

Ministry to Young Singles



CONGREGATION & VISITORS



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Practical Ministry Skills: Ministry to Young Singles

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MINISTRY TO YOUNG SINGLES**Leader's Guide**

How to use "Practical Ministry Skills" by BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS in your regularly scheduled meetings.

Welcome to BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS: Your Complete Guide to Leadership Training. You've purchased an innovative resource that will help you develop leaders who can think strategically and biblically about the church. Selected by the editors of Leadership Resources and Christianity Today, the material comes from respected thinkers and church leaders.

"Practical Ministry Skills" is completely flexible and designed to be easy to use. Each theme focuses on a practical area of church ministry and comprises brief handouts on specific aspects of that ministry. The handouts give a succinct and practical overview of the issues most relevant to your goals. You may use them at the beginning of a meeting to help launch a discussion, or you may hand them out as brief primers for someone new to a particular ministry.

This specific theme is designed to help equip church leaders to organize and run an effective ministry to young singles. You may use it either for a group training session or to give individually to people who lead in the church and help make key decisions regarding the church's future. Simply print the handouts you need and use them as necessary.

For example, to understand the many ways churches often hamper their ministries to young singles, see "A Dozen Ways to Kill a Singles Ministry" (p. 7). To learn how to communicate better with young singles, see "Sending Singles the Right Signals" (p. 10). For ways to address the touchy subject of sex, see "What to Say About Sex" (p. 13).

We hope you benefit from this theme as your church works to more effectively minister to an important, but often overlooked, group of people. We pray it helps meet their needs while incorporating them better into the body of the church.

Need more material, or something on a specific topic? See our website at www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com.
To contact the editors:

E-mail BCL@christianitytoday.com
Mail BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS, Christianity Today
465 Gundersen Drive, Carol Stream, IL 60188

MINISTRY TO YOUNG SINGLES

Basic Needs a Single-Adults Ministry Can Meet

These nine traits can help ensure the health of a program.

3 John 2–4

A healthy, balanced ministry will meet many basic needs common to single adults. If these basic needs are not met in and through the church, single adults will look elsewhere to fulfill them. Unfortunately, some of these places are spiritually, emotionally, and relationally unhealthy and contribute to further confusion and hurt.

The needs include:

Achievement

Single adults need to experience a sense of achievement and contribution. A ministry to and with them affords opportunities for involvement in multifaceted ways and tasks. There are many opportunities for single adults to acquire a sense of achievement through developing their talents and abilities in one of the many ministry tasks in single-adult ministry.

Belonging

One of our deepest needs as humans is to belong, to feel included, accepted, and a part of something. The gospel message is all about belonging: belonging to Christ because of his sacrificial death for us, belonging to God the Father because of the purchase he initiated through his Son, and belonging to each other as part of Christ's body. Single adults desperately desire and need to belong. Not having a spouse emphasizes this need and makes them prime candidates for becoming part of a group that will accept, love, and include them.

Companionship

The need for companionship is another basic need that can be met through a single-adults ministry. God made us to need each other, males and females both needing relationship with both genders. A group known as a safe place is one in which single adults can find and experience true, authentic friendship and companionship with males and females.

Hope

Single adults need to find hope for their life, hope for being accepted just as they are, hope for a bright future, and hope for becoming all God says they can become. A healthy ministry provides these through the teaching, fellowship, and healing that is experienced through God's love shown by his people.

Information

Through single adult ministry, individuals have the opportunity to receive biblical and practical teaching and discussion opportunities on a variety of subjects that affect and interest them. Not only should a single-adults ministry provide information regarding life issues and felt needs, but it should address spiritual issues such as salvation, prayer, commitment, discipline, obedience, baptism, and so on.

Learning

There is a constant challenge to continue the learning process in life. In an atmosphere of acceptance and safety, single adults learn a great deal emotionally, socially, relationally, financially, spiritually, and educationally from others.

Role Models

A ministry will have two basic types of people: *lifters* and *leaners*. Lifters are individuals who are spiritually and relationally healthy and growing. They lift others up by their encouragement and example. Leaners are individuals who need to be lifted because of personal hurt, rejection, discouragement, and so on. Lifters can be role models for leaners.

Spiritual Growth

A single-adults ministry will greatly assist in a person's spiritual journey and growth in many ways. Some of these include: Bible teaching, teaching of spiritual issues, teaching on personal issues/felt needs, discussion, observing and participating in prayer, and Christian fellowship.

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Understanding

It is true that single adults can find acceptance through relationships in the whole body of the church. It is difficult, however, to find *experienced understanding* from individuals who have not gone through the same or similar circumstances. A single-adults ministry affords many people with similar and same situations to offer genuine, experienced understanding.

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Discuss

1. Looking at these nine traits, where are we strongest? Weakest?
2. Who are some single adults we can recruit to consistently gauge our performance in these areas?
3. Are there other healthy ministries at our church that meet the needs described here? Can we take those successes and translate them into the context of a single-adults ministry?

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Debunking Myths About Young Singles

A closer look at the stereotypes established by church and culture.

Proverbs 26:28

The church needs to help people reject many false, cruel myths and stereotypes about singleness in order to become the community of healing, strength, help, and wholeness God intends it to be. The following myths are some of the more common ones:

Single adults are lonely. Singleness is often thought of as a passing phase to be resolved by the ultimate state of marriage. Consequently, single adults must be lonely. I am quick to point out that there are some lonely aspects of singleness, and single adults do get lonely sometimes. It does not take being single, however, to be lonely. There are also countless lonely married adults in the U.S.

Single adults want to get married. This attitude is perpetuated by well-meaning married adults who wonder and sometimes ask why many single adults have not yet married. One of my pet peeves involves the phrase, “I want you to meet my better half.” Married people are not two halves coming together to make a whole. Single adults are not half people until they are married! There are many married adults who do not exhibit wholeness, and there are many single adults who do.

Single men are irresponsible. Society has a tendency to label people who do not conform to its expectations as irresponsible.

Single adults are sexually frustrated. Some may be sexually frustrated, but it is also true that there are single adults who are abstinent, are well-adjusted to singleness, and are aware of the confusion and dangers that exist with an active sexual life outside of a lifetime commitment. It also should be noted that marriage does not preclude sexual frustration—pastoral counseling has revealed many married adults, Christian and non-Christian, who are not sexually fulfilled.

Single adults have fewer problems than married adults. Single adults may have more problems than married adults due to the lack of a partner to assist them with the daily responsibilities and decisions of home care, auto care, children’s issues, family issues, and so on.

Single adults are “on the prowl.” Some think that most single adults are always looking for Mr. or Miss Right. It is true that many single adults want to marry someday, but it is untrue that most are obsessed with finding a mate.

Single adults must be afraid of making a commitment. Many single adults want to make the commitment of marriage but have not found the right person to commit to. It is also true that some are not yet married because it is not God’s timing in their life to be married.

Single adults have more time. Although it is true that a single adult does not have to spend time meeting a spouse’s needs and may focus on himself or herself, it is also true that the many domestic tasks of a household, financial decisions, and other decisions have to be accomplished without the help of a spouse.

Single adults are a threat to married adults. As a pastor to single adults, I have had more than a few tell me they were neglected, ostracized, or at the least made to feel uncomfortable by married adults because they were perceived as a threat. This threat, however, is almost never the intention of the single adult. It is usually caused by insecurity in the married person.

Single adults are not complete until they are married. This stems from the belief that everyone should get married. The expectation of producing children also accompanies marriage. It is precisely this marriage and family emphasis in most evangelical churches, without an open acceptance and emphasis on singleness, that tends to alienate or, at the very least, cause some single adults to feel uncomfortable and sometimes question their completeness. Only Christ ensures and brings completeness!

Single adults have more money than married adults. It is often assumed that because a person does not have a spouse, they have more money to spend on themselves than one who is married. This is only true

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for the small percentage of single adults who have a high salary. Probably most single adults have a lower standard of living than married adults.

There are other myths about single adults, including:

- Single adults are “wild swingers” (whatever that means).
- Single adults don’t understand family life.
- Single adults are selfish and set in their ways.

Many of these myths could be applied to married adults too. Irresponsibility, not understanding family life, selfishness, being set in your ways, feeling incomplete, being a threat to another’s marriage, sexual frustration, or loneliness are a part of many marriages across this country. Singleness does not have a corner on any of these traits.

It is clear the church has a tremendous opportunity to minister to single adults of all types. The opportunity to minister to millions of single adults in the U.S. *needs to be realized, understood, and seized.*

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Discuss

1. Which of the above myths have we heard at our church? How can we address them?
2. What are some constructive ways we can bring greater understanding between singles and others who attend our church?
3. How can we uniquely minister to young singles who face problems that are common to married couples and singles?

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A Dozen Ways to Kill a Singles Ministry

Things to avoid as you reach out to those who aren't married.

Proverbs 3:27

At least monthly, someone tells me they once had a singles ministry in their church, but it died. When I hear that, I wonder who killed it. Here are some reasons I've found:

1. **Fad-born.** If a singles ministry was started to “jump on the bandwagon” of singles ministry, the chances are great that it will fizzle out when some other ministry appears more attractive. A ministry must be founded on need and vision in order to succeed.
2. **Poor lay leadership.** Lack of trained and knowledgeable leadership within the ranks will send a singles ministry down the drain. A singles ministry must be owned by the laity, and they need to understand and be trained in this unique ministry.
3. **Weak clergy support.** The failure of the senior pastor and pastoral staff to understand and support the ministry will cause it to fail or, at best, sputter along.
4. **Unfounded congregational fears.** If the congregation fails to understand the ministry and its goals, such a wall of doubt and questioning will be raised that the ministry will self-destruct. A ministry must be interpreted and explained to the congregation in order to gain its support.
5. **Poor integration.** Singles must be integrated into the total life of the church. That means positions of churchwide leadership also.
6. **No budget.** Lack of proper financial support can cause a singles ministry to die a slow death. Keeping it out of the church budget also communicates a message: “It’s not important enough.”
7. **Inadequate counseling.** Many singles come to a program with hurts. They need to know they can get help. If no one cares, they will move on.
8. **Unbalanced program.** Many singles ministries fail to move beyond a monthly potluck and Sunday school class. Successful programs offer a broad integration of biblical teaching, social structure and events, small-group opportunities, educational opportunities, camps, conferences, and retreats.
9. **No new blood.** Veterans from too many years in the singles wars are often the kind of people who know it all, have done it all, and now want to complain about it all. There is a time for some singles to get out of the group and take a sabbatical.
10. **Leadership by committee.** It must be understood that the buck stops at someone’s desk, whether a layperson’s or a staff professional’s. Committees don’t lead; they have meetings. Leaders lead.
11. **Ducking hard issues.** Some congregations fear that singles ministry will bring a bag of problems into the church. Yes, you will have to deal honestly and openly with sexuality and singleness, and a host of other topics. If you don’t, the ministry will collapse.
12. **Inadequate direction/purpose.** No long-distance planning and vision will cause the demise of a singles ministry. A ministry will also fail if it doesn’t create programs that answer the pressing needs in single-adult lives. A real ministry is planned for the present *and* the future. Planning alleviates fear and gives direction and purpose to the ministry.

—JIM SMOKE, copyright © 1986 Christianity Today. Originally appeared in LEADERSHIP.

Discuss

1. Do we struggle with any of these 12 traits? If so, how can we address them?
2. What is our vision for a singles ministry, and what planning are we putting into it?
3. Do we have a go-to person for this ministry, whether on staff or among our lay leadership?

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Before You Start

This step-by-step checklist provides a foundation for a single-adults ministry.

Romans 12:10

Some of the following may prove helpful to those who are somewhat overwhelmed with building a single-adults ministry:

Understand the numbers game. Single adults are mobile. They move from church to church, trying on for size a variety of organizations, clubs, and classes. In every single-adults program, there is incredible turnover. One quickly becomes aware that a program must grow at a fantastic rate just to stay even. Singles ministries must be set up and geared to grow, or they will quickly die from the normal attrition.

The older the age group, the more the women will outnumber the men. Those who work with singles need to work as hard as possible to reverse this, but at the same time they should be prepared for limited success. Up-front male leadership is absolutely essential. This does not exclude women in leadership positions; in fact, the most successful officer groups are equally divided between men and women. I have discovered over the years that, programmatically, women do not draw men, but the reverse is usually true.

Develop leadership. One must be continually developing new leaders. There is no substitute for spending an extravagant amount of time with a few key people and additional time with others in groups who are either elected or appointed to carry out the program.

Six-month leadership terms are much more advisable with single adults (remember the turnover factor). It is also vital that these leaders be integrated into the whole life of the church. A single-adults ministry structure needs to be compatible with the rest of the church's life, and singles should be plugged into decision-making in the whole congregation.

Go big and small. Single people like large groups with lots of relational possibilities, but also small groups where there is authentic intimacy. Growing, healthy singles ministries are always a combination of large events that attract significant numbers and small groups that provide close-in sharing.

Overcome stereotypes. Singleness is not a disease for which the only known cure is marriage. One is a whole number. Speak to all the couples groups as a way to shatter myths and open a fresh, new understanding of who singles are and how they feel about themselves and the church.

Know the importance of ministry structure. Many churches make the mistake of developing a singles ministry on a youth ministry model, which means the first thing they think of is finding couples to be advisers or sponsors. Adults are not interested in programs being done for them. They must own the ministry.

Separate by age, not status. Most singles ministries that attempt to be comprehensive need to have at least three separate groups, divided by age. I suggest 21 to 35; 30 to 50; and older than 50. The overlap is intentional. People need to feel comfortable with folks their own age, and there can be regular interface between the different singles groups as well as the whole church. It is never a good idea to separate people by their status of singleness, such as whether they are "career," divorced, or widowed.

Advocate for pastoral support. The total support and consistent encouragement of the head of staff is fundamental. Any single-adults ministry is in trouble without it. That is because a singles program on the growing edge will not be without controversy.

Accept where people are, not where we want them to be. Unmarried couples living together, the "swinging singles" scene, and how the church incorporates divorced persons raise serious moral and biblical questions. We must struggle to find the healthy tension between God's law and his forgiving love.

Know the value of a network. Interdenominational groups of both professional and lay single-adult leaders are everywhere. Get on as many mailing lists as you can, and seek out resources and relationships that can enhance your understanding and implementation of the ministry.

Market the ministry. Singles ministries grow only when congregations see the larger community as their marketplace. They must have a vision to reach people who are out there, and utilize creative means to do so.

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Clear, attractive publicity works. Just remember, however, that you have to fulfill your promises of an exciting, quality program.

Provide content with a Christian focus. Some singles are so afraid of turning non-Christians off that they compromise conviction and soon become just like the other secular organizations in the community. Successful singles ministries always revolve around a class or group where biblical study and Christian growth is emphasized.

Be sure the singles ministry doesn't exist solely to meet its own needs. Single adults must also have a mission. If all the church says is "Come," the ministry soon stagnates and dies.

Host special events. Single people respond to seminars, workshops, programs, retreats, and conferences that meet felt needs. Smaller churches should consider pooling resources, leadership, and facilities with other churches in the community.

Provide funding. It goes without saying that any ministry costs money. A ministry with single people usually pays for itself and can ultimately produce revenue for the church as it attracts new members. But in the beginning, it needs help from the general budget.

Provide oversight. If assigning a staff member to single-adults ministry, even part-time, is unrealistic, single people at least deserve someone on the full-time staff who will coordinate and oversee what they are doing. Although adults are perfectly capable of assuming responsibility and developing meaningful programs, they want and need pastoral leadership.

Gear up for the newcomer. The personal touch is crucial, no matter how large or small a group may be. The welcome mat must always be out, with committed singles warmly welcoming, integrating, and following up with visitors. Name tags are essential. Coffee and "finger food" are necessary ingredients for nervous people who have thought about coming for a long time and finally gotten up the courage.

Programs and personhood. An effective program is an umbrella under which the real ministry takes place. Wholesome single-adults ministries are microcosms of the Christian life in that they include Christian growth, study, music, laughter, food, social activities, prayer, and service.

—BILL FLANAGAN, copyright © 1983 Christianity Today. Originally appeared in LEADERSHIP.

Discuss

1. Which of these ideas most surprised us?
2. Where are we strongest? How can we maintain that strength?
3. What is the next step for us to begin implementing some of these ideas?

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Sending Singles the Right Signals

The way leaders communicate makes a big difference to those who aren't married.

1 Corinthians 7

Sermons, announcements, even the way Sunday school classes and small groups are structured can communicate that singles are not part of the program. The good news is that the most significant ways to change this don't require a program or a budget. But they may require a change in perspective. Here are some ways to cultivate sensitivity to the singles' point of view:

Listen and ask questions. One pastor began learning about the single life today when he was asked to preach a sermon called "Single and Happy." To prepare, he asked singles he knew: "What does it feel like to be a single person in a world that's mostly married? How can I describe that to someone else?" He says, "I had to learn to listen with ears that weren't normal for me." Another pastor encourages pastors to gather 10 to 12 singles and ask pointed questions: "How can I preach for you? What's the church doing that's helping you, and what could it be doing? Singles will perceive that you care and feel a sense of ownership in the church because they've been given a fair hearing."

Be sure to seek out people of different ages who are single for different reasons.

Use language carefully. A simple change in wording can draw immense gratitude from your single members. If your sermon application concerns close relationships, refer to "roommates and friends" as well as "spouses and children." When speaking about households in the congregation, say "families and individuals" instead of just "families." Instead of "family picnic," announce an "all-church picnic." You'll show unmarried adults that you know they're there. Many statements meant to encourage families subtly communicate that single life is second-best.

Keep statements biblical. The Bible honors marriage, but it gives an equal (or arguably higher) place to the single life. Consider Paul's teaching about marriage in 1 Corinthians 7, which comes far from exalting marriage as the ideal. The best thing Paul can say about marriage is, "If you do marry, you have not sinned"! The whole congregation—singles, couples, and parents of future single adults—needs to hear that according to Scripture, staying single is often preferable. It takes courage to promote this countercultural but thoroughly biblical view. Jesus and Paul were single adults, as were many other Bible leaders. Scripture shows and teaches that marriage is optional, not inevitable.

Choose topics for all. Most singles expect to hear a family-oriented sermon now and then. But a five-week or three-month series on marriage and family issues gives singles the message: "This church is not for you." If marriages or families need special attention, consider teaching a Sunday school class or weekend seminar. Or preach more broadly on related topics such as love and forgiveness.

—SUSAN MAYCINIK, copyright © 1997 Christianity Today. Originally appeared in LEADERSHIP.

Discuss

1. Are there words or phrases we use that may be insensitive to singles at our church?
2. What are one or two practical ways we can seek input from singles?
3. How well are we communicating Biblical truths about single life?

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Three Ways to Blend Your Congregation

The interaction between singles and marrieds is an important dynamic.

Proverbs 27:17

When David McCasland started a singles ministry in a family-oriented church, he realized that integrating singles into the life of the whole church was vital to his ministry's success. Here are the lessons he learned about blending marrieds and singles:

1. **Integrate on the basis of equality.** Marrieds should be involved in a ministry *with* single adults, not a ministry *to and for* them. Singles, just like marrieds in the church, need guidance and leadership. But they need guidance in how to accomplish their goals, and they need at least some leadership developed from their own ranks and entrusted with their ministry.
2. **Let singles choose their area of involvement in the church.** Insisting that all singles in the church attend a “singles only” class eliminates a natural opportunity for the integration of singles and marrieds in mixed classes. Rigid age-and marital-status guidelines can inhibit participation by singles in the total life of the church. Offer “singles only” classes, but let singles freely attend any other adult Sunday school class in which they might feel more comfortable.
3. **Encourage and facilitate genuine friendships.** As important as the church program is in promoting the unity of marrieds and singles within its fellowship, it is not enough. Outside of that structure, there is a great need for married couples to begin responding to singles as persons and friends. There can be no successful ministry with singles until marrieds and singles begin coming together in genuine friendship relationships that serve to meet the personal needs of both.

Real integration will take place as the people of God open themselves up to learn more from each other and interact on the basis of equality and love.

—DAVID MCCASLAND, copyright © 1981, Christianity Today. Originally appeared in LEADERSHIP.

Discuss

1. How does our current programming and communication treat singles as equals to marrieds?
2. Does our congregation tend to group itself into clusters based on marital status? If so, why?
3. What are some ways we can encourage more interaction between singles and marrieds at church? Outside of church?

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Helping Singles Combat Loneliness

What to do when a single's desire for marriage turns to discouragement.

Philippians 4:11–14

When loneliness lasts too long, many singles begin to suppress their God-given desire to marry. They bury themselves in their job or church work to stave off loneliness and to prove how productive they can be without a partner. Busy schedules crowd out opportunities to socialize and to find love.

Some singles worry about obsessing over marriage, so they neglect to prepare themselves for the possibility. They wrongly assume that if it is going to happen, it will just happen.

But denial and distraction don't diminish the pain. Typically, singles have been silently struggling with this issue for years, maybe decades. They have stretched what faith they have as far as it can go. Now they need something more. They need help.

What Helps the Lonely?

When Paul explained to the Philippians, "I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am" (Phil. 4:11), he followed that with, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (v. 13). The contentment follows confidence in Christ. But many long-term singles have lost that confidence, doubting that they may ever marry. *"I can do all things, except find someone to love me."*

Paul goes on to say, "Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction" (Phil. 4:14). Churches that follow the Philippian church's example when ministering to singles can restore their hope. Most singles would be delighted for other Christians to come alongside with counsel and care.

In many ways singles need the same things that other people need:

- Prayer
- Support
- Encouragement
- Affirmation

Specifically, singles need assurance that they can learn to be content within today's trials *and* that they can believe Christ will give them the strength to do all things, including marry.

Tangible help can be valuable too. If someone in the church desired an education or a certain job, practical help might include introducing the job seeker to someone who can advance their cause. In the same way, churches can support a single person's dream to marry by including him or her in social opportunities and by introducing new people to each other.

Searching for true love requires risk, persistence, stamina, and guts. It expends tremendous emotional energy. For those who have done this year after year to no avail, it is easy to give up, to curl up at home with a pet rather than risk disappointment or rejection again.

That's when the lonely warrior needs an ally—someone to remind him that God delights in fulfilling our heart's desires and that he rewards those who diligently seek him, someone to assure her that her desire for marriage is godly.

I used to think long-term singles needed to learn contentedness. Now, I have a better answer for men and women who want to be married: I acknowledge their need for a spouse and offer to pray that the desires of their hearts will be met.

—KIMBERLY HARTKE, copyright © 2002, Christianity Today. Originally appeared in LEADERSHIP.

Discuss

1. What kind of support system is in place to help those discouraged about finding a partner?
2. Are we cautious in using the word "content" with singles?
3. How can we effectively encourage singles who want to get married without suggesting marriage is the only correct life path?

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What to Say About Sex

Ignoring sexuality robs churches of an important opportunity to minister to singles.

Hebrews 13:4

If we do not talk about sex, the silence forces single adults to look elsewhere for answers and support. As Jenell Williams Paris wrote in *CHRISTIANITY TODAY* (November 2001), “When Christians are silent and TV is loud, it’s obvious which message will be heard.” Here’s where churches can begin:

Encourage healthy relationships with members of both sexes. Jesus was very comfortable relating to the opposite sex. We can follow his example by honoring our brothers and sisters, and by pursuing friendships that are genuine in their commitment to one another and to the God we serve together.

Address the core loneliness and emptiness. Many single adults sit in worship on Sunday after yet another Saturday night alone. When they go to work on Monday, coworkers probably won’t ask about the sermon they heard but how they did “hooking up.” In this culture, sex is the remedy for almost every malady. It’s the great numb-er, and far more damaging than alcohol or drugs.

Marvel at the creation of our sexuality. The Psalmist wasn’t exaggerating in confessing, “I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful. I know that full well” (Ps. 139:14). An awareness of the intricacies of the human body, particularly the animating forces of sexual arousal, can only lead to an “I praise you because I am wonderfully made.” But how nervous we become if the doxologizing gets too specific.

Gratitude for our sexual makeup is a prerequisite for stewarding the good gift God has given.

Acknowledge the difficulty. One pastor, speaking at a single-adults gathering, was asked how he could relate to the group, given he had been married his entire adult life. He answered by sharing a story—he enlisted in the Marines shortly after his wedding and was shipped to Korea. While there, his buddies—even those who were married—headed to places for a “little company.” He admitted how hard it was not to join them, especially as a “full-blooded young man,” but how his purity allowed him to return to his wife and look her in the eye. By recognizing the difficulty, the pastor won a place in the hearts of the single adults in his congregation.

Uphold faithfulness. I find strength in the Anglican confession, “Almighty God, to you *all* hearts are open, *all* desires known, and from you *no* secrets are hid” (*Book of Common Prayer*: 355). This “Gotcha!” prayer includes our sexuality. The prayer continues, “Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord.”

I also pray with singles: “We thank you also for those disappointments and failures that lead us to acknowledge our dependence on you alone” (*BCP*: 836). I have heard some proud celibates boast, “I can do everything through him who gives ME strength” (Phil. 4:13). The emphasis should be on Jesus’ model: “I can be celibate through HIM who gives me strength!”

—HAROLD IVAN SMITH, copyright © 2002, Christianity Today. Originally appeared in *LEADERSHIP*.

Discuss

1. How frank is our church in discussing sex with the congregation, including singles?
2. What opposition should we anticipate if we talk about sex, and how can we respond to any concerns?
3. How can we clearly convey God’s boundaries regarding sex while welcoming all—including those who may not be living within those boundaries yet?

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Further Exploration

Books and resources to equip your church for ministry to and with singles.

BuildingChurchLeaders.com. Leadership training resources from Christianity Today.

- “A Welcoming Church” Assessment Pack
- “Adult Education” Practical Ministry Skills
- “Ministry to Men” Practical Ministry Skills
- “Ministry to Women” Practical Ministry Skills
- “Connecting Newcomers” Training Theme and PowerPoint
- “Trends and Culture” Training Theme and PowerPoint
- “Vision” Training Theme and PowerPoint

LeadershipJournal.net. This website offers practical advice and articles for church leaders.

ChristianSinglesToday.com. A website devoted to articles and devotionals for Christian singles in the twenty-first century.

Reaching Single Adults: An Essential Guide for Ministry by *Dennis Franck*. This book helps churches determine whether they are doing enough to reach single adults, who constitute 44 percent of all American adults. It includes in-depth guidance on implementing biblical principles and practical programs. (Baker Books, 2007; ISBN 978-0801091902)

Baker Handbook of Single Adult Ministry by *Douglas L. Fagerstrom*. A comprehensive reference covering all aspects of ministry with single adults, including contributions from 35 leaders in single adult ministry. (Baker Books, 2004; ISBN 978-0801065354)

Single Adult Ministry for Today by *Bobbie Reed*. A step-by-step guide for establishing a ministry for single adults in your church. (Concordia Publishing House, 1996; ISBN 978-0570048404)