

still single (continued from p. 2)

Learning to live as a well-loved woman gradually changed my life. It became a joy to invest in eager young women and pass on life lessons from the Word, watching the Father bring freedom, joy, hope and transformation. Renewed perspectives enabled me to view my singleness through a healthier lens.

I could surrender my will and my hope only to One whose good, kind heart I trusted. My unmet longings were not evidence of His lack of kindness.

In the seventh decade of my life, God has blessed me with the gift of marriage to a wonderful man. God wasn't obligated to give me that gift, and He would have been kind even if that desire was never met. Looking back on my years of singleness, I realize how deeply I experienced His kindness in His provision, protection, and nurture. I regret my frequent distrust of His goodness, but I rejoice in His grace and mercy in my struggle.

bitter roots



by Lyndi Lee Markus (single)
Editor-in-Chief, *Upfront*
Staff Development and Care

So, I'm scrolling through my social media feed, right? Photos fly past: my friends on vacation, their kiddos with food on their faces—loads of reminders of life milestones I haven't quite reached—and my mad-hatter scrolling halts on the image of a younger-than-me friend and her younger-than-me husband.

"I'm so glad I waited and kept myself pure for you!" she wrote him.

You "waited" sooo long! I find myself grousing sarcastically. Aww, how cute. Not to mention my rankling resentment at the "purity" comment, which dredges up bitter remnants of the damaging "purity doctrine" thought system I experienced growing up.

Ugly irritation swells in me. And then I recoil.

See, it's not my job to judge your journey, whether you married at 20, are still waiting, or never want to get married. Kind of like I don't want to be judged, to be told, "This is why you're still single," to be marginalized, sidelined, or thought of as "extra."

Firsthand experience in singleness does not equal a call (or a right) to judge others for their inconsideration. "Do not judge, or you too will be judged" (Matthew 7:1). That's a call to both single ministers and married ones to exhibit God's grace to each other in the ways we respect each other and partner together.

It's a call to loose the chains of bitterness (Ephesians 4:31-32). We've all got snarky stories to tell. Moments we've felt put down, let down, or left out by insensitive comments and presumptions. But that bitter streak? If we're not careful, it just might hold us back from fulfilling our calling.

Do I identify myself by my single status, choosing to present myself as a single person with a chip on my shoulder rather than as an adult Christian serving in ministry? If so, I'm choosing a role that widens the very gap I resent, the gap that has wounded me and disappointed me deeply.

When I'm scrolling on Facebook, I don't get to choose what you post. But I do choose how I respond to it. God wants to heal me, knocking that chip off my shoulder, because I'm more than just a "single person." I'm whole, complete, called, and chosen.

You may be married. You may long to get married. Or maybe you'd rather keep serving singly. But... are you your marital status? How do you approach intimacy and community in all your relationships?

For myself, I want to be known by my fruit. Known by my love, my grace, and the ways my life touches the lives of those around me. The way I abide in Christ, fully inhabiting the place God has me today.

So, what's the truest thing about you? ◀

marital status (continued from p. 2)

Paul goes on to say, "And don't be wishing you were someplace else or with someone else. Where you are right now is God's place for you. Live and obey and love and believe right there. God, not your marital status, defines your life (1 Corinthians 7:17, MSG)."

As The Navigators grows in embracing inclusiveness and diversity—not just ethnicity and race, but also age, gender, gifting, and marital status—it's essential that we value, support, and speak life into one another while we minister together as His Body. As a single, I've always flourished in the Navigator teams I worked in, thanks to the members demonstrating this very principle.

If God has called you to be single or to be married, do it with enthusiasm and fervor to please Him! We're called to serve our Father, worship Him, and glorify Him in what He's called us to. All He calls us to, He gives the grace to accomplish. He'll take every aspect of who you are and give you abundant opportunities to invest in the lives of others.

So... what's marital status got to do with it? Absolutely nothing! ◀

Questions, comments, or suggestions? Email SDC@navigator.org



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upfront

Real-Life Stories and Practical Tools
to Advance The Navigators Calling

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the gift of singleness

by Laurence Koo (single)
U.S. Navigators World Missions



As a same-sex attracted Christian, I began wrestling in my late teens with the possible reality of lifelong singleness and celibacy. Following Jesus meant surrendering everything, the deepest core of who I was, including my sexuality.

My decision to not pursue a homosexual relationship wasn't the end of questioning how life would look for me, but rather the starting point. What does it mean for me that it's "not good to be alone"? Where do I find intimacy? What is the place of community and deep friendship? And why does Paul refer to "the gift of single-

ness" in 1 Corinthians 7:7, when almost everyone else seems to see it as a burden? I had to deepen my understanding of this particular gift, instead of believing the false "truths" in our Christian culture about it.

First, Paul talks about the vocations of singleness and marriage as exclusively interchangeable. You have either one gift or the other. There is no third option. That means I can't say as a single person that I don't have the gift of singleness, and my married friend can't say he doesn't have the gift of marriage. We each have our gift, even if sometimes we don't want it. This is a matter of state, not of desire.

Second, a gift from God is never just to keep for ourselves—it's meant to be given to others. So many expect romantic love and marriage to be the gift of completion and fulfillment for them. But marriage is the incarnational image of Christ's self-sacrificial love as a gift to His church. It doesn't just express self-sacrificial love between the spouses. Where "two become one," it's not good for that oneness to be alone, either. Married people are called to give self-sacrificially to others as well.

This is the same calling I have as a single, celibate man. We're called to the same thing, and this calling is equally challenging and counter-cultural for married and single followers of Jesus, regardless of sexual orientation. We need to de-idealize marriage and support a life of celibacy as an equally valid way to represent the image of Christ and the Bride.

Since I moved to the United States two years ago as a Dutch native (culture shock!), I've wrestled with this invisible but evident wall between married and single people. Like any cross-cultural missionary, I needed to learn more about American Christian culture, the sexual revolution in this country, and the response of the church in the purity movement of the nineties. This helped me better understand the root of the—in my humble opinion—unbiblical interpretation and concepts of emotional purity, which seem motivated more by fear than freedom. They emphasize behavioral restrictions more than heart transformation, law more than spirit.

This barrier is equally bad for single and married people. Journalist Andrew Sullivan says in *Love Undetectable* (Vintage, 1999):

Families and marriages fail too often because they are trying to answer too many human needs. A spouse is required to be a lover, a friend, a mother, a father, a soul mate, a co-worker and so on. Few people can be all these things for one person. And when the demands are set too high, disappointment can only follow. If husbands and wives have deeper and stronger friendships outside the marital unit, the marriage has more space to breathe and fewer burdens to bear.

What could life and ministry look like if we lived out the perspective that in the family of God, marrieds and singles are meant to be a gift to one another? What if interactions between brothers and sisters across the relational aisle were self-sacrificial, instead of seen as threatening to our marital relationships or our independent way of life?

Our eternal perspective of Jesus' Kingdom is that there will be no marriage or celibacy, because we'll live in the full reality of the unity between Christ and His Church. We'll have this perfect unity not only with Christ Himself, but also with all our brothers and sisters.

And now? Can we tap into that heavenly reality of deep and intimate relationships, allowing His Kingdom to come, be present, and advance among us? This is the kind of community that draws people into His Kingdom to find belonging in Him and His family. ◀



my side of the table

by Laurie Besonen (married)
Staff Development and Care



I was 42, and I'd persistently prayed about singleness and marriage for over 15 years as a surrendered disciple of Christ. Overall, I was content with my life. I loved the opportunities and experiences I had as

a single woman in ministry. Still, though, I felt I would be more fulfilled with a spouse.

One day, I sensed an underlying urgency to my discontent—something more like, “I don't know how to walk with God another day and still trust Him with my singleness.” I decided to confide in my mentor.

“Laurie,” she asked me wisely, “are you willing to wait with God in your singleness?”

“What do you mean, wait *with* God?” I retorted. “I'm waiting *for* Him. This is His fault!”

Her probing question exposed truth: I viewed God in an adversarial position: on the opposite side of the table, my singleness the issue that separated us. Now I felt prompted to invite God to sit on the same side of the table with me and to accompany me as I walked in a new way on this journey of faith.

Not every person wants to be married, and singleness doesn't challenge everyone the way it did me. But I know some singles do share my experience. And getting married doesn't resolve every issue we might have with God. Even though I recently celebrated 12 years of marriage with my husband, I still need to keep inviting God to my side of the table.

We've discussed marriage in previous issues of *Upfront*, which you can find on www.SDCResourceHub.org. This time, we want to explore what it means for single ministers and married ones to trust God together. How do we give ourselves fully for the sake of the Kingdom, abiding in Christ despite challenges, misunderstandings, and even unfulfilled longings?

No matter your marital status, whatever the area of your longing, can you wait in confidence for a God who is kind enough and strong enough to absorb our unfiltered, raw emotions? Will you invite Him to sit on your side of the table even when you know He could have already changed the situation that brings you dissonance or pain? How can you encourage those you disciple to do the same? ◀

still single?



by Marilyn Hardie (married)
Staff Development and Care

“Wow! You're still single? Why?”

As a single woman who longed to marry, I'd often asked that same question of the Lord! Did He care about my deep longings, or was He mainly interested in my availability to minister? Painful perennial disappointment made it difficult to keep hope alive. It threatened my trust in God as I teetered on the edge of resignation, which seemed so much easier than hope.

As I discovered, that “why” question can lead to unhealthy places:

- **Self-contempt**—“I must be defective.”
- **Self-pity**—“I shouldn't have to do all this alone” (e.g., fundraising).
- **Self-sufficiency**—“I don't need anyone else.”
- **Separation**—“I'm isolated, different, not fully grown up, and probably really missing out.”
- **Settling**—“I could be reasonably happy with someone who doesn't share my faith, vision, and values.”
- **Substitutes and addictions**—“I'll dull this ache with ministry, food, achievement, etc.”
- **Sabotage**—“I'll kill desire and go dead emotionally.”

Eventually, my addiction to ministry brought me to a place of complete helplessness. But by grace, God wouldn't let me abandon hope for long.

Psalms 16:5 (TLB) encouraged me. “The Lord himself is my inheritance, my prize. He is my food and drink, my highest joy! He guards all that is mine.” In Him, I am most deeply known, enjoyed and loved.

God's love for me was not based on my performance, but on the fact that I was His beloved daughter—even when I could offer Him nothing.

[still single](#) (continued on back)

what's marital status got to do with it?

by Dr. Jacqueline Holland (single)
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In my journey of spiritual mentoring as a single person, a voice in my mind has sometimes whispered, “This would be even better in partnership with a husband.” My mother, unbeknownst to her, reinforced this reasoning each time I told her of a friend who was getting married. “Why aren't you?” she would ask.

Is marriage really the be-all-end-all? Or is it more important to be at rest in the position God has ordained for each of us?

Many individuals of faith, present and historical, have embraced singleness as they impacted others in positive ways. Consider Jesus, Mary, Martha, Lazarus, Paul the Apostle, Jeremiah, and John the Baptist. And how about Mother Teresa, Sojourner Truth, Fanny Crosby, Henri Nouwen, and Theresa of Avila?

So... what's marital status got to do with it? The Father promises He'll use those in any status who give themselves to him. The Apostle Paul declares, “...Sometimes I wish everyone were single like me—a simpler life in many ways! But celibacy is not for everyone any more than marriage is. God gives the gift of the single life to some, the gift of the married life to others” (1 Corinthians 7:7, MSG).

Married life and single life are gifts from the Lord. Both have advantages and disadvantages. My singleness gives me ownership of my time, sole management of my finances, and the ability to please the Lord as my spouse. My married friends may experience benefits like companionship, shared responsibilities and burdens, and the fulfillment of intimacy. The Father desires us to fully live the life or situation He's called us to.

[marital status](#) (continued on back)

we remember



by Dave and Kelly Sasaki (married)
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When Dave was single and starting out in ministry, he was excited to move to his first assignment at Northern Arizona University. He finally finished fundraising in the middle of the school year, crammed all his belongings into his tiny, two-seater Mazda, and drove to Flagstaff. He eagerly anticipated jumping into the work God had called him to. What he didn't anticipate was the lonely and difficult time of transition.

His roommate, another great staff guy, was engaged to be married. Understandably, he spent most of his time with his fiancée. The apartment had no TV or stereo—not even a radio to break up the silence. Dave didn't yet know the staff team well, and they didn't know him. In the days before internet and cell phones, there was no way to connect consistently with friends back home. Dave spent more time alone during that season than he ever had in his life.

He did eventually form great friendships in Flagstaff, and two years later we got married and I joined him at NAU. We both have some great memories of ministering single, but we also remember the challenges and disconnects we faced.

Now we're married, in regional leadership, and ministering alongside many single people who add great value and perspective to our work. Because we remember what it was like, we try to intentionally bridge the gaps in ways that love and bless the singles, honoring their contribution and ministry.

- **Connection and intimacy** aren't built in for singles. We try to include the singles in our family events or dinners (while being careful not to assume they want to babysit for us!).
- **Transitions** can be tough. Moving to a new city and a new staff team, searching for a new church and community—these were things we faced alone. As married people, we always have at least our spouse with us to help us through those times. So even though it's tempting to think that single people can easily move from one city or assignment to another, we work from the assumption that it's even more difficult for singles to make these kinds of moves.
- **Fundraising** is harder. As singles, we had to walk into every funding appointment or summon the faith and courage to make our phone calls alone. Now we try to offer extra support here, too. Sometimes we pray and cheer single staff on so they won't feel so alone. Sometimes we find ways to advocate for them, talking to or finding potential donors for them.
- **Affording our own living space** was impossible. We always had to share an apartment and often even a bedroom with another person. We offer the use of our home while we're out of town, so our single co-laborers can get away for at least a short time.
- **Leading overseas trips** seems more convenient for singles, but they need restful summer assignments just as often as married couples. We find creative ways in our region to utilize our married staff and staff with families.

Single people are such a blessing to our ministry. We hope we can return that blessing to them. ◀

you said...

Expectations, assumptions, and misunderstandings: your responses to *Upfront's* survey in *NavWeekly* identified all of these as obstacles for disciplemakers in different life stages working together. No matter where you find yourself, these questions could spark an obstacle-blasting conversation.

Talk It Out questions for team discussion

- What's it like to be you? Are you single, married, a parent of kids or adult children? What difficulties do you encounter in your current life stage? What do you enjoy about it?
- What would be helpful for me/us to serve you better?
- Do you have any hopes or expectations of singles, couples, or parents you work with? (Do you hope teammates will offer babysitting, meals, social interactions?) Sometimes we don't even know we have expectations until they aren't met and conflict occurs.
- Many people have had experiences—poor boundaries, past wounds, or family-of-origin dynamics—that make them hesitant to engage with someone in a different life stage. Some singles would never think to hang out with families. Some couples wouldn't think to invite a single to do something. What has been your experience?
- How have you been blessed by spending time with someone in a differing life stage from your own?

One more thought: This discussion doesn't “require” you or anyone else to meet any desires expressed. Instead, listen, understand more deeply, and discern how God might be calling you to love and serve others.



To read more Navigator voices on their experiences with singles and singleness and see the survey results, check out this QR code, or visit SDCResourceHub.org/upfront-newsletter.

