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Christian Singles: The Final Frontier

Are the Christian singles today in the world a depleted gold mine, a market subjected to denial by others, the new anathema of the Christian Clique, the 'red-headed step-child' of the church, or an Edsel in the post-modern, culturally relevant era? Instead of those misguided conclusions, I tend to believe that we, as single Christians, are the forgotten frontier in the church today. Although we may be diverse in conviction, we are unified in our hope and aspirations, identity and acceptance. The last U.S. Census counted the number of singles in America to be approximately forty million singles. Out of the forty Million singles, approximately two to five million singles profess to be Christian by belief and attend church on a regular basis. What used to be the classic model of a family consisting of a mom, dad, two kids, and a dog (it's a tragedy that many family-focused organizations of today either see this as still true or the number of kids increase to being more than three) has now turned into a flood of single-parent incomes (primarily women) in the workplace, free love is accepted, divorce and remarriage is now as common as the nightly news, etc. We are now experiencing the first true generation of young and single adults where many of them did not have a father-figure in the home to instill discipline, values, ethics, etc. The mother did the best she could. However, we saw a church condemn these divorced people as inferior, failures, and cursed and refused to touch and minister to these broken families in the name of "avoiding the appearance of evil". The church, in better position than government to help these people, used the tragedy of others to justify their own legalisms to make themselves look more holier and purer.

Careful analyses of the scriptures clearly show God's love and concern for those individuals who for some reason or another are single. This love and concern is the same love and concern shown to their married counterparts. More and more pre-married singles already come from broken homes to feel the pain of the "sanitized" stigma of "single-parent households" or "blended families". More and more singles are now the single parents of today. Between the pasts, inability to give and inability to receive love, betrayal of trust, inadequacies, guilt, rejection by the holier than thou, and war of the roses, the trend continues to increase more rampantly with no evident signs of downward change. The church of today must recognize the hurt and dying and become able to minister the Love of Jesus to their dying world of all singles, whether divorced, separated, widowed, or never married.

Today, we see the mothers now grandmothers and the grown-up children now parents in society at the mall, the golf course, the PTA meetings, etc. However, we do not see many of these spiritually hungry people at the one place that can help answer their questions, meet their needs, and influence society. We do not see these people at church because of the stigma the church placed on

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these people. Like the church in Nathaniel Hawthorne's book The Scarlet Letter that would physically sew the scarlet letter "A" on the clothes of an adulteress, the church has spiritually sowed the scarlet letter "S" (for Sinner) on their mind, and emotions. Therefore many single people today go through life searching for that something to meet their needs wherever their flesh attracts them, whether it's online dating, the nightclub, workaholism, or weekend getaways. However, some do come to a decision of accepting Christ as their personal Savior through some form of evangelistic outreach. These people decide to become part of a community of people and learn to live out the Christian lifestyle. However, when the singles look at themselves demographically in the church setting, many feel the same loneliness and emptiness that they felt in the world. Once again, in the midst of big home schooled families, the isolation reverberates within their senses as a benchmark of either acceptance / rejection or normal / dysfunctional.

Why the term "forgotten frontier"? Because some cutting edge churches did attempt to reach out to this group of people. Some of these cutting edge churches were successful while some cutting edge churches failed again and again. Some churches did not make an attempt to reach out to singles because of some of the following reasons listed below:

- "This ministry had little response in the past."
- "There are not enough singles here in our congregation to invest time, nurturing, and money into."
- "All singles are sexually active, have no sense of values, and therefore are beyond reach"
- "We do not condone 'meat-markets' for this will tarnish our prestigious reputation"
- "Generation X, urrrrrrrgh"
- "This does not fit our 'Focus on the family, Republican, feminized man, nine home schooled kids, stay-at-home mom, wood grained minivan, etc...' vision"
- "Singles do not place enough money in the offering plate to justify investing in their souls"
- "If you are still single at age 30, you have a problem, some 'hidden sin' or some issues to deal with and repent of"

There are other factors that I did not mention above. However, here is what has not changed, many singles lay out there dying for love, acceptance, hope, and fellowship. If one even watched or attended many men's specific or women's specific conferences, one noticed that the central theme was for men and women to get back to their priorities with their families and marriages. Nowhere to be addressed was the issues of single Christian men and women, the implementation of priorities of love, respect, and gentleness needed to pursue

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healthy Godly relationships with Godly members of the opposite sex. From the single Christians I have met via e-mail, I have discovered that Women's Aglow and the Women of Faith conferences does more to help single Christian women prepare for life, relations, marriage, and singles related issues than the Promise Keepers movement directed at Christian men, or should I say, directed at married Christian men with children.

The mentality of singles in the church needs to be changed from:

- "Singles ignored" to "singles cared for"
- "Divorced with no support" to "divorce recovery groups"
- "Singles 18-23" to "singles 18-life" (author's note here, I am still seeing that many singles groups have made some progress here, but instead of seeing the mentality of "singles 18-life" we see "singles 18-30")
- "Singles in the church" to "singles ministries"
- "Singles with no purpose" to "singles with vision"

This list can go on and on. We are Singles, not Shingles. We are not a disease that is contagious and clouds up the church's utopic visions of what a family is. We are not to be feared. We are not after breaking up your family and conducting a secret love affair with your spouse. We are and need to be loved and respected. We are not the church's easy free labor pool to do the undesirable jobs no one else wants to do in the name of "servitude", "contentment", and "humility". We are anointed individuals like our married counterparts with unique Spiritual giftings and callings that others need in their lives. We are not inferior nor second-class citizens. We are not dysfunctional nor are we anybody's thrown away trash. We are people. We are Christians. We are God's children also. We have pain. We have fun. We experience joy. We experience grief. No government should discriminate against us in the form of tax breaks because of our marital status nor should an employer discriminate against us salary-wise because of our marital status. We are an individual like you. We, as singles, do not need to be shortchanged and treated as second-class citizens.

Singles today are very skeptical of "organized" mainline religion, but open to events and activities lacking the "churchy" feel. Singles tend to fear the onward ticking of the "biological clock". To have to attend the wedding of a friend "now free from the singles scene (lucky them)" or the funeral of an elder who exemplified the meaning of marriage creates the sensation of time slipping away and deepens the hurt and pain. Single Christian women (especially older ones) want to break the stigma of either being incorrectly viewed as "an old maid" or "cranky witches". At the same time, single Christian men (especially older ones) want to be free from the stigma of being unjustly classified as "gay" or "techno geek nerd". These labels add to the already present pain of singleness and

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enforce the loneliness of a 2:30 AM wakeup in the middle of the night. Singles in general are looking for safe ways to meet members of the opposite sex. They have tried singles clubs, bars, one night stands between the sheets, blind dates, and personal ads with little to no success resulting in the feeling of being cheapened and/or burned by their own selfish and narcissistic lifestyles. Career objectives are on the mind of singles today. A balance of career and God needs to be developed into their lives since most usually put their careers ahead of God.

I have found that most singles are procrastinators by nature; we singles tend to put off major decisions until the decision becomes absolutely necessary to make. It is very important for church leadership to be patient, persistent, and follow-up more with singles. Even though we have very active lifestyles, we often feel very lonely and out of place. Just because we do find a church does not mean that we become fully settled, assimilated, or in some cases wanted. The winds of change come in, more harsh than ever. These changes heightens the loneliness, fears, disillusionment (professionally, mentally, socially, and personally) and insecurities that prevail in one's heart. The feeling that one has missed "the good life" sets in. Some singles even go to the extreme as to leave their well established careers in search of new vitality, vigor, and excitement.

With today's singles turned off by "organized" religion, Bible study needs to be brief, short to the point, and very light in nature. Today's singles know how to cut through the fluff and get down to the meat of the issue. The Word of God does not need to be compromised during these times of studying the Bible. The times of fellowshiping do not need to embarrass singles by playing old, tired, worn-out games nor the re-asking of the same questions that receive the same answers that does not work. Singles have had enough of games. They have had to play the games of dating, the game of politics and "team building" at work, the game of acceptance in the church, and this list can really go on-and-on. The days of Sunday-school picnics and fried chicken on the churchyard after morning service are over. Today's singles need motivation, drive, intensity, work ethic, and healing instilled into them to do what God has called for them to do in life. Most singles are shy by nature and it takes every ounce of mental energy for them just to walk through the church doors alone to see firsthand the families and couples in their respective cliques making us re-question ourselves "Do we, or do we not b

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many churches have already tried to deal with Christians and dating by the concept of denial and dowry state called "I Kissed Dating Goodbye" written by an author who broke his own rules and re-legalisms when he met his wife and could not distinguish the difference between dating and courtship based on the rules he created and defined. It is like the married people got their mate and does not care anymore if singles find the special one God wants for them to have. It's hypocritical. They wanted to get married, got married, but now discourage others from getting married. Singles need to know that they belong and that we count as complete human beings, not an incomplete person who can not be considered as being functional until married. In fact, when singles do get married, then the couples considers them as incomplete until their first child. The bar level and benchmark between the state of completeness and incompleteness is always changing as the single individual continues to grow. Therefore, progress at God's timing to be in God's will, not some man's personal vision.

Singles today, need the encouragement of each other to live out the single lifestyle. Many singles groups end their target markets at the age of 30 and therefore, expect the individuals at 30 to already be married and "Dobsonized" into the "Republican, single-income, nine-home schooled children family with the wood grained minivan" philosophy. In most churches, their vision and their budgets reflect the desire to minister to families and children because the majority of the congregation is within a family either by being a parent or a child themselves. The single person in the college / career age brackets (18-25) and older singles are the minority. Recognizing one is in the minority on the demographic scale, the single Christian individual must ask themselves numerous questions:

- Am I a Christian person of significance to God and my fellow church members or am I just another number and money to denomination headquarters?
- Do I have to be "content in your circumstances" when everyone else is not content in their circumstances?
- If I left my current church for a greener pasture, would I just repeat the same scenario again? (author's note here: you would probably experience a better singles group, but still experience the same 'minority' feel you currently experience)

No matter where you go to fellowship, the single Christian will always be in the minority and in most cases, experience the same frustrations of lack of church support, church resources, and church budget to obtain the needs that exist within you. Therefore church hopping is not feasible unless your current church has no singles support whatsoever and you need support of likeminded individuals or if you deeply feel the conviction of God telling you to leave and go

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elsewhere. You have a right to expect other church members to treat you like an adult and not a sympathy case. We as singles do not want pity, a handout, nor sympathy, we need hope and assurance that we can cope with our singleness. We need to be lifted up in prayer as we wrestle with the world's concept of free love knowing that true love is not free. True love has a price of integrity and commitment. While many singles try to fulfill their inner voids by being sexually active, we need someone to stand with us in prayer and accountability in order to save our sexual purity for the marriage covenant. My success in God is not based on whether I am married with a huge family. Success in God is based on obedience and sacrifice to His word and commandments. True Christian singles really have a desire to obey and follow the Word of God to it's fullest. We are not looking for an easy way out, but a reassurance and a confidence to live out the Christian lifestyle.

As time rolls onward and our lives progress older, the same questions will be asked again by the next generation. Hopefully, we will be the generation that has the answers and has the support the younger singles need for survival, purity, and confidence. I think that the church has forgotten that many singles who have been Christian since childhood also experienced the same lack of support for their youth groups for some of the same reasons listed on page one concerning the lack of a youth group or the fact that youth does not bring in the numbers and money. Therefore, the lack of support went from Sunday school, to youth group, to singles group. It is evident that now, many churches are now investing time, money, and resources into their youth groups seeing what the failure to invest in the youth of yesterday did to drive yesterday's youth away from the church. Hopefully, this trend will continue as the same people grow older more and more churches will see the need to invest time, money, prayer, intercession and resources in their single members of their congregations not just to keep them, but to care and nurture for their needs.

In summary, The Catch-22 of placement and want exists in many churches today concerning singles. As singles issues increase and come to the drawing board to be addressed, relevant answers to real life's real problems are needed to fill the emptiness existing in Christian singles today. No more will the answer "just be content in Christ and everything will work in place in due time". The Christian single of today is very mobile and active. If you attempt to demobilize and deactivate the single person's already busy schedule just to feed that person culturally irreverent material, then you have lost the Single person. Many single people stay busy with either extracurricular activities or become workaholics to mask the pain of loneliness and inadequacy. However, the single person desires relevant answers to the loneliness, isolation, and instability they feel and fear when they suddenly wake up at 3 AM in the morning and the reality of the isolation and loneliness overwhelms them. The flaming need for personal intimacy is not quenched by a night of cheap sex nor is it quenched by the

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spiritual psychobabble of contentment. The need for intimacy is quenched when one allows God Almighty to apply salve to the wounds of past relationship hurts, past sins, and feelings of inferiority. There will always be a segment of Christian singles in the church. The church that desires to be cutting edge in the area of singles ministry must be the church that addresses the needs head on not at the lower level of maturity expected for Junior/Senior High scholars, not at the expectant level of already being married, but at the level of progress the Singles are currently at in their present lives between The Rock and The Hard Place.

Lord, right now, I ask you in the name of Jesus, that you would send comfort today to those who are single. Help us deal with where we are with our circumstances, our finances, our careers, our fellowships. I ask that you would send healing to all of the areas where we hurt and desire love and acceptance. I also ask that you would protect and shelter those who need a safe haven of peace. I ask that you would send fellowship to those who need and desire to be functional within a local church body. I pray for blessings and happiness to enter their lives now. I also ask that you will send every single person their God-chosen mate in your appropriate timing. All things I ask, in Jesus name. AMEN.