

# *Singled Out for Service*

**Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth**

Singleness once was looked upon as unusual, unfortunate, unnatural and even undesirable. Then innumerable Christian books, magazines and seminars explored the subject, offering everything from advice (how to be single and satisfied) to consolation (how to be happy though single). Singles were encouraged not to regard themselves as second-class citizens and challenged to express themselves. For fulfillment, they should look to such things as careers, hobbies and church singles' groups.

These materials have helped the Christian community develop a new perspective on singleness. It is no longer a social stigma. In fact, singles enjoy greater social acceptance than ever before. Most churches no longer regard singles as those who are not spiritually mature enough to be married. Singles' groups in churches are flourishing -many churches even employ a minister to singles.

This increased awareness of the value and needs of singles has been healthy, but I've witnessed some dangerous trends now gaining acceptance. For example, with the increase in divorce and widespread dissatisfaction with family life, many adults are choosing to remain single to avoid the pressures, responsibilities and restraints of having a family. I often hear single adults say, "There's no way I'll get married for a long time, I just don't want to be tied down with a family."

The state of singleness has been exalted to equality with the state of marriage, making marital status purely a matter of personal preference. While God calls many to a period of singleness, and a few to singleness for a life-time, we must never forget that He calls most people to marriage.

Of course, marriage does involve tremendous responsibility and restraint. But, in fulfilling God-ordained family roles, we become the fullest expression of all He intended us to be.

I have observed another dangerous trend in the Christian "singles' movement." It is very easy for singles to live for themselves and become preoccupied with success in the professional world. Now, there's certainly nothing wrong with careers and lucrative salaries, but God is concerned about the heart motives of His children. Many Christian singles are caught in the trap of self-seeking and self-fulfillment. To embark

on a career simply to achieve personal success and material security is a dead-end street.

Paul warned Timothy, "But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness" (1 Tim. 6:9-11).

Most singles are not under pressure to provide for a family; but this cannot be a license to pursue temporal values. The greatest position is not at the top of some corporate ladder, but as a bondservant of Jesus Christ. The greatest prestige is not human recognition, but the "well done, thou good and faithful servant" of our Master.

To avoid the potential pitfalls of singleness, it is important to make some non-negotiable spiritual commitments based on the principles of God's Word. I would like to share seven commitments I have made as a Christian single. They are not commitments applauded by the world system. They may appear to some as strenuous or limiting. But in making these commitments and in relying on God's grace for the power to fulfill them, I have entered into a place of greater spiritual abundance and genuine liberty.

1. I am committed to serve Christ with all my time, abilities and energy. This is the emphasis of Paul's teaching in I Corinthians 7. Paul is addressing those whom God has gifted to be single. His words are challenging: "But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the woman who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit. And this I say for your own benefit, not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is seemly, and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:32-35).

In the margin of my Bible I have written, "As a single woman, may I serve You, Jesus, with all of my body and spirit." You see, no one who has been redeemed by Christ has the right to be footloose and fancy-free. Singleness, whether for a few years or a lifetime, is not a time to be without responsibility, but a time to serve Christ wholeheartedly and full time, regardless of occupation.

One of my former pastors challenged the members of his church to "go for broke with God." I like that. Tireless, reckless abandon to the will and work of God ought to characterize the Christian who is single.

Years ago, a communist leader said, "We must train men and women who will devote to the revolution not merely their spare evenings, but the whole of their lives." The cause of Christ is far greater than any human revolution. The idea of an eight-hour workday, with "The rest of the time for myself," ought to be foreign to the Christian single. Jesus wants nothing less than the whole of our lives.

2. I am committed to relinquish all my expectations of material and physical security. All of us long for security, and sometimes God is pleased to provide security far greater than our actual needs. But we must be willing to have the spirit of Christ, who replied to a would-be follower, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head" (Matt. 8:20). I never want to become so secure—in a home, a job, a social group or a geographic location—that I am not willing to move the instant God wants me to. We must count it a privilege to relinquish all temporal security in order to follow Jesus and be eternally secure.
3. I am committed to develop personal discipline. Christ is looking for disciples—those whose body, soul, and spirit are disciplined to forsake the world and follow Him. Physical discipline is necessary for effective spiritual service. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "And everyone who competes in the games exercise self-control in all things. I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified (1 Cor. 9:25, 27).

Lack of moral discipline is one of the greatest disqualifiers of those who run the Christian race. A commitment to absolute moral purity is essential to the Christian single. I have observed that those who discipline themselves in such physical matters as eating and exercise are less subject to giving in to moral temptation.

Spiritual discipline also must be developed. Few Christians today are adequately disciplined in such things as prayer, Bible study, and Scripture memorization. Paul told Timothy to "discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness" (1 Tim. 4:7).

4. I am committed to relate to families. Those singles whose lives are characterized by loneliness have not discovered their place in the body of Christ. We are not alone. We are a part of and have a responsibility to the families in the body of Christ. Time spent with families has been one of the most valuable influences on my life. Wherever I live, I seek out families to love, serve, and worship with.

Commitment to families is a safeguard against selfishness. It provides practical preparation for marriage and parenting. We get firsthand exposure to the blessings of obeying God's family plan and the consequences of disregarding it. Nothing will rid us of impractical or idealistic notions of marriage and parenting faster than in-depth involvement in real homes.

When singles are assimilated into families, everyone benefits. The single adult can have a strong spiritual influence on children that supplements the training their parents provide. Spiritually wise and mature couples can counsel and pray for the single. And singles can meet needs of parents, such as to have time alone without the kids.

I am privileged to have "adopted" children and parents in every part of the country where I have lived. In the process of giving myself to these families, I have experienced God's great ability to meet my emotional and spiritual needs.

5. I am committed to honor and care for my widowed mother. God's command to children to honor their parents has no expiration date. Whether or not we are married, as long as we have parents, God expects us to honor them. He has equipped them with wisdom and counsel, regardless of their spiritual condition. When single adults break ties with their parents to pursue absolute independence, they are deprived of great spiritual blessings and protection.

The Bible gives instruction regarding children's responsibility to care for widowed parents (1 Tim. 5:4). The story of Ruth is a poignant illustration of a single woman's commitment to care for her widowed mother-in-law. Ruth put Naomi's future and interests ahead of her own. God not only used Ruth's obedience to restore joy and healing to Naomi's life, but also gave Ruth a wonderful husband and blessed the world with Jesus, a descendant of that marriage.

6. I am committed to give extravagantly rather than live extravagantly. I don't want things to have a grip on my life. And I don't want to own anything that I'm not willing to give to Jesus, or to one of His children in need, on a moment's notice.

Mary was a single woman who loved Jesus deeply. The greatest expression of her love came when she anointed the feet of Jesus with a pound of very costly ointment. Those who observed were indignant at her lavish worship. It was fanatical! Such a waste, they thought. But what could be more wasteful and ungrateful than to lavish such costly gifts on ourselves.

Giving is the greatest expression of genuine love. Learn to give lavishly. Learn to give every time God prompts your spirit with the need of another person. Our giving can never match that of Jesus. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might be rich" (2 Cor. 8:9).

7. Finally, I am committed to pursue God's will above all else. If God has chosen me for a life of singleness, then I will delight in His goodness and His ability to meet all my needs.

Read the words of the prophet Isaiah to eunuchs (this term includes those who have voluntarily foregone marriage for the sake of the kingdom of God—Matt. 19:12):

"For thus says the Lord, 'To the eunuchs who keep My sabbaths, And choose what pleases Me, And hold fast My covenant, To them I will give in My house and within My walls a memorial, And a name better than that of sons and daughters, I will give them an everlasting name which will not be cut off'" (Isa. 56:4,5).

"God makes a home for the lonely—only the rebellious dwell in a parched land" (Ps. 68:6). If I ever find, as a single, that I cannot cope with feelings of loneliness or unfulfillment, it is an indication that I am rebellious—unwilling to find all my fulfillment in God Himself.

For whatever period of time I am single, by God's grace I will be totally His in body, soul, and spirit. I will claim no time, aspirations or interests of my own and will seek only to please Him. And as a single woman, I will pursue those same qualities that God values in a wife and mother—a gentle, quiet, serving, submissive, trusting spirit.

If God's plan for me is to become a wife and mother, then I will wait patiently, without fretting, until God reveals the husband of His choice. In the meantime, however, marriage cannot be my pursuit. I must pursue Him (Ps. 62:5).