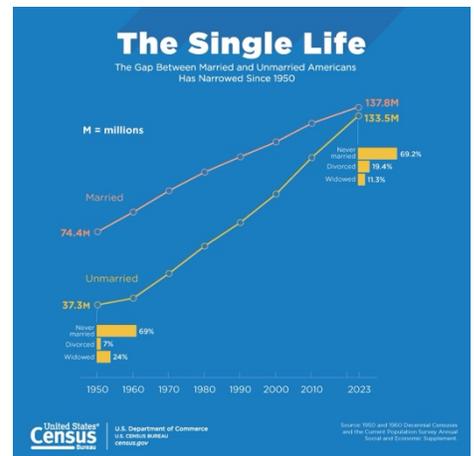


# Singleness, Women in Ministry, and the Local Church

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## Introduction

- 2022 American Religious Benchmark Survey
  - *From 2018 to 2022, the amount of singles who never attend church increased by almost 50%*
- Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures Project (2010 & 2020)
  - *“The global church has at least eighty-five million more women than men among adults 30 and older. In the US church, women outnumber men by twenty-five million. Even if some of those women have or find spouses outside the faith, that leaves millions who can’t ever marry. The church has yet to face that reality.”*
- Scope of this workshop: Discover the importance of embracing singleness, overcoming biases, and empowering both single individuals and women in our local church communities. Learn practical ways to mentor + mobilize singles and women into all levels of leadership within the church.
- Defining terms:
  - **Single**: a.) not married, b.) of or relating to celibacy<sup>1</sup>
    - Single people are those who are unmarried by choice or by circumstance, including those who have never been married, are divorced or are widowed.
    - According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2023, 133.5 million Americans were unmarried. That is 49.2% of the population. (Infographic courtesy of US Census Bureau<sup>2</sup>)
  - Foursquare Global Distinctives: Empowering Leadership - *According to God’s gifting and calling, we will intentionally prepare and release men and women across generations and cultures into all positions of leadership and areas of ministry.*<sup>3</sup>



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/single>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/stories/singles-awareness-day.html>

<sup>3</sup> “Foursquare Global Distinctives” Foursquare Licensing Course Guide, 12.

- Foursquare Identity Keystone: Women in Senior Leadership - *The value and belief that women should be celebrated and equipped for every area of ministry leadership.*<sup>4</sup>

## A Theological Approach to Singleness, Women and the Church

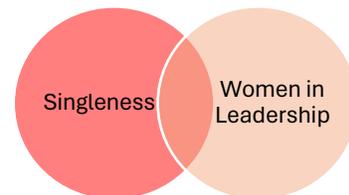
- I. Singleness as Fidelity to Christ
- II. A New Approach to Family
  - Genesis 1:27-28 – God’s first command was to “be fruitful and multiply.” For the Ancient Near Eastern cultures, including Israel, the family was the most validating part of your existence. Therefore, marriage and children were of the utmost importance.
  - Matthew 28:19-20 – Jesus, our single Messiah, was the most fruitful person who never had biological children; this new family of God, modeled by Jesus and instituted at Pentecost, looked like making disciples who made disciples
- III. Wholeness in the Body
  - Paul’s metaphor of the body indicates a level of interdependence that the body of Christ should display. [1 Corinthians 12:12-27]

## Why Is This Still An Issue?

- **Billy Graham Rule:** To uphold morality as evangelists, Billy Graham and three other leaders instituted the Modesto Manifesto, which were resolutions to maintain ministry integrity. What has come to be known as the “Billy Graham Rule” relates to upholding sexual morality in which Billy Graham would not travel, meet or eat alone with a woman other than his wife.<sup>5</sup>

- **Challenges:**

- It implies that every male-female relationship is or can be sexual in nature. It paints women in an unfair light as temptresses or seductresses.
- It deprives men and women of healthy friendships with people of the opposite sex. This becomes a particular challenge for single people, but also for the formation of married people as well (i.e., learning from different experiences and perspectives).



<sup>4</sup> “Foursquare Identity Keystones” Foursquare Licensing Course Guide, 14

<sup>5</sup> <https://billygraham.org/story/the-modesto-manifesto-a-declaration-of-biblical-integrity/>

- It abdicates the need to cultivate the fruit of the Spirit in their lives (love, faithfulness, and self-control, to name a few – Galatians 5:22-23). While there is wisdom in not placing oneself in compromising situations, living a Christ-centered, Spirit-filled life means that we do not have to be bound by or give in to our base, fleshly urges.
  - It prevents women from being trained and mentored by men.
- **Biases against single people in ministry contexts**
  - An assumption of maturity in married people and immaturity in single people (particularly those who have never married)
  - An assumption of unbridled sexuality or hidden sexual struggles in single people + a discomfort with having conversations around sexual wholeness and holiness for single people
- What does the discipleship + empowerment of single people look like?
  - Discipleship is holistic. [Matthew 22:37-40]
  - Empowerment is for all Spirit-filled believers. [Acts 2:17-18]

## Community, Covenant + The Church

- The Gracious Power of God’s Indwelling Spirit
  - i. We need to quit idolizing the marriage covenant over the Jesus covenant.
  - ii. *“While both marriage and singleness are gifts for all God’s children to receive, both are also very difficult to live faithfully in our fallen world. Thankfully, God offers his children an even greater gift than marriage or singleness: the gracious power of his indwelling Spirit. As followers of Jesus receive his gift of grace, we are empowered to live out his vision for human flourishing in all our beauty and diversity.”* (The Story of Marriage booklet<sup>6</sup> released as a resource for Park Hill Church in San Diego.)
- Galatians 3:26-28: *So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

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<sup>6</sup> [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/633c20b6e432a20b1c0291c7/t/63f642ac1c6149028244d660/1677083317816/Park-Hill\\_The-Story-of-Marriage.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/633c20b6e432a20b1c0291c7/t/63f642ac1c6149028244d660/1677083317816/Park-Hill_The-Story-of-Marriage.pdf)

- i. ***“Christianity was the very first religion or worldview that held up single adulthood as a viable way of life. One clear difference between Christianity and Judaism and all other religions is the former entertainment of the idea that singleness is a paradigm way of life for its followers.”*** (Stanley Hauerwas, *Community of Character*)<sup>7</sup>

## Practical Tips

### ○ Partnership

- **Pastors and leaders**—are you using your single people or are you equipping them? Are you treating them as servants or as partners? I encourage you to sit down with the single people in your church and consider how you could be more inclusive with them.
- **Singles**—are you being intentional about seeking God first and what his plans and purposes are for your life and how you can serve in your local church context or are you too busy obsessing over when your spouse might eventually come along? Would you consider approaching your pastor and asking them to have a conversation about the things we are addressing in this workshop? Perhaps you could read *Solo Planet* together.

### ○ The Sexual Prosperity Gospel

- *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.”* (Luke 9:23-24)
- **Singles**—marriage and family is not guaranteed. Jesus is. He will never leave you or forsake you. He will be your comfort and your peace. He denied himself so that you could have life with God. Now we get to deny ourselves as our worship to him. I don’t know if that will lead us to marriage or not, but that’s not the point. It will lead to whole and flourishing, fulfilling life.
- **Marrieds**—marriage and family is not guaranteed. Jesus is. He will never leave you or forsake you. He will be your comfort and your peace. He denied himself so that you could have life with God. Now you get to deny yourself as your worship to him. I don’t know what this will lead to in your marriage and family,

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<sup>7</sup> Tim Keller, *Theology of Singleness* <https://vimeo.com/88162694>

the heartaches and joys that may come, but that's not the point. It will lead to whole and flourishing, fulfilling life.

○ **Loneliness**

- Psalm 73:23-26: *Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*
- **Singles**—God will be the strength of your heart and your portion forever. Go to Jesus often with your loneliness. He will meet you there. And then share that perspective with other lonely people around you. Look outside of yourself and find someone you can engage in community with. Maybe someone else needs community, too.
- **Marrieds**—invite your single friends to participate in life with you
  - Let them come raid your fridge, have them pray during your kids bedtime prayers, call them when you have to go run errands.
  - Sometimes single people just want to feel like they're a part of normal family life.
- **Singles & marrieds**—commune together, listen to each other, come to God with and for another, lament together, laugh together.
  - Jesus has given us the solution for loneliness—he puts the lonely in families. Let's be family together with Jesus.

## **Further Reading + Resources**

### ***Singleness--***

*7 Myths About Singleness* by Sam Allberry

*Solo Planet: How Singles Help the Church Recover Our Calling* by Anna Broadway

Timothy Keller Sermons Podcast by Gospel in Life

- A Theology of Singleness
- Singleness and the Rest of the World

### ***Sexuality and Gender --***

*Sexual Character* by Marva Dawn

Resources by Preston Sprinkle:

- The Center for Faith, Sexuality & Gender ([centerforfaith.com](http://centerforfaith.com))
- Theology in the Raw podcast
- Exiles in Babylon 2024 Conference--Women, Power, and Abuse in the Church

### ***Spiritual Formation—***

*Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* by Pete Scazzero

*The Deeply Formed Life* by Rich Villodas

*Practicing The Way* by John Mark Comer

### ***Women in Leadership--***

*Tell Her Story* by Nijay Gupta

*Why Not Women* by Loren Cunningham and David Joel Hamilton with Janice Rogers

*Women in Ministry Leadership* with Professor Ryan Lytton (New Hope Worship Center Media)