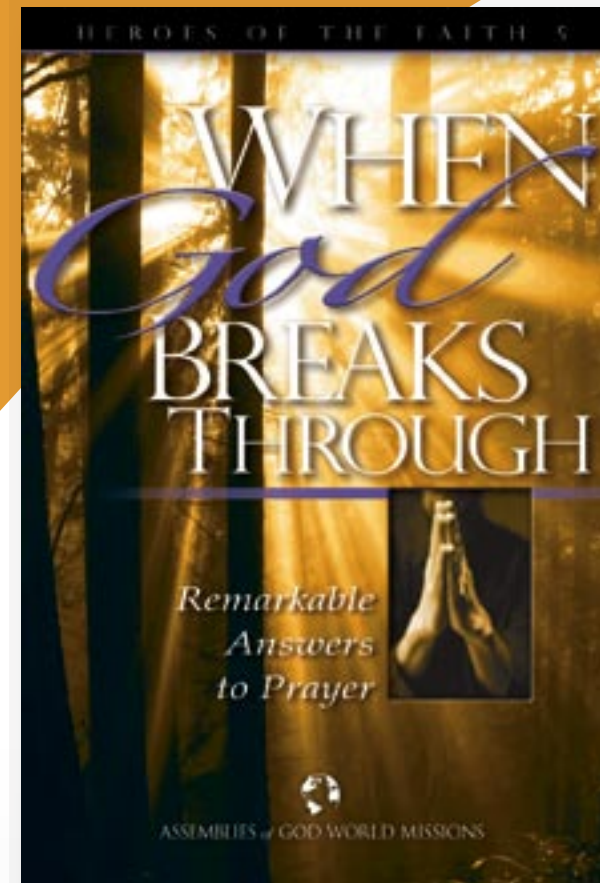
married. Living in Jewish society, parents chose a spouse for their children who were typically married by the time they were 18 years old. Yet Jesus lived well into His 30s without a wife and children.

You may have never thought about the benefits of singleness, whether for a period of time, or for life. Here are some benefits I learned from others while pastoring adults who were single or single-again (widowed or divorced).

1. *You can travel, move and spend money without a spouse’s permission.*
2. *You have more time to serve God and develop your spiritual life.*
3. *You can prepare to be a healthy marriage partner.*
4. *You can live without the stresses marriage brings.*
5. *You have more freedom to develop close friends and to develop abilities and talents.*
6. *You do not have to be concerned about having married the wrong person or married at the wrong time or for the wrong reasons.*
7. *You can keep the apartment/house the way you want it.*
8. *You can cook and eat only the food you want.*

One powerful advantage of being single is the benefit of developing you. Many adults marry before they should and have not taken the necessary time to mature spiritually, relationally, emotionally and finan-

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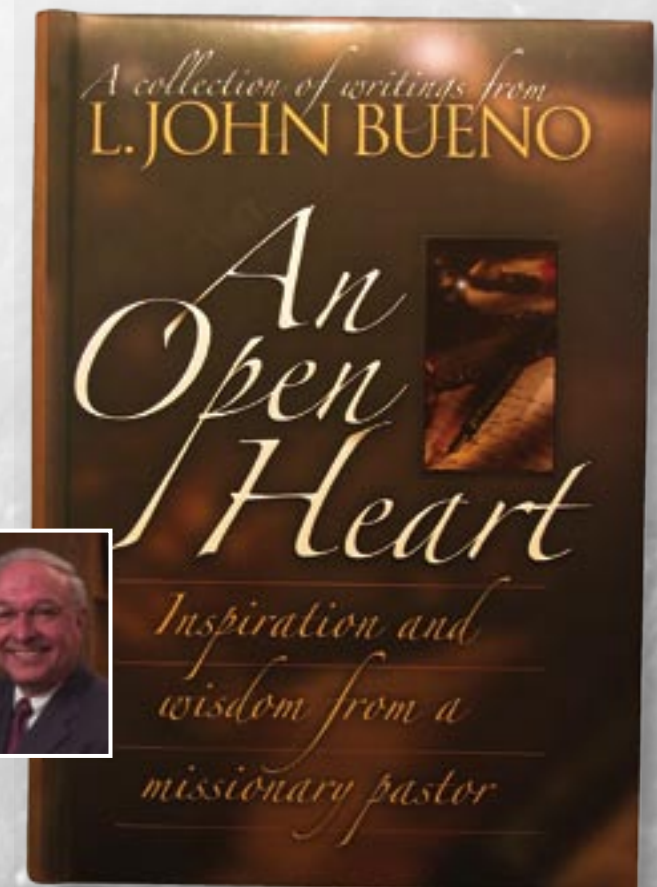
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cially before entering into a lifetime commitment. They don't have a complete understanding of the roles and responsibilities of marriage.

Such marriages have much difficulty and sometimes don't last. It is far more important to *become* the right person for marriage than to *find* the right person for marriage.

Many people think marriage completes us. I think some peo-

ple confuse the words *complete* and *complement*. Colossians 2:10 says that we are "complete in Him" (NKJV). Christ completes us, not marriage. **tpe**

DENNIS FRANCK is the director of Single Adult/Young Adult Ministries of the Assemblies of God. For more information, visit singles.ag.org.

E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.

6 wrong reasons to marry

- 1. To escape singleness.** Some people are so unhappy being single that they will do almost anything to get out of it. But a season of singleness can help you become the whole person God wants you to be before marriage.
- 2. To escape loneliness.** Loneliness is a state of mind that often requires a personal change. That's not to say that marriage cannot be a partial cure for loneliness, but there are many married adults who, for a variety of reasons, will experience loneliness in marriage.
- 3. To legitimize sex.** To marry out of a desire to make sex "OK" in God's eyes is to marry prematurely. The reality is, sex is only a small part of marriage. How compatible are you otherwise?
- 4. To escape living with Mom and/or Dad.** If a person can't handle relationships with immediate family, how well will he or she handle the demands of marriage?
- 5. To provide a stepparent for your children.** Some single parents are so tired and frustrated from raising children alone that a person of the opposite sex who cares for them appears to be an answer for the lack of another parent. But children grow up and leave, and you will have to face the person you married. What do you have in common?
- 6. To fulfill a "need" to be married.** Some people are just in love with the idea of being married. Marriage is not an ideal. Its challenges can be a letdown for people with unrealistic expectations.

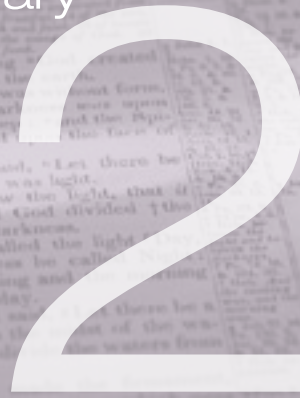
All of these reasons for marrying are selfish and self-fulfilling. Marriage means giving to, edifying and fulfilling the other person who is the object of our affection.

Dennis Franck

- 1 Leviticus 1-4
- 2 Leviticus 5-7
- 3 Leviticus 8-10
- 4 Leviticus 11-13
- 5 Leviticus 14, 15
- 6 Leviticus 16-18
- 7 Leviticus 19-21
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- 26 Numbers 32
- 27 Numbers 33, 34
- 28 Numbers 35, 36

BIBLE READING

February



L I V I N G I T

Salvation is in Christ

Last week's Living It was about the fall of humanity, the fact that every person is a sinner. It is a sad fact. But there is a happy fact that follows it: There is salvation in Jesus Christ!

Jesus died on the cross to provide the way out of punishment for sin. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (NIV).

Man's only hope of redemption is through the shed blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God. The Bible reveals the steps that lead to salvation, steps that multitudes have taken to bridge the separation between themselves and God.

First, one must admit being a sinner and believe in Jesus Christ as the only hope of salvation. In John 14:6, Jesus says, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Asking God's forgiveness with a repentant heart is next. He stands ready to accept all who do this sincerely. Repentance means regretting one's sin and intending to change completely, with God's help (Acts 3:19). The person who does this receives Christ and becomes a child of God (John 1:12).

After one receives Christ, it is important for the new believer to confess verbally that Jesus is Lord (Romans 10:9,10). The outward evidence of a changed life and lifestyle follows (Ephesians 2:8-10). The new believer is a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17), certainly not perfect, but clearly demonstrating his relationship with Christ.

Ken Horn

Based on one of 16 foundational truths and one of four cardinal doctrines of the Assemblies of God.