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Single and Christian Masterclass and Community

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

PROJECT PORTFOLIO:

SINGLE AND CHRISTIAN MASTERCLASS AND COMMUNITY



IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

PORTLAND SEMINARY

BY:

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

This certifies that the doctoral Project Portfolio of

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RESEARCH METHOD

This Project utilized a blended methodology that draws upon bibliographic resources, data derived from stakeholder collaboration, and human-centered design and iteration processes to create a heuristic-based, application-oriented Project.

ABSTRACT

As the number of people marrying later in life or not at all in the church and world continue to rise, singleness as a significant stage of life and ministry area must also rise. However, with the Western church's traditional focus on evangelism, family, and church growth, among other things, singleness is not given the attention it needs and results in single Christians languishing.

As a pastor at an urban church who has worked primarily with single people in their 20s and 30s, the issues related to a person's singleness have been a reoccurring source of challenge regarding pastoral care, spiritual growth, community building, and leadership development. Just as one's marriage affects every part of the person's life, so too does one's singleness. In my research, I discovered the enthusiasm of both singles and church leaders when talking about the challenges of singles to their flourishing. Issues such as loneliness, shame, frustrations with dating, and a lack of guidance in life, became apparent as common challenges.

What I ultimately discovered from both my ministry context and research is that single people need a community specific to their singleness, not for dating or marriage but for all of life. What emerged, as a result, is a digital course and community specifically for single Christians to experience a shame-free space on matters of discipleship and life, all in the context of singleness.

INTRODUCTION

The Journey

For almost ten years now, I have served on staff in the small group ministry at a large, young, and urban church in one of the arguably most secular cities in the world—Vancouver, British Columbia. We had two services before the pandemic and starting my doctoral studies journey. The first consisted primarily of young families and the second mainly of young singles or couples (dating and married).

As I met and walked alongside both members and leaders of the community, what became apparent was the gap between many single people's understanding of discipleship to Jesus as Lord and our church. Whether it was the goal of growing in their faith, connecting into the community, or becoming a formal leader, the person's singleness—particularly their dating choices—was the primary barrier. If I could only solve this challenge, overcome this barrier, then our church would have more mature singles, more people engaged in the community, more leaders, and more Christ-centered romantic relationships.

At the beginning of my doctoral studies journey, I had in mind to create a book that specifically addressed marriage or dating a non-believer or someone much less mature in their faith. Although this is not an area of concern in every church tradition and denomination, I have personally witnessed the negative impact these types of decisions regarding dating and marriage can have on both the disciple, the partner, the children, the church community, and the witness and mission of the church.

For my Discovery Workshop, I gathered three single men and three single women, between the ages of 20-40, except one in their 50s. We followed the procedures of the Discovery

Workshop and concluded that the primary challenges for singles are rooted not in a lack of biblical understanding on marriage and dating as I thought, but rather a lack of understanding and empathy by married church leadership, a general stigma towards singleness, and a lack of intentional community for singles. Through my one-on-one interviews, all who have served as pastors, much of the conclusions were affirmed. These findings and affirmations from more experienced ministers led me to rethink my NPO from "single people don't understand what it means to follow Jesus" to "church leaders do not understand the struggles of singles and are therefore unable to help them follow Jesus effectively."

In the next phase of my research, the Design Phase, I hosted another workshop with other singles. Together, they concluded that "done," or a solution to single people's problems would be a sense of community, comfort, confidence in their singleness, and clarity in their calling in the world. What resulted from these conclusions were ideas primarily around teaching, preaching, and leading. The ideas involved bringing more single people to the "front," a sermon series on singleness for both singles and married people, and a course specific to living well as a single person. In my one-on-one interviews, the need for further teaching on singleness, talking about singleness, and community for singles were all powerfully affirmed.

Because all the ideas involved the senior pastor or the executive leadership of the church and were rather simplistic, I had to modify the ideas into something that I could do realistically and creatively. As I sat with the NPO and the workshop and interviews' conclusions, I realized that I needed to combine community and teaching somehow. Seeing that two of my interviewees had started an online ministry, an online ministry appeared to be the most viable option.

As a result, I came to two different online ministry ideas. One was a course for singles on singleness that taught various topics about the Christian life and singleness. The other idea was a

community for single people to essentially "do church" together. There were forums or groups to organize worship events, bible studies, prayer groups, and social activities. Recognizing that the two ideas were not mutually exclusive, but the community idea would be more challenging to start, I decided to create an online course that facilitated community. This course would provide single people a group of people or community that normalized singleness and an opportunity to learn both biblical and practical information regarding singleness and discipleship.

What came to fruition was a 12-week, paid, digital masterclass or course on singleness and discipleship. Topics ranged from the biblical definition of flourishing to the practicalities of dating to how they can help lead change in their context. Each week has a teaching video and a set of questions for reflection and discussion, and some weeks provide exercises or additional resources. To provide the course students with a feeling of community as much as possible, given the dynamics of it being online and the students coming from various stages and places, I decided that the masterclass/course would have multiple tiers of payment and involvement. Creating financial barriers to things such as a small group discussion will hopefully create small groups for students where all the students show up and engage in discussion.

The benchmarks in determining the success of the course came down to the quality of the videos along with the engagement of students in their church community, the taking up of a formal mentoring relationship (e.g., pastor, spiritual director, therapist), and the overall positive experience in connecting with the material and course community.

Initially, I created videos that were 30-40 minutes long. However, upon reflection and conversation with a colleague I greatly respect and who also works in my ministry area, I concluded that videos should be around 12-17 minutes and no longer. Since this course is digital

and not in-person, where the students' attention span would be longer, it seemed fitting that the videos would be more effective with less than more information.

After graduation, I hope to test out the course first with a few individuals and then, after some revisions, with a group. I then intend to launch a website to hopefully build a gathering/community around singleness and discipleship through blogging and podcasting. Once I feel that the size of the gathering is large enough, I will attempt to launch my course with them.

What I Learned Through The Process

Through the entire process, the two significant challenges that I encountered were the feeling of hopelessness and imposter syndrome.

The more I reflected on the challenges of single people and began to see the problem as systemic and an outcome of western and church culture, I became wearier to the fruitfulness of my endeavors. At times, and even now, I wonder if any difference can be made. The solution is not simply a book, sermon series, a course, or even a community—but a complete reorientation of the church. Secondly, I am not famous or influential and do not have a platform. Will anyone even follow my blog or participate in my course?

In addition, there was and is the imposter syndrome. Who am I to create a course on flourishing for singles when, if I were, to be honest, am not? In addition, I am not a great preacher, teacher, or communicator. I have worried and continue to worry that my teaching would not resonate or make sense to my audience.

The most significant shortcoming of the Project is likely the content of the teachings. Since none of it has been tested by a real audience of single people, I have no evidence at the moment that the content will help or even resonate with my target audience. Therefore, I will likely need to review the content with people and make the necessary changes as they come up.

Alternatively, I could write a book, develop a workshop, or a small group curriculum that can be used and be led without me. With a book, I would be unable to measure its effectiveness and still have the problem of not having an audience. Furthermore, experience has led me to believe that most of my audience are not avid readers, and therefore a book will most likely not get into their hands. If I were to develop a workshop instead, I would have to be up against the unwillingness of people to attend another online workshop or the reluctance of a church to host me in person (or online). A group curriculum is a possible option for the future, however. I could easily make all my videos and documents available for free or package them as a paid digital resource. However, I won't be able to measure progress or fruitfulness once again. And for many if not most churches, forming an entire group of single people may be difficult.

Through the entire research journey, I have discovered that what ultimately prevents single people from flourishing is not a theology of singleness but a theology of flourishing and community. Most of the significant challenges uncovered during the workshops and one-on-one interviews revolved around the way people (single and married) thought about and approached singleness and community. What is ultimately needed is a complete reorientation for leaders and the church on how they relate to singles and form community. Single people will always lack community if married people do not see their necessary involvement and influence. Unless and until the church truly lives like the church in a close and committed community, single people most likely will not experience it and, therefore, will continue to languish.

Next Steps

What single people need is not biblical or practical information, nor is it even a shame-free community. What single people need most is simply biblical community. That is a community of Christ-centered people committed to living together for God's calling and mission

that will help its people heal, grow, and flourish interdependently with another. Although workshops, a sermon series, a singles-only community, a small group curriculum, or a dating service may be helpful, they do not get to the crux of the issue. The question then isn't now how do I help single people flourish, but instead, how do I help the church be the church? A question that many have tried to answer and one that few or even any have answered.

That said, recognizing where I am and have been given, I believe the next steps are to develop a sermon, workshop, and website/blog to develop a "following" around singleness and discipleship. The sermon would act as something that can be done for Sundays or young adult groups. The workshop would be a 1-2 hour experience of teaching and reflection, much like a session at a conference. It could be hosted either by a church as an event or by myself. Lastly, the website/blog would be a consistent source of devotional and small group material around discipleship and formation. However, this poses a different set of challenges, all essentially around "marketing." What churches would let me speak to their community? What church would trust me enough to let me invite them to follow me? And if I am going to try and develop a following through blogging and social media, I will have to understand how SEO and social media work.

Summative Reflection

Overall, this has been a very joyful and fruitful experience for me personally. I got to meet and have conversations with incredible people whose insight and wisdom I have benefitted much from. In casual conversations with other people, I have repeatedly been affirmed about the importance of such a topic and the endeavor I am pursuing. Most people I have talked to so far (married and single) have enjoyed talking about singleness, and the challenges singles face in flourishing yet do not know or have the resources to address them.

However, one disappointment I have in the journey was that I did not have the time that I would have liked to create something of more substantial thought. Ideally, I would have preferred to have first written a book slowly on the intersection of singleness and discipleship. And then, once I was content with the content, I would condense it and package it into a masterclass/course. Given the parameters of the Project journey, however, I chose to focus on what would be most relevant and practical, which I concluded to be a masterclass/course.

Through the joys and disappointments of this journey, I have become more convinced of the natural and unmet needs of single Christians in the church body. Whether at a large or small church, the challenges remain the same. And whether I am at a large or small church, a church of young singles, or a church of families, this journey has made me see the small call to participating however I can toward the development and flourishing of singles.

My ultimate dream for the Project would be to create a community that provides what single people need while empowering them to participate and serve their local church from a place of fullness. I hope that single people will find friendship and companionship in their singleness and loneliness. I hope they will discover their calling or vocation in the world to greater depths. And I hope that they will experience healing and growth and ultimately find themselves either happily single, following Christ in every aspect of their life, or married with Christ at the center of their marriage. And if they decide to have children, the children would be raised in an emotionally healthy, Christ-centered family.

PROJECT

NPO STATEMENT

Single people lack community and a formation path toward wholeness due to the church's focus on family and evangelism.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

My project is a digital masterclass or course where participants choose and pay for the level of commitment, relationships, and depth of content for themselves. Those who want to consume some content and reflect on their own can. While those who want and are willing can connect with others who also want to. The rationale for a tiered cost structure is to bring together singles that genuinely want to learn and connect with like-minded individuals.

Depending on the level of investment, participants may be able to experience group spiritual direction or meet with a spiritual director and form accountability partners and weekly discussion groups with their peers. See below for an example:

Tier 1 (\$)	Tier 2 (\$\$)	Tier 3 (\$\$\$)	Tier 4(\$\$\$)
Content	Content	Content	Content
	Large group (entire class)	Large group (entire class)	Large group (entire class)
		Small group (4-6 students)	Small group (4-6 students)
			One-on-One conversations with me

PROJECT SCOPE

The format of the Project will be a series of 12 high-quality videos addressing the following topics:

1. The challenges of being single.
2. The history of the church and the recent developments on singleness.
3. The Bible on singleness.
4. The Bible on flourishing.
5. Marriage
6. Dating
7. Vocation
8. Community
9. Prayer
10. Healing
11. Suffering
12. Leadership

BENCHMARKS

- Participants will engage high quality and professional videos utilizing 1080p picture size, industry standard video editing (blurred background, accompanying music and imagery etc.). The quality of the videos will be indicated by a post-assessment where participants will be asked about their reaction to video qualities throughout the course.
- Participants will take a step forward into community, such as a greater Sunday attendance, small group joining or attendance, or serving within their church.

Participation into community will be indicated by a survey at the end of the course with an additional one three months after.

- Participants will establish a regular relationship with a spiritual mentor such as a pastor, an elder, a life coach, a spiritual director or a therapist. This relationship will be indicated by a survey at the end of the course with an additional survey three months after.
- Participants will be able to articulate a holistic, embodied, and biblical theology of singleness and human flourishing, as well as how and where they are seeking community for their personal formation. This will be indicated by a post-assessment where participants will share their learnings and new insights from the course, as well as establish future formational goals and continued areas of personal growth.

PRESENTATION/DOCUMENTATION OF PROJECT

Participants of the Project will access their material through a website that can store and present video. The current example/picture uses Thinkific; however, one can use Teachable, Kajabi, Youtube, or any other number of video hosting services. Below you will find a brief description of each module. For screenshots of the videos and some finished videos, please see the Appendices.

Part 1: Module 1-4

Since participants likely have heard very little about singleness in their church upbringing, the first 4 modules focus primarily on singleness and are meant to foster thought and reflection.

Part 2: Module 5-12

In Part 2, participants are guided through critical topics that are essential to their flourishing, although not necessarily exclusive to singles. Each video lesson acknowledges the viewer's singleness and addresses it specifically regarding the topic matter.

Module 1: The Struggle

Summary: This module acts as an introduction to the course and the topic of singleness. It is meant to establish the common struggle or challenge that single people share and develop a relationship between the teacher and the participant.

Full Manuscript

Okay, let's just get it out there: being a single Christian is not easy. In fact, it's a struggle. There's the loneliness experienced both in not having a partner and in having your friends slowly take a step back to focus on their family. Then there's the shame, that feeling that we are somehow to blame, somehow at fault, for our predicament. That there is something inherently wrong with us. Then there's the uncertainty, that gnawing feeling that you will be alone forever. That you will be the only one you can rely on, and will neither spouse nor child to look after you when you're old. Then there's dating, his seemingly never ending cycle of meeting people, getting hopes crushed, and being disappointed.

The problem with being single today

Don't get me wrong though. I do not want you to get the idea for a moment, that being single, being a Christian, or being a single Christian, is inherently worse than the alternatives. That said however, being single in the 21st century, I want to suggest if not argue, is harder, than it was before.

As a single person following Jesus since 2010, and a single person in pastoral ministry since 2012, I have thought a lot about singleness, about being single. I have experienced first hand many of the problems single people struggle with and have pastored many people who have struggled through those same struggles. And throughout this time, I have wondered, can something be done? Are these struggles, avoidable? Preventable?

In my reflections and in my doctoral studies on both singleness and specifically Christian singleness, I have come to the conclusion that yes, many of these struggles can be avoided and prevented. I have come to the belief and conviction that God desires single people, to flourish and to find life.

A Complicated System

In 2020 and 2021, the world became a little more aware of the challenges of people of color in the West. In the US after the killing of George Floyd, people started learning about the history of Black people in America and how systems have been against them from the very beginning. In Canada, when the hundreds and eventually thousands of unmarked graves of Indigenous children were found, people began to learn about the troubled history of Indigenous people in Canada. Slowly, more people are realizing that we live in a complicated world. A broken system of multiple interconnected, broken systems.

Although the struggles and sufferings of single people are not of the same level as racial minorities in North America, single people too, are a minority group caught up, in a system that does not fully acknowledge or understand the situation or system, and one that is controlled, to no one's fault, by another group, a majority group— married people.

I won't be as bold as to say everything, is set up in favor of married people, but I will say that much of our church systems and structures are set up for married people and families to succeed.

Married church leaders and church members, tend to think "I know someone single, and they're just fine. They're doing well and are happy. Therefore, there is no problem." Little do they know, that that single person, is actually just presenting their good side to them. Or they may think, "I once was single, and know what it was like. Singleness therefore, is simply a stage of life, some longer than for others, but one that all must go through." For these folks, they empathize with singles, but ultimately believe it will all be okay. Unfortunately, there are married Christians who simply think that single people are being babies. They think, "Your problem is that you don't trust or love God enough. You're not praying enough or leaning on God enough." For these people, your problems are ultimately, that, your problems.

Single vs. Alone

The major problem of being single, is not that single people are not married. Although we will go into that in more detail later, we know that it is possible to be single and to be fulfilled and flourish. Whether it is Jesus himself, St. Paul, or that one single and flourishing person you know at church, being single does not automatically condemn a person to suffering. The problem isn't that the person is single, but rather, that the person is alone.

Due to our culture, our society, and its recent "developments," a person single today is much more likely to be alone, than people in the past. The essentials to a flourishing life, are harder to find and to hold onto.

Although we know this word to mean peace, shalom in ancient Hebrew, meant much more than the absence of conflict. Back then, it meant perfect flourishing. And life, was divided

essentially into 4 categories, relationship with God, with others, with self, and with creation. And what resulted from the fall, was a brokenness in shalom and consequently, in each of these relationships. Aloneness, therefore doesn't simply entail a lack of relationship with other people, especially one special person, but rather, a lack or incompleteness of relationship, with God, others, and even themselves and creation.

Single people to no particular fault of their own, are not simply struggling to find a partner, but to find God, find community, find themselves, and find their calling.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1) In what ways have you seen the church or your own church, prioritize married people either explicitly or implicitly?

2) Ryan mentions 3 ways that married people perceive the problems of single people.

They either think:

- a. “Single people are doing fine. In fact, they’re probably having a better life than me!”
- b. “Singleness is tough but simply a stage of life. We all have to go through it. They think it’ll last forever but it won’t. “
- c. “Singles are single for a reason. They’re too picky and too sensitive.”

Which of these ways do you think most married people in your church or community view single people?

3) What do you think of Ryan’s idea that the problem isn’t so much that a person is single (aka. Not married) but rather because they are alone, languishing in their relationship with God, others, self, and creation? That they need help finding God, finding community, finding themselves, and finding their calling? In which area, do you find yourself lacking in most? Why do you think it is this way?

4) To flourish is to have a good and growing relationship with God, others, self, and creation. Spend some time imagining what flourishing would be like for you in this season of your life?

How would your relationship with God look like?

How would your relationships with others look like?

How would your self-perception and self-confidence look like?

And lastly, how would your sense of calling and purpose look like?

Scripture meditation

In John 10:10, Jesus says that

“I have come so that they may have life, and may have it abundantly.”

In other words, Jesus said and says today, that he came so that we may flourish and not languish, so that we may not be alone but rather, be alive.

Eugene Peterson, in his translation, writes,

“I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of.” Whichever translation you prefer, commit this scripture to memory. And as often as you are able, meditate on it. Meditate on the biblical truth that Jesus came and is coming, so that you may be alive, not alone, and that you doing this course is exactly where God has wants you.

Module 2: The Story

Summary: In this module, students are taken through the history of singleness pertaining to the church, beginning at Augustine, all the way to Vatican II. Students are then provided a snapshot of the evolution of singleness in the last century through statistics made public by PEW research and others.

Full Manuscript

Although we may be led to believe, think that the church has always valued and elevated marriage about singleness, this was not always the case. Let me take you through a quick survey of singleness as it relates to the history of the church and the Western world.

4th Century

St. Augustine, who may be considered one of the most influential theologians of all time, along with St. Ambrose, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom and others, elevated singleness, or celibacy from their reading of 1 Cor 7 which we will explore more in the next module. Augustine saw the life of a monk has the highest form of living, sacrificing all worldly desires for the sake of Christ, charity, and community¹. Chrysostom and Nyssa concluded that since virginity was the original state of humankind and the one to which all humans will return (no sex in heaven), virginity was the appropriate and logical way of life². Some even encouraged couples to become celibate but remain married for a season or even permanently.

¹. (Bennett, 110)

². (Bennett, 86)

For Augustine, the church was Christ's virgin bride and therefore was a call for people toward virginity. In Augustine's eyes, virginity was not only good and beautiful, it was practical. A virgin would "produce the birth of members for Christ more abundantly and fruitfully than would be possible from her womb, however fertile³." He looked to the virgin Mary and said "If Mary, who was a virgin could birth the greatest human being ever in the entire world, then why wouldn't other virgins also birth, spiritually speaking, great human beings also?"

6th Century

As the Roman Empire continued to develop and as Christianity was the full-blown official religion everywhere, being single and being a Christian was found to be becoming harder and harder. Thanks to its infrastructure and unified government, people no longer had to stay and live in the town that they were born into. Yet, more and more, people started to feel disconnected and lonely.

At this time, St. Benedict emerges with a new form of the monastery. Instead of simply having the only two vows that all monks made (poverty and celibacy), St. Benedict added 3 more. Benedictine monks vowed also to stability, to staying at the same monastery until they died, to fidelity, to listening to one another and to God in prayer, and to obedience, to doing what was necessary to grow and maintain harmony in the community.

Over the course of his life, Benedictine monasteries began grow in popularity everywhere. People were choosing to be single and to live with others because the life seemed better than any other way the world and had church had to offer. And from the 6th century then onward, most monasteries became Benedictine monasteries.

³. (Bennett, 103)

12th Century

Most of us I think know that in order to be a Catholic priest, you must commit to a life of singleness. This rule actually only came officially into existence at the Second Lateran Council in 1139⁴. Up until then, celibacy for the priesthood was more “encouraged” than required. In 304 AD, the Council of Elvira stated that all “bishops, presbyters, and deacons and all other clerics” were to “abstain completely from their wives and not to have children⁵.” So they could have partners, just not sex. And just a bit before in the 11th century. Pope Gregory VII issued a decree against clerical marriages⁶.

16th Century

When the Protestant Reformation began, among the many changes that began to occur in the church, the priesthood, was no longer forbidden to marry. And since then, as we may know, Protestant churches have been primarily led by married men. Jana Marguerite Bennett, in her book *Water is Thicker than Blood: An Augustinian Theology of Marriage and Singleness*, writes,

“Since the Reformation and Martin Luther’s insistence on marriage as a natural, earthy, and beneficial foundation, virginity has fallen out of favor and, indeed, has become almost nonsensical.

20th Century

And although the Catholic church has maintained its stance on celibacy and the priesthood, it began to change its posture towards marriage and singleness starting at the Second Council of the Vatican which was a series of meetings of the Catholic priesthood between 1962-

⁴. (<https://historynewsnetwork.org/article/696>)

⁵. (<https://historynewsnetwork.org/article/696>)

⁶. (<https://historynewsnetwork.org/article/696>)

1965, to update Catholic beliefs to the modern world. In it, it formally esteemed marriage, speaking of it now as a “lofty calling,” a “nobility,” and a “vocation.”

Bennett writes,

“Since Vatican II... Catholics, too, have become much more inclined to write about marriage and family while paying less attention to or even maligning single states of life, especially the celibate priesthood. While Catholic theology has not wholly turned aside considerations of celibacy, the thrust of the conversation moves toward marriage. One might even go so far as to say that, in the common understanding, celibacy as a state of life has been found wanting and that the best state of life for happiness consists in marriage, or, at least, the semblance of marriage...”

By the 20th century, both Protestants and Catholics were now both strongly affirming of marriage and rather quiet on singleness.

The Stats on Singleness

In the latter half of the 20th century in the Western World, more has changed for singles than the entire 1,950 years prior. For the first time, singles started to rise in population. In 1935, 51% of men and 75% of women were married by the time they turned 25. In 1985, the numbers were 6% of men and 12% of women.

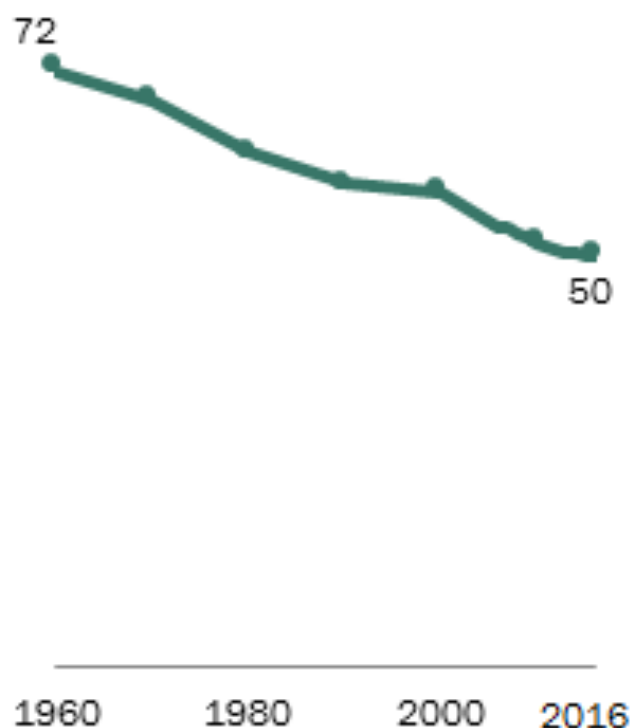
In 1950, 22 percent of all American adults were not married. In 1960, that number grew to 28% and by 2013, that percentage grew to 50 percent⁷ and has stayed there since about 2015⁸.

⁷. Klienenberg, 4

⁸. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/14/as-u-s-marriage-rate-hovers-at-50-education-gap-in-marital-status-widens/>

Half of U.S. adults are married today

% of adults ages 18 and older who are married



Note: Data from 2013-2016 include individuals in same-sex marriages. Adults who are separated are not classified as married.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 1960-2000 decennial censuses, 2006-2015 American Community Surveys (IPUMS) and U.S. Census Bureau's 2016 American Community Survey 1-Year estimates.

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In 1960, 9% adults over 25 had never been married. In 2012, that number rose to 23%⁹, approximately 43 million people. What's even more fascinating is that this 23% is not representative of everyone: 36% of black adults had never been married, whereas only 16% of white adults had never been married. Apparently, singleness takes sides.

In 1970, 20 percent of Americans between 25-34 were not married. In 2015, That number became 60 percent.¹⁰

In 2018, the average age of having one's first marriage hit an all time high in the US at 30 years for men and 28 years for women¹¹. In 2014, it was 27 for women and 29 for men. In 1960, it was 20 for women and 23 for men¹²!

In 2010, 47% of adults who had never been married between the ages of 25-34 were single. Based on the rates of marriage since the 1960s, it is likely that when this age group becomes 45-54, 25% will still be single and have never married. This does not however account for cohabitation and other forms of long term partnerships.

⁹. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2014/09/24/record-share-of-americans-have-never-married/>

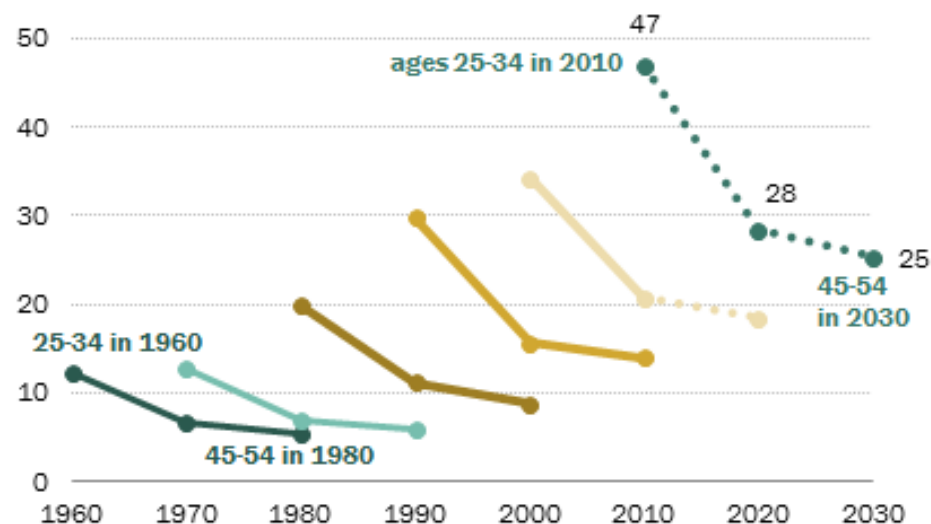
¹⁰. (Regenerus, The Future of Christian Marriage, 8)

¹¹. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/02/13/8-facts-about-love-and-marriage/>

¹². <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2014/09/24/record-share-of-americans-have-never-married/#fn-19804-2>

One-in-Four of Today's Young Adults May Never Marry

% never married, by cohort (at ages 25-34, 35-44, 45-54)



Note: The dotted lines are projected rates based on rates of the previous cohort.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of the Decennial Census and American Community Surveys (ACS), IPUMS

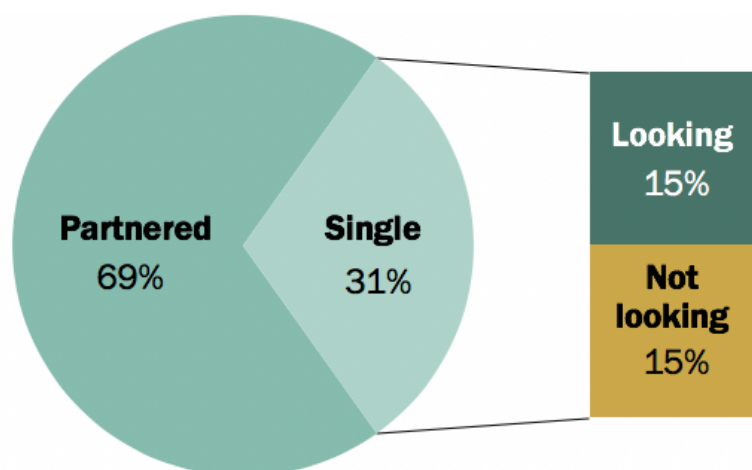
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According to PEW Research, today, out of all people not married, 31% of single adults are not married, or living with a partner, or even in a committed romantic relationship. Of that 30%, half of the group is looking for a partner, and half is not looking for a partner. Meaning, among all those single, only 15% are willing to mingle.¹³

¹³. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/08/20/a-profile-of-single-americans/>

Singles are split between being on and off the dating market

% saying they are currently ...



Note: "Partnered" adults are those who are married, living with a partner or in a committed romantic relationship. "Single" adults are those who are not married, living with a partner or in a committed romantic relationship. "Looking" refers to singles who say they are currently looking for a committed romantic relationship only, casual dates only, or either. "Not looking" refers to singles who say they are not currently looking for a relationship or dates. Figures may not add to subtotals due to rounding. Share of respondents who didn't offer an answer not shown.

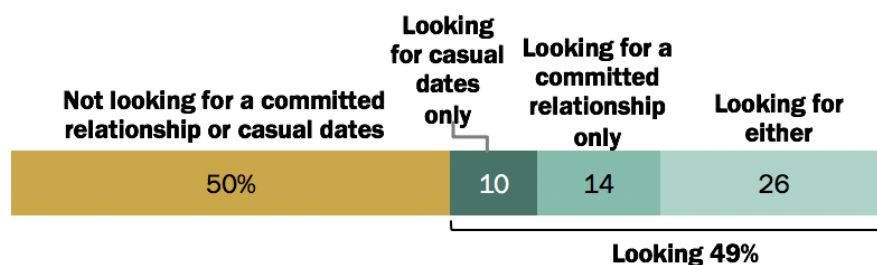
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Oct. 16-28, 2019.

"Nearly Half of U.S. Adults Say Dating Has Gotten Harder for Most People in the Last 10 Years"

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Half of singles are not looking to date

% of single adults saying they are currently ...



Note: "Single adults" are those who are not married, living with a partner or in a committed romantic relationship. Figures may not add to subtotals due to rounding. Share of respondents who didn't offer an answer not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Oct. 16-28, 2019.

"Nearly Half of U.S. Adults Say Dating Has Gotten Harder for Most People in the Last 10 Years"

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Religious Observance and Marriage

These numbers as you may know however, do not specifically address Christians. So let us take a look then take a look at the work of Mark Regenerus, sociologist and professor at the University of Texas at Austin.

From his research, he has found that religious observance has a strong correlation to whether someone will be married. In his research along with the World Values Survey, he mapped the likelihood of Christians being married at ages 25, 30, 35, and 39¹⁴.

Likelihood to be Married

¹⁴. Regenerus, TFOCM, 14-15

Age	Men		Women	
	Less Observant	More Observant	Less Observant	More Observant
25	16%	33%	21%	40%
30	37%	60%	45%	68%
35	50%	72%	58%	78%
39	49%	71%	57%	77%

Let me however, flip the numbers and give the likelihood of Christians being single:

Likelihood to be Single

Age	Men		Women	
	Less Observant	More Observant	Less Observant	More Observant
25	84%	67%	79%	60%
30	63%	40%	55%	32%
35	50%	28%	42%	22%
39	51%	29%	43%	23%

As I am sure no single ever likes to be told that the more they focus on their walk with God, the more likely they will find a spouse, apparently, the research and numbers affirm it!

Finally, in 1960, 8% of all marriages were of a Christian and a non-Christian, whether agnostic or of another religion. In 2010, this number rose to 24%. That means that basically 1 in every 4 marriages, is between a Christian and a non-Christian. If you are wondering why this

matters, stay tuned for our module on marriage. And among co-habiting but not married couples, half of them are couples of differing faiths¹⁵.

Conclusion

This module may have the most “information” than any other module and information that may feel the most impractical. Therefore, please try to take extra time this week to go over the reflection questions and exercise.

¹⁵. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/06/02/interfaith-marriage/>

Questions for Reflection

1) St. Augustine believed that virginity was the higher spiritual state and that virgins would produce more fruitful than married people. What fruit have you cultivated in your life because of your singleness? If you were to be single for the next 5, 10, and 15 years, and walking closely with God, what sort of fruit do you think God could birth from you?

2) In Benedictine monasteries, every monk, in addition to the vows of poverty and celibacy, also vow to stability, fidelity, and obedience: to staying, to listening, to growing. What do you think your life would be like if you and your community committed to those vows (single and married)?

3) Take a look at the following research that formed much of this module's content. What sticks out to you? What do you think is behind these numbers? What is going on in our society?

- <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/14/as-u-s-marriage-rate-hovers-at-50-education-gap-in-marital-status-widens/>
- <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2014/09/24/record-share-of-americans-have-never-married/>
- <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/02/13/8-facts-about-love-and-marriage/>
- <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/08/20/a-profile-of-single-americans/>
- <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/06/02/interfaith-marriage/>

4) If you have the time, consider watching the following videos for a greater perspective on how society has changed:

- The Coddling of the American Mind moderated by Malcolm Gladwell -
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rGTS9vZfV2o> (75 minutes)
- Connected, But Alone? Sherry Turkle at TED -
https://www.ted.com/talks/sherry_turkle_connected_but_alone?language=en (20 minutes)
- The Social Dilemma - Netflix (94 minutes)

Module 3: The Scriptures

Summary: This module goes through 2 Old Testament passages (Gen. 2:18; Ecc. 4:8-12) along with 2 New Testament passages (Matt. 22:30; 1 Cor. 7:25-26;28), showing participants that even though the term “single” is not a Hebrew or Greek word, the Bible does speak to the life of a single person.

Full Manuscript:

Not that it was needed or necessary, but now that we have established the unfortunate shame it is to be single in the 21st century church in the West and the story of how we got there, let us now look to what the Scriptures say about being single. You are here because you likely, have never heard the church talk about or preach on singleness. It’s not that its a taboo topic, the church just isn’t aware of it.

Yet, as I will show you in a moment, scripture does point to and talk about singleness. And though this will not to be an exhaustive overview or exegesis of the Bible, I hope to provide a simply and concise survey of key passages that will both inform and encourage you.

The Old Testament

Genesis 2:18 (Not Good To Be Alone)

In the book of Genesis, after God creates the universe and then the world, God makes a man and places him in the garden of Eden. It is a perfect world without sin. God and man are chilling in paradise, yet despite all of that, we read in verse 18, that “The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone.”

Let’s just pause for a moment, and sit with that.

What we see here in this text, is that you can live in heaven, with the God, Jesus and the Spirit, without pain, death and sin, and it's still not good.

I am not suggesting, that God, that Jesus, that the Holy Spirit, is not what we need most in our lives. But simply, that God. is not all, that we need. This idea that we have a God shaped hole in our hearts, that can only be filled with God, and that if we fill that hole, then our life will be all hunky-dory, is false.

I think, Genesis is very clear, that a person can have an intimate relationship with God, and still be incomplete, to still feel lonely. It is not good, for man, and I'll say woman, to be alone.

I know this might sound like blasphemy and heresy to you, but, the text does not lie. God said it himself, it is not good for humans to be alone.

Furthermore, let me just add, the Hebrew term translated in English as "not good" does not mean, sub-optimal or average. The term is actually highly emphatic, meaning that God is saying it's not just "not good" but that it's actually bad. We can therefore more accurately rewrite Genesis 2:18 to say that "the LORD God said, "It is bad for men and women to be alone."

Ecclesiastes 4:8-12 (Two Are Better Than One)

If you've ever been to a wedding, Christian or not, you've probably heard this passage.

9 Two people are better than one

because they can reap more benefit from their labor.

10 For if they fall, one will help his companion up,

but pity the person who falls down and has no one to help him up.

11 Furthermore, if two lie down together, they can keep each other warm,

but how can one person keep warm by himself?

12 Although an assailant may overpower one person,
two can withstand him.

Moreover, a three-stranded cord is not quickly broken.

Although this passage has been almost always used at weddings, this passage is not actually about marriage at all. Just look at verse 12, what ancient Jewish man reading this text would think that his wife, a woman, who were really thought of as property back then, would think of her as his partner to overpower an attacker? This passage isn't about marriage but about meaningful relationships.

At the end of this passage, we are told that although two may be good three is even better. At Christian weddings, this third person is most often considered to be God. That although marriage is good in and of itself, a marriage with God is even better. Although that is certainly theologically sound, that might not be what the text is saying.

Tremper Longman III, one of, if not the most respected Old Testament scholars of the 21st century, says that a plainer and simpler reading, is the more accurate reading. That although God, in any relationship, be it a marriage, friendship, or business, the writer of Ecclesiastes is simply saying, that although two people are better together, three people, or more people together, is even better.

The New Testament

Now that we've gone over the Old Testament, let's flip a few more hundred pages and take a look at the New Testament.

Matthew 22:30 (Neither Marry Nor are Given in Marriage)

One day, a group of men that weren't a fan of Jesus known as the Sadducees came up to him to try and stump him and embarrass him. They being by reminding Jesus that according to

Deuteronomy 25:5-6, if a man dies before giving his wife a child, then it is up to the dead man's brother to marry the woman and give her a child. Since widows were not the most desirable to marry, God made this law to protect the woman from having to beg with a family, and protect her in the future, with a child that could look after her.

They then go on to propose this hypothetical story of a woman whose husband dies before he can give her a child and so ends up marrying his 6 brothers because each other, married her but died before they could give her a child.

So the Sadducees then ask, "Hey Jesus, you're so smart, if this woman had 7 husbands legitimately, who's wife is she going to be in heaven?"

In response, Jesus essentially says, "You guys do not understand the Scriptures. Heaven isn't just like life on earth but forever and better. It's going to be completely different. In fact, in heaven, there will be no marriage. "They neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels." (Matt. 22:30 NET)

This passage may be the most direct comment Jesus has on marriage and singleness and from it we can know that marriage is not the end goal for any human. Instead, Jesus says the goal is for us to be like angels. He isn't saying we will be angels however. Robots without feelings or relationships, but rather that in Heaven, we will be transformed by God into something unlike anything we could experience or understand now. We will love each other to the fullest in the way that God loves us, including the woman who had 7 husbands.

1 Corinthians 7:25-26;28 (Remain as You Are)

If you've ever spoken to someone that's been married for awhile or who even has lived with someone, you know that marriage is and will be hard. I've heard some married people say

marriage is the hardest thing in their life. And if some are really honest, they'll actually tell you that they wished that they were single. And you know what? The Bible agrees with them!

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul says,

“With regard to the question about people who have never married, I have no command from the Lord, but I give my opinion as one shown mercy by the Lord to be trustworthy. 26 Because of the impending crisis I think it best for you to remain as you are... But if you marry, you have not sinned. And if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. But those who marry will face difficult circumstances, and I am trying to spare you such problems.”

He then goes on to essentially say,

“When you're single, the only worries you have in life are how to serve and please the Lord. But when you're married, you gotta think about money, keeping your partner happy. And I want to save you from these burdens and so you can be free to focus on God and serve him!”

Imagine if you heard that in a sermon!

“Single people, stay single! Married people, including me, got so many problems because of our marriage and you know what, it also make us less effective and useful for God!”

Although you are here watching this video and taking this course because being single is a real struggle, we have to remember that marriage isn't all that it's cracked up to be. Marriage results in a variety of challenges, problems, and burdens that according to Paul, can and should be avoided.

Genesis 1 - Revelation 22

And lastly, let us not forget that the entire Bible, is about a single person. From Genesis to Malachi we are told a story all to prepare us for the coming of this person. From Matthew to

Revelation we are told about this person, how to be with and become and live more like this person.

Can you imagine what it would be like if Jesus was married during his life and ministry? I know, crazy. It's crazy to think and even suggest because everybody knows Jesus was single, yet, we never acknowledge or talk about it.

Conclusion

Despite our church's silence on singleness, singleness and its relevance to life is found throughout the scriptures. Being single, being alone, have real, significant, problems. Yet being "single," is actually God's goal for us than it is marriage. And at times, for some of us, singleness may actually be the better option for life and flourishing.

The problem I want to suggest and argue is that singleness, is particularly hard for us today because we have largely lost a holistic and complete theology of flourishing, of a good and full life. In our next module, we are going to go over the solution to singleness in the modern 21st century. We will look through scripture and science as to how single people can not only survive, but thrive in the church and the world.

Questions for Reflection

1) “The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone.” - Genesis 2:18.

Spend some time meditating on this text. But instead of “the man” put in “you” or your own name. Hear God speaking over you that it is not good for you to be alone. Hear and feel God’s compassion for you.

2) The ultimate call of our life, is to be with Jesus, become like Jesus, live like Jesus and lead others to do likewise. Read Ecclesiastes 4:8-12 and reflect on what life may be like, if you had such companions and a community to help you.

3) Read Matthew 22:30 and 1 Corinthians 7:25-28. This may be hard, but meditate on what if you remained single. The hard truth is that many single people will remain single for the rest of their lives. Although this may sound like a life sentence to misery, what good may come from it? What problems might you avoid?

Module 4: The Solution

Summary: In this module, students are presented with a picture and definition of true flourishing according to Genesis 1 and 2. It is argued that for singles (and all people) to flourish genuinely, they must engage and deepen their relationship with God, others, self, and the world.

Full Manuscript:

You are here because you recognize that your singleness is a part of your life and that it is bound, intimately tied to, your flourishing. You are here because you sense, or even know, that you are not flourishing.

In this module, we are going to take a look at what it Biblically means to flourish. If we have any chance of living well in this life, we must understand what God's design and definition of the good life, of a life well lived, is.

Genesis 1-2

In Genesis 1-2, we get a glimpse of heaven, what the good life for humans is supposed to and will eventually be like. In it, we find the two "Dei's" of the Christian tradition: the Imago Dei and the Missio Dei. The Image of God, and the Mission of God.

The Image of God - Communion and Community

"Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness..."

God created humankind in his own image,

in the image of God he created them,

male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:26-27)

In the beginning, we see the humanity was made to be communal.

But, who is this “us” that God is referring to? The most likely interpretation is that God is referring to Himself and his heavenly court. In 1 Kgs 22:19-22; Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6; Isa 6:1-8, God uses the plural to represent both himself and his angels. Humanity therefore is to reflect the relationship of God and God’s angels, but differently.

Looking at the entire scriptures then, we can more easily see that what God wants and designed from the beginning is that every human have a personal relationship with God and each other. Humans were not made to be robots, mechanically accomplishing God’s will on earth, individually and irrespective of each other. Nor did God create us to live in harmony but without God.

God wanted humanity to be in communion with him and in community with each other.

Communion in God

The scriptures and the Christian tradition teach that God is love, that God loves humanity, and desires a personal and intimate relationship with each and every person. Despite popular belief, God is not a loving grandpa who will do whatever you ask of him, and requires nothing of you, God is described much more like a husband to a wife.

It’s often said that Christianity is a relationship and not a religion. When we look at the life of Jesus, we see a relationship with God that is deeply dependent and intimate. Jesus goes away at times to just be with God. Jesus radically calls God his Abba Father which is an extremely intimate term. It’s sort of like how children call their dad’s papa or dada, but it’s not just for babies. Before his crucifixion, Jesus prays desperately to God asking that if it’s God’s will, that he wouldn’t have to go on the cross.

To say then that Christianity is a “relationship,” is for me, in complete. I think, we should say, that Christianity, is “communion.” He wants us to be with, and in, Him.

I don't ever want to be one of those people that give Christian platitudes, telling you to simply pray more or have more faith. But the reality, is that as people of faith, the object of our faith, and consequently, the maturity of our faith, will determine, the depth of our flourishing.

Community with Others

When God said that it was not good for man to be alone, God created a “companion for him who corresponds to him.” In other translations, the word for “companion” is usually translated as helper.

The word helper in Hebrew however, is the word, עֵזֶר (‘ezer) and is used elsewhere in the Bible primarily to describe God as our deliver.

- Psa 115:9 He is their deliverer and protector.
- Psa 121:2 My help [or deliverance] comes from the Lord, the Creator of heaven and earth.
- Psa 124:8 Our deliverer is the Lord, the Creator of heaven and earth.

We were made to be interdependent beings. Ones that live in mutual self-giving and receiving. We were made to be in community. With, and unity. United, standing and walking in the same direction together.

We need people. People to help us. Dare I say, deliver us. This is not to say that we need to be married, because we know that in heaven we won't be married, and that Jesus and Paul lived fulfilling lives as single people. And so therefore, our flourishing must involve, community.

The Mission of God - Calling and Completion

“The Lord God took the man and placed him in the orchard in Eden to care for it and to maintain it...The man and his wife were both naked, but they were not ashamed” (Genesis 2:15; 25)

When God put humanity on earth, we see that God had a mission for them. God wanted and wants to create a world, known as the Kingdom of God, where humanity lives in perfect relationship with the world and with their self. They don't just take from the world, but they care for the world, and in the process, bear fruit and multiply in children yes, but also culture, technology, and art.

The man and his wife are acknowledged as being naked not in reference to their sexuality, but rather their vulnerability. They were able to be their true self in front of one another. Nakedness in this context, signifies innocent or integrity, meaning that in the Kingdom of God, humans are not driven or hidden in shame, but show up in the world as their true and authentic self.

In these two lines, we see God's design and desire for humans to have a calling into the world, and to be complete as their unique and true selves.

Calling into the World

Over the years, I have heard many people look forward to the day when Jesus comes back so they will never have to work again. Unfortunately, I then have to tell them that work preceded the Fall and that there will still be work in heaven.

In Genesis, we see that humanity was given a job to do prior to their fall. They were called to care for the world and to create a better one. They were called to be fruitful and multiply. We see in Revelation that there all tribes, tongues and nations will gather, and worship in a golden city. God wants cultures, technology, languages, and art to be made. Work in the

New Heaven and Earth won't be farming for those who do not want to, nor any job, that we do not want to. But rather Heaven will be where our greatest passions are allowed to flourish and which will in turn, make the world better.

Having a purpose, having a calling into the world, is central to the human condition and human flourishing. At moments we may feel the thrill of doing or being a part of something bigger than ourselves, but for the most part, we live in the grind of the day to day. Most of us likely long for a life that feels more integrated. Where everything we do is somehow connected to our central purpose in life, our calling.

Calling however is not to be misunderstood as a job or a volunteer position. Too often in our talking of calling we equate it to just that. But calling is so much more. It is a summons, by the maker of heaven and earth, to participate in what he is doing in the world, to renew, restore, and reconcile, all things to himself.

Completion of the Self

I don't know about you, but I have a immense fear of being seen naked. Nakedness, means all of me, physically, is seen. And I do not know, if I want anyone to see all of me. In the same vein, I don't know how many people, if any, I would truly want, to see all of me, emotionally and mentally.

Shame, is part of the human condition after the fall. We all fear nakedness, vulnerability. We fear being seen, warts and all. We fear being found out for not being perfect or having it all together.

God's design and intention however, was for us to live naked. To live freely as our true selves in front of the world. Unashamed of who God made us to be.

One day, we will all be perfect. I don't mean just morally, though. I mean, we will be the best version of ourselves. We won't only be less impatient, less angry, less sinful. But we will be more creative, but loving, more passionate, more our true selves, than ever before.

And therefore part of what is involved in flourishing as a single Christian in this broken world, is pursuing our true and best selves— our complete self. God has made each of us unique. Paul says that each of us are God's workmanship, or masterpiece. We are all works in progress. And to flourish in this world, means we must pursue our self and our maturity, the completion of our self.

Conclusion

In Hebrew, the word peace, shalom, entails so much more than simply, the absence of conflict or war. Shalom in Hebrew, meant and means flourishing. In Hebrew, when a person heard the word shalom, they knew that it encompassed everything. That it meant people living in perfect relationship with God, with each other, with the world, and with their self. When the Israelites would pray for peace, for shalom, for deliverance, for God to come, that's what they were praying for. That's what the messiah is supposed to bring.

And so when we pray the Lord's prayer, the Messiah's prayer, when we pray, may your Kingdom come and your will be done, we are praying for shalom. We are praying that every human being would find communion with God, community with others, a calling into the world, and a completion of their true and whole self.

And when we pray lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, we are praying, God, help me not stray away from you. Help me not distance myself from community. Help me not focus on money or stability, or status, but on your calling. And help me not try to be someone I'm not.

Questions for Reflection

1) What area of flourishing (communion, community, calling, completion) do you find most ignored in the church? Why do you think this is so? What do you think your life would be like if the church taught more on this area or relationship?

2) What area of flourishing do you find yourself strongest in?

3) What area of flourishing do you find yourself weakest in?

4) What do you sense, in this moment, God calling you to do, in order to go deeper in these 4 relationships?

Exercise

Pray the Lord's Prayer slowly, while keeping a few things in mind.

1) When you pray "Our Father," remember that father is an intimate word. God is "prodigal" which means lavish, and generous. What does it mean for you to pray to a loving, close, lavish, and generous God?

2) When you pray "Your Kingdom Come," pray that shalom would come. In this world, but also for your world. What does it mean to pray for shalom, for God's kingdom, to come into your relationship with God, others, the world, and your self? What does flourishing look like?

3) When you pray "Give us today our daily bread," what do you need today? For your relationship with God, with others, with the world, and with yourself?

4) When you pray "Lead me not into temptation, but deliver us from evil," what are the temptations you are facing today, and need God's strength to resist them? How are you being pulled away from God? From community? From your calling? From your true self?

Module 5: Marriage

Summary: Because this course is not about encouraging people to be single but rather about navigating through their singleness, marriage will be one of the most important topics to cover. This module primarily looks at marriage as a partnership between two people and encourages the viewer to build a biblical perspective on marriage and seek a Christ-centered marriage.

Full Manuscript:

Although almost every single Christian that I have met wants to be married, very few of them I have found, have had a biblical and theological understanding of marriage. Because I believe marriage is important, not just to single people's flourishing, but to families and the church, I think it's important that all single people, have a biblical/theological framework, in their pursuit of marriage.

What exactly is marriage for? Is there anything that should be different for a Christian looking for marriage, than a non-Christian? Is there such thing, as a Christian marriage? If practically every single Christian wants to get married, then I feel that every one of them then better have a good understanding of what they are wanting.

In this module, I will attempt to build a biblical perspective and a beautiful picture of marriage. Most things in life do not happen by chance, and I would like to suggest, that a good marriage is no different.

It seems only logical to begin our conversation on marriage, from the first marriage—Adam and Eve. Although they did not technically get married in that they said walked down an aisle in church, said their vows in front of their loved ones, signed papers with their pastor, and

then had a big celebration afterwards, I think we can all agree that Adam and Eve were in a exclusive, monogamous relationship.

The Mission

Before we meet Eve, we know that Adam was created and commissioned to care for the world. Before there was marriage, there was a mission. Before there was a partner, there was a purpose.

Let me suggest then that the fundamental basis of marriage is not love, but mission. Not sex, but service. Christian marriage is fundamentally about serving God, together. As we have explored earlier, God calls woman, a helper, or, deliver. Adam was unable to fulfill his calling, without Eve.

In 1 Corinthians 6:14-16, Paul speaking on all forms of partnerships, marriage and even business, he says,

“Do not become partners with those who do not believe, for what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship does light have with darkness? And what agreement does Christ have with Beliar? Or what does a believer share in common with an unbeliever? And what mutual agreement does the temple of God have with idols?”

If you are familiar with the Bible or have grown up in the church, you’ll know the translation as “do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.”

This text is most often used in regards to marriage, but the actual context of the passage, applies to any sort of partnership, including business. Paul then was saying, don’t marry or even get into business with those who do not believe, because how are you going to achieve the same things, if you don’t believe and want the same things?

If marriage is a partnership between two people with a mission, if being married means being a companion, a helper, a deliver to the partner's calling in life, the Paul I think is right. How can two people, that do not share the desire and activity of following and learning from Jesus, accomplish more together?

The Meaning

In the Catholic tradition, marriage is considered a sacrament just like baptism or communion. It is an ordinary thing that expresses a divine reality. In baptism and communion, people express their death to self and their being raised to new life in Christ. In marriage, people express Christ's sacrificial love and commitment to the church, through their sacrificial love and commitment to the other.

What is the biggest deal about Jesus? I think all would agree that it is his sacrificial love and commitment. Jesus had no reason, zero, to live the life he lived, and died the death he died. He did not owe us a thing nor did he need anything from us. He lived and died, simply because God loved and loves us, and made a commitment long ago, to never forsake us and to one day redeem us.

In their book, *The Meaning of Marriage*, Kathy and Timothy Keller use Ephesians 5 as the foundation to how they understand marriage. Paul says that the relationship between two people in a marriage, is like the relationship between Jesus and the church. Paul writes,

“Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her to sanctify her by cleansing her with the washing of the water by the word, so that he may present the church to himself as glorious—not having a stain or wrinkle, or any such blemish, but holy and blameless.”

The Keller's argument is that marriage is meant for sanctification. Gary Thomas in his book, *Sacred Marriage*, echoes the same mentality, when he asks, what if marriage is not meant to make us happy, but holy? In Ephesians, we see that Christ, gave himself to the church in death, to sanctify her. To make the church glorious, without a stain, wrinkle, or blemish. Holy and blameless.

Marriage therefore is about sanctification. Marriage is about the commitment of two people helping each other to follow Jesus and become more like him, and to live more like him.

The Mistakes

Given the mission and meaning of marriage, I want to share 3 mistakes that I have seen singles make in their pursuit of marriage that I hope you will avoid.

1) Underestimate Our Sinfulness

Throughout the Old Testament, God is abundantly clear to the Israelites that they are not to intermarry with the surrounding nations because if they do so, they will start worshiping other things other than Him. King Solomon was the wiser human to have ever lived after Jesus, was raised by who we consider a man after God's own heart, and yet strayed from God. 1 Kings 11:1-4 says,

“Now King Solomon loved many foreign women. Besides Pharaoh's daughter, he married women from Moab, Ammon, Edom, Sidon, and from among the Hittites. The Lord had clearly instructed the people of Israel, “You must not marry them, because they will turn your hearts to their gods.” Yet Solomon insisted on loving them anyway. He had 700 wives of royal birth and 300 concubines. And in fact, they did turn his heart away from the Lord. In Solomon's old age, they turned his heart to worship other gods instead of being completely faithful to the Lord his God, as his father, David, had been. “

One of my favorite lines in all the Christian songs there is, is the one in the great hymn *Come Thou Fount*, which says, “Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, Prone to leave the God I love.”

Too many singles underestimate their proclivity to sin and from turning to God and think that by marrying someone who isn’t an apprentice of Jesus, it will not affect their apprenticeship either.

2) Overspiritualizing the Situation

When Abraham and Sarah were in their old age and was promised by God that they would have a son and descendants like the stars in the sky, they waited. And then waited some more. Eventually, they got tired of waiting and began to wonder if God meant they were to have a child not through Sarah, but through a surrogate. So, Sarah and Abraham decide that Abraham should instead have a child with their house maiden Hagar.

If you are familiar with the story, you know that that was not God’s plan, and that there were serious repercussions that happened afterwards.

Some single people tend to do what Abraham and Sarah did but for a partner. They start to think “what if God meant this instead...” “what if God wants me to convert them to a Christian.” “What if God wants me to help them deal with their trauma and baggage.”

In this line of thinking, singles can over-spiritualize their situation and start thinking that what they are doing is actually God’s purpose and plan for them, disregarding what the scriptures I think, are quite clear on. They think that because God loves all people, and that they love this person, God will save them, heal them and transform them.

3) Overestimating Our Satisfaction

One of the most beloved verses of all scripture is Jeremiah 29:11

“For I know what I have planned for you,” says the Lord. “I have plans to prosper you, not to harm you. I have plans to give you a future filled with hope.”

And as much as we all love this verse, I think we often underestimate just how good God’s plans are for us, just how much he wants us to prosper.

As good as some unequally yoked marriages may appear from the outside, how can it really compare to one with someone who loves Jesus with all their heart, mind, soul and strength?

Conclusion: The Magnitude of Marriage

Marriage can be the greatest gift to our flourishing, enabling us to more fully follow Jesus’ calling in our life and to become more like him. Imagine, being with someone who had Jesus first in their life, who always sought to be more like him in love and wisdom, and who’s ultimate priority in marriage, was to build you up in Christ and help you flourish biblically?

Marriage can also be the greatest hindrance of our flourishing, distracting us and preventing us from following Jesus. It led Solomon and many others away from God and ultimately to other gods. Imagine, being with someone you loved every single day, but who did not believe in or love Jesus. How could that not, in some way, turn you away from God?

Marriage is a serious thing. It is the biggest decision we will ever make in our lives. It affects our future in ways we can’t imagine. It attaches us emotionally and spiritually to another person. If children are involved, it affects them. I can’t imagine a single area of life that isn’t affected by marriage. And lest we forget, it affects our spiritual life, our apprenticeship to Jesus.

Questions for Reflection

1) Although you may not know your yet your calling from God today, try to imagine what it would be like to know it as Adam knew his in the Garden of Eden. Recognize how important and difficult it will be to achieve it.

What would your life and the pursuit of your calling look like if you were married to someone passionate for and mature in Christ? How would they be able to help you build your relationship with God, others, the world, and your self?

How do you think it would look differently, if you were married to someone that wasn't? How might you be pulled away from your communion with God, your community with others, your calling in the world, and the completion of your self?

2) If you ask anyone that's been married for any amount of time, you will quickly learn how difficult marriage is. Marriage is not for the feint of heart or the weak of mind. Marriage is hard work. Although marriage has been a part of practically every culture in history, we live in a society where the permanence of marriage is not longer valued. Separation and divorce okay and sometimes even good. Imagine being married and going through a very difficult season.

What kind of person do you think you would become if you were married to someone who sought to be and live like Jesus in their life and especially their marriage?

Now imagine if you were married to someone who did not have God at the center of their life. What kind of person do you think you would become? Or, what kind of person, would you likely, not become?

3) Which of the 3 mistakes do you think you most likely make or most tempted to make? Is it underestimating your sinfulness, overestimating God's sovereignty, or is it underestimating flourishing? Pray about this to God. What do you hear him wanting to say to you?

Module 6: Dating

Summary: Because there are no dating examples or guidelines in Scripture, this module goes over pieces of wisdom and advice from people such as Andy Stanely, Matt Chandler, Neil Warren, and myself.

Full Manuscript:

In case this needs to be said, there are no real rules to dating, or specifically, the pursuit of marriage, as it pertains to practices. I have made the argument, that the only real “rule” there is, is the one that a partner should be also a committed apprentice of Jesus. Other than that, there is no advice that the Bible gives because, well, marriage happened a little differently back then that it does today. That said, over the years some thoughtful people have come up with a few good ideas that I want to go over, that I think will be a gift and a real help, in your pursuit to marriage.

Give It Time

I’m not sure where this piece of advice really comes from, but it’s been around forever: don’t judge a person by your first experience. On a first date, and quite likely many subsequent ones, are people a bit awkward. We don’t know how to act because we don’t know the other person.

The general rule of thumb, is to give a person at least 2 dates before you write them off. This is assuming though, that they pass the competence and character test. If you’re simply not super physically attracted to the person, don’t feel them super funny, or whatever, the general advice is to give it some time.

Although this is not the most romantic, and really against everything Hollywood tells us, to be clear with the person that you're not in love, but open to exploring friendship, and what that could potentially become. There are absolutely no expectations for anything to develop. You're just two single human beings, getting to know each other, who don't have the opportunity to naturally do so.

There are lots of stories, tons of marriages, where usually the woman, isn't interested in the man. However over time, is either persistence or their friendship, blossoms into romance. They served at YWAM or youth group together. Or they were in the same small group for a time. Or they were simply friends at church for years. Every story is a little different, but in every one of these stories, someone changes their mind. Someone realizes something.

Be The Person You're Looking For is Looking For

Andy Stanley, in his book *The New Rules for Love, Sex, and Dating*, asks the piercing question, "are you the person you're looking for, is looking for?" Meaning, would your ideal partner really be interested in you?

This is unfortunately a serious question we have to ask in our world of unrealistic expectations. Everyone is looking for their Prince Charming or their Cinderella, the total package. Yet, rarely does anyone ever ask, "am I their total package?"

Everyone wants to be loved unconditionally, yet all of us have so many conditions for the other person. If you are looking for someone to love you unconditionally, that person is God. Everyone else, has conditions.

This is a sort of hard question to ask, I realize. We aren't mind readers, so we don't really know, what our ideal person, really wants. We know generally, fit guys, like fit girls. And tall

girls, like tall guys. However, there's a lot of other traits that they also look for, and we might not even be aware of.

However, seriously ask yourself, are you the person you're looking for, is looking for?
Would they really want to go out and spend the rest of their life, with you?

Don't Just Wait

In his book, *Date or Soulmate?*, Neil Clark Warren, a committed Christian who created eHarmony to help committed Christians find and marry other committed Christians, wrote, if you are only waiting at home, waiting for God to send you your marriage partner, then the person you are going to marry is the mail person.

For a reason, there was a unhealthy emphasis on waiting for women, on their partner. It was encouraged that women just wait on God to provide the man he had for them. Unfortunately, a lot of women who didn't have to be, are now in their 40s, and still single.

I think Warren is right, if we don't get out there, put ourselves out there, we will find no one, except the person who delivers our mail. As someone who's been dating online since the very beginning, I have found it quite odd when someone asks me as a pastor, if its okay to date online, as if it was somehow morally wrong.

As we have explored, times have changed. We no longer just marry the person across the street, or the person we grew up with in Youth Group. As a result, we have to actively put ourselves out there, to meet people.

That said, it's probably wise, to choose certain apps or services, that allows you to find other apprentices of Jesus. Meaning, don't go on Tinder.

Look at Their Relationships

Matt Chandler in his book, *The Mingling of Souls*, encourages singles to pay attention to how their potential partner is in relationship with other people, and in particular, church authority. Now, this may sound super conservative or legalistic, but give me, and give him, a second.

Marriage is hard. And I think, one of the primary contributing factors to faltering and failing marriages, is the independence of the individual. The easiest example, is the person who does not want to go to couples counseling. They refuse the advice and authority of another.

Chandler suggests, to look at and think about, how this person lives currently in relationship to others. Are they in a small group? Do they have a mentor? Are they held accountable to the pastor or a leader?

A healthy marriage, is going to require both people to listen to other people, and not just themselves. Don't you want a partner, who seeks the advice of a therapist, a pastor, a mentor, or even a small group of friends? Someone that will tell them they're being an idiot and being selfish.

If a person shows no signs of humility to another, you may then do well in wondering, if this person will be humble to you.

Be Bold and Ruthless

One of the most frustrating experiences that I have heard time and time again in dating, is genuine Christians that go on a date with someone who ends up not really being a Christian, or at the very least, a mature one.

If all devoted followers of Jesus were loud and clear on their dating profiles that they love Jesus and are looking for someone that does too, and then ruthlessly eliminates or swipes

left, to all people who's profile does not show it, I think a lot of people, would save themselves from a lot of frustration and grief.

That said, don't be too judgy. A girl that I once dated absolutely loved Jesus, but in her frustration to dating, simply did not give much thought to her profile. The only reasons why we went out, was because we already knew each other through a mutual friend, and I knew despite her profile, that she loved Jesus.

If their profile suggests the most important things are traveling, work, or just having fun, and suggests no submission to Jesus, then, maybe just forget it. I don't know about you, but I'd rather go on a few quality dates, then waste my time and money on ones that likely have no future.

Stop Judging and Gossiping

At a church I happen to visit that had a seminar on dating after the service, the pastor asked the 100+ guys in the sanctuary if one of the reasons why they didn't ask girls out more in person, was because they were afraid of both rejection and the girls talking about them behind their backs, almost every guy hand, went up.

Although I am in fully against gender stereotypes and in full favor of girls being forward and asking guys out, I realize that I am a minority. So that said, girls, if you want guys at church to ask you out, first, I think, you should give them a chance, and then second, don't talk about them to others.

I think we do a disservice to both others and even ourselves, when we talk to other people about the people we date. We give and get inaccurate perceptions of the person, and make judgments out of really nothing.

I know of men and women at my church who have been labeled as thirsty, or on the hunt. Even if there was no malicious intent, this sort of talking greatly hurts other people, and hinders them from actually being seen and making a connection with another person. So stop the gossip.

Be Gracious and Kind

As single people, we need to start treating each other a bit better. Especially as a Christians. I am always floored, when I have a good conversation with someone on an app, and then they just ghost me or remove me. Maybe I think that I deserve too much, but I don't think so.

Whether its online or offline, I think we could all be a bit better at extending grace and kindness to others. Girls, if a guy who you aren't super interested in, asks you out, might I suggest either saying yes to something really simple, or very extremely kind in your saying no.

If you've read Aziz Ansari's book, *Modern Romance*, you'll know that everyone hates being ghosted, or being treated without full respect and honesty. And yet, he says, we all do it to others.

A few extra words or sentences can go a long way. Imagine if your potential partner, gave up on dating and ended up never meeting you, because too many people treated them poorly. Wouldn't that be just so sad?

Let us be different then.

Questions for Reflection

1) Write out the type of person that you're looking for in as much detail as possible. Now be honest, would this person, want to go out with you? Are your expectations and desires too high? Or are you not focusing enough on being your best self?

2) Out of all the various pieces of advice, which do you think you need to take on, in your season of dating? How do you think you can practically apply this to your life, today? Which of these do you think you do *too much* and which may actually be a hindrance to your dating?

- Give it Time
- Be the Person You're Looking For is Looking For
- Don't Just Wait
- Look at Their Relationships
- Be Bold and Ruthless
- Stop Judging and Gossiping
- Be Gracious and Kind

Exercise

Find some solid Christian married couples you know and ask them how they met and what dating looked like for them. Discover what they did wrong and what they did right.

Although many of these couples won't understand the details of your particular situation, there is something that be gleaned from every story.

Module 7: Vocation

Summary: This module seeks to teach participants the theology of vocation or calling and provides practical steps on finding theirs. Since singles are without a partner and likely a strong community, finding meaning and a purpose in their life will be all that more important for them.

Full Manuscript:

Before there was a partner, there was a purpose. Work, according to scripture, is integral to the human experience, to human flourishing. Without meaningful work, without a calling, a vocation, a purpose, life is, quite frankly, without meaning, without purpose.

Many people have asked me if I believe I am or others are called to be single. I think this question greatly misunderstands something. Since the beginning of the church, people were not called to be single, but called to serve. And if that calling to serve required the person to be single or was easier to be followed, as a single person, then that person chose to be single.

God does not call people single for no reason, there is always a greater and higher purpose. As single people, finding and following our calling is essential to life and flourishing. If we do not know our calling, then how can we possibly find a suitable helper?

If our goal as single people is to flourish, whatever that looks like, and not simply to be married, then finding our calling, is an integral issue.

General vs Individual purpose

At the most foundational level, teachers on calling have generally distinguished between what we will call a “general” calling and an “individual” or “specific” calling.

The general calling refers to the calling that every human being has: the call to follow Jesus, to become like Jesus, and to live like Jesus. The Greek word for call, “klay-sis” is used 11

times in the New Testament and is used almost every single time, to refer to the call God has for people toward Jesus. And never do they refer to a certain task, or job.

That said, each of us as individuals have a unique or individual calling. In Ephesians 2:10 Paul says, “For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago” (NLT). The word “masterpiece” can also be translated as workmanship or handiwork. The Greek word is *poiēma* (ποίημα), pronounced “poe-em-a.” This is where we get the word “poem.” Like every piece of art, it is one of a kind. Every person therefore, has a specific call, a unique purpose, a series of works only they can do.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul says that each of us are members of a body and that every member has its use or function. He says that no member’s function, or no person’s calling, is better than another. He says that ears can’t be jealous of noses, and toes, jealous of fingers. He says that we are all important.

How to find your calling

Reflection

If you are wondering if there is anything, we can actually do to find our calling, there is. Let me share with you the main questions that almost every commentator on calling asks.

- 1) What are you good at?
- 2) What does the world need?
- 3) What do you love to do?

To express it most simply and beautifully, Frederick Beuchner wrote,

“The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.”

I won't pretend that there are not other questions to ask and other things to consider. Your life circumstances, your current career, your finances, are just a few that will impact what you can and are most likely called to do in this life.

This is why prayer is so important, in particular, silence and solitude and why we have an upcoming module on it. In order to reflect upon these questions well, we must be able to get into a mental and spiritual state to hear God and , as Parker Palmer says, "let your life speak."

Reading

Henri Nouwen, in his book *Discernment* lists books, as a primary means in which God speaks to us. Reading not only slows us down to think and to hear, but it also gives us knowledge and wisdom. We simply do not know what we do not know.

Reading books on calling will certainly be helpful. Books on God's mission and in particular, the goodness of all work and vocations will certainly be also. However, reading a biography may also help you realize something within. Say you aren't sure about med school but then read about a doctor who lived a life you want to live. That might be the inspiration you needed and would never be able to find otherwise. Or maybe you read the biography of a stay at home parent and realize that medical school and all the work involved in becoming a doctor is not worth it for you.

In reading, we gain perspective and perspective is a component of wisdom.

Relationships

Answering the 3 main vocation questions are not easy to answer nor the only questions we have to answer. As beings created for relationship, we will need specific relationships to guide us through life. The two vital relationships in vocational discernment I believe we all need are the following:

- A mentor
- A peer group

The one thing that they both have in common, is that they know you, love you and are mature followers of Jesus. The mentor can be a spiritual director, life coach, pastor, or anyone who you greatly respect and who's advice you will receive. You will see them regularly but likely not often. A peer group on the other hand are people you will see more often and who can help you reflect on your personal reflections, readings, and mentoring conversations.

Misconceptions on Calling

Unfortunately, the church has developed some bad habits when talking about calling which has led the majority of its people to not knowing their calling. Let us go over what I have found to be the major misconceptions of calling.

1) Calling is sexy

For most of us, our lives will be quite boring. The bible says that we are jars of clay. The word human, comes from the word hummus, which means dirt. We've come to the belief that for something to be considered a calling, it must involve a grand vision. Sometimes if not often however, our calling is simply to be God's presence to others, or to work humbly.

2) Calling is safe

Jesus said that if we want to follow him we will have to deny ourselves and take up our cross. Of course Jesus promises life and life in abundance. But he is also very clear of the role of suffering in our lives with him. Following our calling will take risk and will lead to failure.

3) Calling is straightforward

Life is never straight forward. Sometimes we have to turn around, and sometimes go in a few circles to be right where God wants us to be. We may like my friend who felt called to quit

his job to go to seminary and become a pastor, only to hear God after call him back into the marketplace.

4) Calling is simple

No matter who you are, you do not just have one task to do. Life is complicated. There will still be the call to love your neighbor, be a good friend, and serve in your community. Finding your calling will certainly help you say no to some things, but it won't help you say no to all things.

5) Calling is salary

Because we live in a broken world, not all of us will be able to get paid to do what we love most to do and are good at. Although some artists will be able to support themselves financially, not all artists will, but that doesn't mean that those artists aren't equally called to create art either.

6) Calling is successful

Jesus' earthly ministry was an abysmal failure. He was betrayed by one of his disciples (embarrassing) and was crucified like a common criminal. In our productivity driven, progressive, type 3, winning culture, we can easily be misled to believe that calling must always be successful or that its fruit should be immediate and apparent.

Conclusion

Being single can be difficult because you have all this time, all this energy, all this love, and yet nothing to direct and devote it to. To be without a calling or sense of purpose is a form of loneliness because we have no feeling of relationship no great meaning to others. We are lacking something inherent to what it means to be human. And to top it all off, we lack any sort of partnership towards it.

Our calling, whatever it is and may be in the future, will require our full commitment. It will require us to seek it, grow in it, suffer for it, and then at times, re-evaluate it. It will not be easy, but it will be so worth it.

Although I do not think we can ever be 100% certain about what we believe God wants us to do in our lives, I do think we can be confident. The more we reflect in silence and solitude, the more we read and learn more about God, ourselves, and the world, and the more we talk to and listen with long-term mentors and friends, the more we can be confident to what God is calling us to.

God has great plans for us. Plans to prosper us. It's partially up to us however, to learn and discern those plans.

Questions for Reflection

1. Your primary calling, before all other callings, is to Jesus, first and foremost. To be in relationship with him, to become like him, and to live like him. How do you feel that is going right now?
2. Paul calls us God's handwork or masterpiece. We are God's *pièce de résistance*. And Paul says that God made us for a purpose, for a task, to do certain things in this world. How does that make you feel? Does it bring excitement? Anxiety? First figure out how you feel about it, then ask, why?
3. Spend some time to meditate on Frederick Beuchner's words, "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." Firstly, think about what have you found to be some of your "glad-est" moments? Where is your deep gladness? Then afterwards, meditate on the next part, what do you think the world is hungry for? What are the greatest needs in the world?
4. Who is someone in your life that you respect, who's loving challenge and advice you would listen to? How do you think an intentional relationship with them could aid you in your flourishing and to the finding, following and fulfilling of your calling? What is stopping you from pursuing such a relationship?
5. In the same vein, who are some people your age, or in your field, that you would benefit from in meeting regularly with, to talk, listen, and pray? What can you today to start building that sort of relationship?
6. Ryan outlines 6 misconceptions that often stop people from following their calling. They are that calling is sexy, safe, straightforward, simply, salary, and successful.

Which misconceptions do you struggle with? What of the Gospel, of God's character and kingdom, do you need to remember?

Recommended Resources

If you want to take a deep dive into the topic of calling from a Christian perspective, my recommendations would be:

- 1) The Call - Os Guinness
- 2) Your Vocational Credo - Deborah Koehn Loyd
- 3) Courage and Calling - Gordon T. Smith
- 4) The Other 6 Days - R. Paul Stevens
- 5) Let Your Life Speak - Parker Palmer
- 6) Kingdom Calling - Amy L. Sherman

Module 8: Community

Summary: In this module, participants will be guided through the various relationships in Scripture and how they all can play a role in their flourishing. Participants will be encouraged to connect more deeply with their local church and even professionals such as spiritual directors or therapists.

Full Manuscript:

As we have learned and continue to remember, we were made for community. It was not good, it was bad, for human to be alone. But because of our broken world community is one of, if not the hardest thing to navigate. Just read through the Gospels, Acts, and the Epistles and you will quickly see how many challenges and problems can come up when a group of people decide to meet together for a purpose.

The Cry for Community

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to the disciples, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and he became anguished and distressed. Then he said to them, “My soul is deeply grieved, even to the point of death. Remain here and stay awake with me.” Going a little farther, he threw himself down with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if possible, let this cup pass from me! Yet not what I will, but what you will.” Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. He said to Peter, “So, couldn’t you stay awake with me for one hour? - Matthew 26:36-

40

In probably the second worst moment of his life, Jesus is utterly terrified and in pain, to “the point of death.” And despite being the son of God, despite being perfect, despite being full

of faith, Jesus was scared and he felt alone. And one thing he wanted, was that his friends would stay awake with him and pray for him. If the Son of Man, the Son of God, needed community, then how much more do we?

The problem I believe is not that we do not all believe in community, but that we do not know and understand the forms of community and each one's unique purpose. So many churches think all that people need is a weekly small group, not realizing that that is just a fragment of what community truly and fully is.

The Forms of Community

As I look at the scriptures, I see different types of relationships that all gave life to another person. There's

- The mentor - Paul
- The mentee- Timothy
- The friend - Jonathan
- The small group - The Disciples
- The triad- Peter, James and John
- The fellowship - Mary, Martha, and Lazarus
- The church - Jews and Gentiles

Because this is an course for singles disgruntled with the church, I want to focus on a few relationships that I believe are the most life-giving and the most lacking, for singles.

The Mentor

At the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, we read that Jesus "appointed 12 so that they would be with him and he could send them to preach and to have authority to cast out demons." (Mark 3:14) At the end of his ministry, we see that Jesus tells them to "All authority in heaven

and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” (Matt. 28:18-20)

Throughout and after Jesus’ earthly life and ministry, we see that Jesus was committed to the practice of mentorship— a more mature person investing into the life of a less mature person for the purpose of following Jesus. Just as we needed and may need our parents to survive and thrive in this world, so too do we need spiritual parents, mentors to help us flourish in Christ. Mentorship however, is my catch all term, for an intentional relationship with a more mature Jesus follower. No parent or parenting style is perfect, and neither is a mentor.

Specifically, there are spiritual directors, life coaches, and counselors. Each provides to a specific need we have and can often times overlap. So don’t think that you necessarily need 4 distinct relationships. However, let me explain each briefly.

- Spiritual Director - Someone who listens, ask questions, and helps you see and hear God.
- Life Coach - Someone who encourages, inspires, and holds you accountable to working towards God’s call in your life.
- Counselor - Someone who helps you understand yourself and your internal pain and challenges that stop you from healing and growing.

For many of us, one person, often a pastor, has played all three roles for you or will. The reality however is that very few are able to perform all three well in a person’s life. This can either be a result of their giftedness or equipping or because we are simply unable to receive everything from one person. Therefore, having a specific professional or highly gifted and wise

person may be necessary. You may want to consider hiring a spiritual director, a coach, or a counselor depending on the specific need or challenge you are facing.

The Mentee

In the beginning, before the Fall, before sin, God commanded humanity to be fruitful and multiply. In the end of Jesus' ministry, Jesus commands and commissions us, to make disciples, to be with people and to teach them how to follow the ways of Jesus and to flourishing in the life of Jesus. Before and after the fall, instructing, influencing, and impacting other people, is a component to human flourishing.

Although Jesus loved everybody because well, he's Jesus, is it possible that Jesus received a particular joy, a particular life, from his disciples? In his letters, Paul speaks nothing but gratitude for Timothy who he calls his spiritual son. Paul also calls the Thessalonian church, his crown and joy.

As a pastor and leader in the church, I have experienced so much joy and fulfillment in helping people follow Jesus. When I sit with someone or go for a walk, and I help them come to some realization, or give the encouragement to take a risk, I feel in that moment that I am exactly where God wants me to be.

Although you are likely not a pastor nor want to be one, I think we all want to be a life-giving presence to others. And I think one of the reasons why so many single people are languishing in life, is because they don't have someone to pour into. Just as we need mentors, maybe we also need mentees.

The Friend

Even though we are no longer a child or a teenage, we still need peers. We need at least one good friend, who is going through the same journey we are going through. Someone of faith

who also understands the unique challenges and struggles that you work and life may entail.

Aristotle, said that the basis of true friendship is

- 1) Affection
- 2) Mutual Benefit
- 3) Common Goal

You like each other. Your life is somehow made better by the other. And you both are striving for something similar in life.

One of the reasons why being single is so hard, is not simply because we don't have this type of friendship. But rather we don't engage enough, in this type of relationship. Part of the beauty of marriage is that there is someone to wake up to and go home to. Someone you can rely and depend on being there for you. Not just emotionally or when you need them and ask them, but physically there for you, every day.

The Practice of Community

Let me suggest 3 practices you may want to consider, in helping form these 3 vital relationships:

Hire a Professional

One of the reasons singles and all people do not thrive, is that we aren't proactive to our flourishing, only reactive. We will see a pastor or counselor when things are bad, but never when things are fine. Certainly not when they're good.

But just as an athlete would hire a physical trainer to grow in their sport, we should strongly consider hiring a spiritual director, coach and/or counselor for our life. If we really want to thrive and flourish, then we will have to accept that we may have to accept the financial cost associated it.

Serve Your Community

By now I hope you believe you have something unique to offer others and the world. Reach out to your pastor for any leads on spiritually younger people that would be open to a formal relationship with you. Think about serving in a young adults or youth ministry at a church or with a non-profit.

Or simply ask your friends or someone at your church if they'd be open to you babysitting their kids on a regular basis. If you choose the right people, you might get a mentor, more time with friends, or at least a meal out of it!

Move Closer to Your Friends

As much as we take pride in our independence and joy in our freedom, we lose so much from living at a distance from others. Sometimes all we need is a quick walk in the morning or a short conversation over wine at the end of the day. Someone to eat with, and maybe watch some tv with.

One of the easiest ways that we can create regular connection with mentors, mentees and especially friends, is by moving closer to them, or even moving in with them. Being with each other would no longer require so much planning, energy, and traveling.

Conclusion

Lest we forget, it was not good, it was bad for Adam, for humanity, for you and for me to be alone. Although life is complex and multi-dimensional, arguably the best thing you can do for yourself, is to find and develop relationships that bless you and give you life.

You cannot live life alone so don't.

Reflection Questions

1. Create an inventory of the meaningful relationships you currently have and have had in your life and then categorize them as best as you can with the types below:

- The mentor - Paul
- The mentee- Timothy
- The friend - Jonathan
- The small group - The Disciples (a bible study or prayer group)
- The triad- Peter, James and John (an intimate group of friends)
- The fellowship - Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (a larger social group)
- The church - Jews and Gentiles (a worshiping group)

Is there anything that you notice? Any patterns? How did these groups give you life?

What might have been missing?

2. Of the three types of mentors, the spiritual director, the life coach, and the counsellor, which do you feel most inclined to? Which do you feel least inclined to? Why is that?

3. Have you invested in or served someone only to be surprised at how much you received? Reflect on that relationship. What was so life giving about it? What could have been better? How might this type of relationship be a gift and life-giving part of your life today and the future?

4. According to Aristotle's definition of a friend, one who's company you enjoy, one you gain encouragement or wisdom from, and one who you share some sort of common goal, who are those people? How often do you see them? How might you benefit from initiating a conversation, to see each other more regularly?

5. If you do not have anyone that fits into this definition of friendship, what do you suppose is making that difficult to find or maintain?

6. Out of the three strategies Ryan suggested (hiring a professional, serving your community or moving closer to your friends), which do you feel most inclined towards? What is one step in this strategy that you can make today or in the next week?

7. Out of the three strategies, what do you feel most resistant to? Why do you think you are resistant to it? Spend some time meditating and praying on this question.

Module 9: Prayer

Summary: Since single people need to know that God is with them, this module is dedicated to prayer, particularly silence and fasting. Participants are given practical steps to crafting a life of prayer and fasting and given multiple passages of scripture to meditate on.

Full Manuscript:

Throughout the scriptures, Jesus goes away by himself to pray. Just before his ministry, he goes away for 40 days, fasting and praying. Luke reports that Jesus “frequently withdrew to the wilderness and prayed.”(Luke 5:16) Although Jesus was divine, and was one with the Father, although Jesus was perfect and without fault, Jesus still practiced prayer and fasting, or another way to say it, silence, solitude, and sobriety.

One of the most famous studies in consumer behavior is a research experiment that compared the sales of two store fronts that both sold jars of jam, one sold 6 flavors and the other 20. Going under the assumption that people love having choices, and therefore, the more flavors the better, they thought to confirm this. However, as they conducted the study, they found out that when customers were presented with fewer choices (6 jars), they were much more likely to purchase, than if they were presented with more choices (20 jars).

If you are watching this you likely are doing quite well in life. You’re not too worried about next months rent, or tomorrow’s meal. And as a single person, you likely then have more choices and more options in practically ever area of your life, than anyone in the entire history of the world, has ever had. And although we can celebrate this unique cultural moment, I also want to be realistic about the negative impact it can also have, on our lives.

In this module, I will be arguing that prayer, in the form of silence and solitude, along with fasting, some form of active sobriety or self-restraint in the consumption of a good thing, is vital to every single person's life and flourishing.

First things first, according to Jesus himself, prayer and fasting should be part of our regular life. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, "whenever you pray," and "when you fast," implying that he assumes we are praying and fasting. And although that should be reason enough, we see that Jesus himself practiced these practices. The question is, why?

If you have seen Netflix's *The Social Dilemma*, or simply have been on social media or know someone that regularly consumes it, you know how damn addictive social media is. Millions, maybe even billions of dollars are spent every year, trying to lure our eyes and grab out attention. We are constantly bombarded with messages trying to convince us to invest our time, energy, and money into something.

If you remember, Paul said that single people are able to give more focus and attention to serving God than a married person because married people have to also serve their spouse. Although that may have been true before, I am not sure if that is true now in the same way. Single people have less commitments than a married person, but that also means more time and more options. Having clarity, peace of mind, focus, are not common things that I hear many single people having. Instead, they're often distracted, aimless, and confused.

If Jesus needed to go out and fast and pray to prepare and focus himself on his mission, I wonder, how much more often do we imperfect, distracted humans need to go off to pray and fast?

Is not one of our primary problems is not knowing what to do? What should I do with my life? Should I take that job or promotion? Should I quit? Should I do something else? Should I go

out with her? Should I go out with him? There are so many decisions we have to make, and at times, if not all the time, they can be overwhelming! Clearing our heads therefore, for discernment is one of the key practices we must cultivate in our life, if we want to grow and flourish.

We will never be able to change how many jars there are in front of us. The world has changed, and there will always be more and more options to choose from. Yet we can change our perspective. We might realize that we ate all types of berries and therefore essentially, eliminate all berry jams. By fasting and prayer, we can eliminate voices, thoughts, and ideas in our minds that are keeping us from choosing the right things and making the wiser decision.

Silence and Solitude

When I say prayer, I am referring to silence and solitude as opposed to speaking. There is speaking prayer, which is the “Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done...” prayer. And then there is silent prayer. Prayer focused on shutting up and trying to hear, the voice of God.

I think for most of us however, we grew up almost exclusively being told that pray is speaking. It’s giving adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication (ACTS) to God. It’s saying the Lord’s prayer, a Hail Mary, or a short blessing of the food.

But when Jesus prays, aside from his prayer in John 17, we don’t know what he says, or how much he speaks! All we know is that he goes away into the wilderness and prays, often in the early morning. Why does he go away? Why doesn’t he just pray where he is? After all, if we can speak to God anywhere at any time, surely Jesus can too? So why does he go away? The only answer I have, is that Jesus goes not to speak but to be silent. To enable his human body, ears, and brain, to be open to the voice of God.

The reason why it's almost universally encouraged to pray or do your devotionals in the morning or before bed, is that when you are most likely to be most focused. Sure, it's still easy to be distracted, but it's probably a lot easier than in the middle of the day or during the lunch hour. If we want to hear God, our bodies and brains have to be slowed down, they have to be silenced.

Fasting

The other practice that Jesus practiced in concert with prayer was fasting. In Jesus' time, fasting was a regular practice. Remember, he said, "when you fast," implying that he assumed we were fasting regularly. And afterward Jesus left Earth, fasting continued through the Christian church. Jews did it. Jesus did it. And the early church did it. Today however, fasting is one of those practices like Sabbath. You know it's a good idea, but it's not required or necessary. It's sort of a bonus practice, only done by the spiritual elite.

For those familiar with the church calendar, Lent, a period of about 40 days prior to Easter that parallels the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness, has been for the Christian church for 2000 years, a season of fasting. At time point in the church, everyone fasted for 40 days.

Today, the practice of fasting has grown and expanded to include a variety of exclusions. Although at its root, it is the abstaining from food for a period of time, people who would not be able to necessarily fast from all food for 40 days straight, may skip a meal, or skip 2 meals. They may go vegetarian or vegan. They may not eat any sweets or sugar items. They may refrain from alcohol or social media.

Why - Why should we pray and fast

What are some of the primary struggles that single people face again? Loneliness, lack of direction, overwhelming responsibility and choices, shame. Although this might sound like some

standard Sunday school response that your married pastor gives you, prayer, hearing God's voice in your life, is essential to your flourishing.

As Christians, we believe that God is the creator, the final judge on all that is good, true and beautiful in the world. And I don't know about you, but from time to time, I can get a bit crazy. My mind gets flooded with worries of the future. I think of all the things I need to do or want to do, need to have and want to have, and I start to freak out. I start think, am I going be alone for the rest of my life? Am I gonna live in this tiny apartment forever? Am I ever going to have any stability and security in my life? The list of anxiety inducing things goes on. And almost always, do these thoughts and worries surge, when I'm alone.

In addition, because these thoughts are so constant, are ever present, sometimes I just don't want to talk to someone about it. It's not worth paying to see a therapist to listen to me, nor is it serious enough to call a friend.

I don't know how true it is, but in the movies there's a form of torture where you drop water on a person's forehead for a long length of time. I know, that's it? Well apparently, that little but continuous drop, can drive people crazy. I think those little thoughts we are always struggling with is like those drops of water. They're nothing serious, but when constantly bombarded by them, all day everyday, it can become a form of torture that drives us insane.

Wouldn't it be great though, that whenever we had these thoughts, and got into these crazy thought patterns, that there would be someone who would tell us to stop being crazy, or to not worry, or who would tell us that everything would be alright?

When it comes to surviving and thriving in our singleness, we need to be able to hear God. We need to be able to hear the truth amidst all the half-truths and lies that we constantly tell ourselves and hear. We need to hear the make of heaven and earth, the authority, the Lord of all

creation, to tell us, that things will be alright and to tell it all personally, and intimately. And so, we need to pray. But more specifically, we need to be able to hear God and know it is God, and rest in God's sovereignty.

How - Practical Implications

Prayer and fasting are like all other practices, ones that take time to develop. I am going to be realistic and assume you are not going to plan a 3 day silent retreat at the local monastery or fast from all food for a few days. In fact, I would encourage you to go slow. You likely won't get much out of the experience even if you try.

That said, here are a few suggestions in cultivating silence and solitude.

- Download a timer - There are a variety of meditation apps on the market and any of them can help you begin cultivating silence in life.
- Get control of your sleep schedule - If you can't control your sleep schedule and get a good night's rest, practicing silent prayer before or after you sleep will be a recipe for sleep. Although I don't think God ever gets upset at us falling asleep, what parent ever gets mad at their child for falling asleep? Falling asleep doesn't help us achieve the actual goal of the prayer time.
- Find community - Fasting during Lent is much easier than in any other time of the year because you know you are fasting with Christians throughout the world and Christians throughout history. Knowing you are not in it alone, can greatly strengthen your resolve and self-restraint. Whether you are fasting, praying, or doing both, doing it with others will help you stay on track.
- Give up control - A sure fire way to fail at prayer and fasting, is to set outcomes or goals to it. Setting goals such as "I will hear this" or "I will know what to do with

this” will lead you to experiencing your time as a failure if things don’t go your way. And more likely that not, things won’t go your way. As the old proverb goes, if you want to make God laugh, make a plan. Just be quiet, just fast, and allow the Spirit to do whatever it wishes. You may know what’s going on, and you might not.

- Create a plan - That being said, having a plan of development can help. For example, maybe you plan on meditating in silence in the morning starting with 2 minutes (many, many people can barely do 2 minutes without going crazy). And maybe each week, add a minute until your 18th week when you get to 20. And then maybe continue going up from there if you find it beneficial.

Prayer and fasting is a lot like running a marathon. Doing any of them in short, manageable bursts is enjoyable to most and makes a lot of sense to do. But when we think about doing it for a long time, then it becomes nonsensical. Why would anyone want to run 13 or 26 miles??? In the same way, why would anyone want to spend hours and days in silence? Hours, days, or months, fasting?

As it is with running, it is impossible to explain or convince who’s never experienced it. But if you ask anyone who can, they would only tell you of the extremely positive benefits of their dedication and training. So far, I have never met a marathon runner, or a person of deep prayer or fasting who has ever regretted their training or doing what they were doing.

Questions for Reflection

1. Do you find it hard to be in silence and in solitude? If so, what do you think are the reasons and contributing factors to it?
2. Reflect on your formation history on prayer. Was prayer mainly talking or listening? How does prayer happen? Was there implicitly “good” prayers and “bad” prayers?
3. Have you had a time when you “heard” God in the silence? Maybe you went for an early morning or late night walk at a church retreat. Maybe you were praying with others, and as someone else was praying, you heard God speak. How do you think your life would be better if you heard God more often?
4. What has been your experience and education on fasting? Was it ever taught? Was it an optional discipline?
5. If time and money was not an issue, what do you think would be your ideal rhythm to prayer and fasting? What small step could you take towards that this week?
6. Is there someone you know that you could ask to be your prayer partner? To encourage you and keep you accountable to prayer and fasting? To pray with you? If not, consider getting a spiritual director.

Scriptures for Meditation

Below is a list of scriptures that through the centuries, people have leaned into, to hear God's voice. Choose a passage relevant to your life stage, and simply sit in it. Read it over multiple times, while holding silence in between each reading. What do you notice? What did you hear? Consider using a prayer time for your time of silence. Start with 2 minutes.

Genesis 32:22-31, Jacob Wrestles The Angel

Jeremiah 1:4-10, Before I Formed You In The Womb'

Jeremiah 29:11-11, Plans To Prosper You

Psalms 23, The Lord Is My Shepherd

Matthew 5:14 - 16, You Are The Light Of The World

Matthew 5:19 - 21, Treasures In Heaven

Matthew 6:25-34, The Lilies Of The Field

Matthew 8:13, Become Like Children

Mark 10:46 - 52, The Healing Of Blind Bartimaeus

Luke 10:38-42, Mary And Martha

Luke 13:18 - 19 The Parable Of The Mustard Seed

Module 10: Healing

Summary: One of the problems that all people have toward their flourishing, including singles, is seeing their sin, blindspots, and weaknesses. Using the Enneagram framework, this module explores the sin patterns participants may possess to better their relationships with God, themselves, and others.

Full Manuscript:

Do You Want To Be Well?

One of my all time favorite passages in the Bible is found in John 5. Jesus is walking with his disciples through Jerusalem by a pool that apparently had healing powers. We read that “A great number of sick, blind, lame, and paralyzed people were lying in these walkways.” And that there was “a man was there who had been disabled for 38 years.” Although we may think that Jesus simply comes and heals the man, Jesus does something weird. He asks the man, “Do you want to become well?”

Of course he wants to be well Jesus! He’s been disabled for 38 years and waiting to get into this healing pool. What kind of stupid question is that!

In response, the disabled man says, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up. While I am trying to get into the water, someone else goes down there before me.”

Instead of saying “Aw man, I’m so sorry. Let me heal you.” Jesus says, “Stand up! Pick up your mat and walk.” And we read then that “Immediately the man was healed, and he picked up his mat and started walking.”

Why would Jesus ask the man if he wanted to be well? Well, maybe because he, or other people, didn't actually want to be. If he was healed, he still probably would have to regain muscle in his legs, learn to walk, get a job and no longer depend on the charity of others.

This attitude toward healing is not specific to just this man, but to all of us. There are broken areas of our lives that we know of, and want healing in, but at the same time, may not really. We know that it'll take a lot of work and we are sort of used to our disability.

Although I believe that true healing can only happen from the Holy Spirit, I believe that true healing also only happens when we participate in it. When Jesus says, "Get up and walk!" We have to get up and walk.

However, we to our own detriment, overspiritualize healing. We wait and wait and pray and pray, for Jesus to heal us, to make us more whole, to grow us, and we label it as being faithful or dependent on God. When all the while, God is saying "go see a therapist," "get some accountability," "change the way you live."

A Plan Toward Healing

Abraham Maslow, said that if the only tool we have is a hammer, then everything begins to look like a nail.

Consider that there are different tools in the world for humans to survive and thrive in it. Some are, being good, being strong, being cautious. But each of us, in our finiteness, in our humanness, only develop 1 tool. We get good at it, and then start using it for everything. Imagine if you only had a hammer to build your house, or anything. You'll likely not be able to build anything very pretty or even structurally sound.

What if though, we knew what those tools were and how they generally worked. Well, let me introduce to you, the Enneagram.

Although most understand the Enneagram to be a personality assessment, let me describe and define it a little differently.

The Enneagram, is a framework of the 9 ways humans can build a good life in a broken world. Each way or “type” sees the world with a specific lens or worldview. This lens leads to the development of specific values, and set of virtues along with vices.

The Enneagram, is not this new agey, horoscopey thing to be afraid despite what some Christians think. It is simply a framework, that gives language to how we finite and predictable humans act. There’s nothing spiritual about it.

And so with that said, let me give a brief introduction, to each type.

Type 1 - The Reformer

This personality sees the world in black and white. They see God rightly but also often only, as judge. As the name implies, they are focused on what is right and wrong, and how to make things right. This personality type is most embodied in the reformed tradition, which often favors a binary perspective on God and life. The Reformer’s sin or sin pattern, is anger. They’re not so much explosively angry, but instead often and easily hold judgment, resentment, and bitterness to themselves and others.

Type 2 - The Giver

This personality see the world in relationships. They see God rightly but also often only, as the suffering servant. As the name implies, they are focused on giving to and helping others. This personality type is often lifted up as the “best” personality type in the church for its embodiment of service, and also because the church cannot function without them. The Giver’s sin pattern is pride. Not that they think they’re better than other people, but that they often

confuse their role with God's role. They often feel too much compassion for people, and want to, and attempt to, save people.

Type 3 - The Achiever

This personality type sees the world as a competition. They see rightly but also often only, as the God who wants to evangelize the world and build his kingdom. As the name implies, it is focused on achievements, and consequently, movement and progress. This personality type is embodied in the quintessential mega church and mega church pastor. They value growth and productivity. The Achiever's sin pattern is vanity, an obsessive focus on how successful people see them as. This leads them to often being in denial of weaknesses and threats in their lives and organizations.

Type 4 - The Romantic

This personality type sees the world as missing something. They see God rightly, but also often only, as the one who can take all our pain. As the name implies, they are focused on ideals, they have a habit of romanticizing things as opposed to being in reality. This personality type is found in more liberal or progressive churches, as they tend to veer away from Reformer or black and white thinking, and towards a more open perspective on issues. The Romantic's sin pattern, is envy, an obsessive focus on what's missing in their life and in the world. This leads them to often being negative, emotional and ignoring reality or truth, for the sake of their ideals.

Type 5 - The Observer

This personality type sees the world as interconnected, as systems within and related to other systems. They see God rightly but often only, as the word and source of wisdom. As the name implies, they are focused on facts, and have the habit of observing things rather than in engaging things. This type would be reflective of the academy, valuing knowledge and wisdom,

slightly over world engagement and action. The Observers sin pattern, is greed, not for money, but more so, time and energy. They're hyper focused on whether or not they can do something and do it well.

Type 6 - The Loyalist

This personality type sees the world as filled with danger. They see God rightly but often only as faithful and ever present authority. As the name implies, they are loyal people, to other people, organizations, systems and beliefs. This type is reflect of the Catholic church and its value of tradition, authority, and continuity. The Loyalist's sin pattern is worry. They are worst case scenario thinkers, and require a lot of time and assurance in making decisions. They're hyper focused on what can go wrong.

Type 7 - The Adventurer

This personality type sees the world as opportunities for experiences, life is an adventure, and they will explore and experience life. They rightly but often only see God as the miracle maker, healer and provider. This type is reflective of Pentecostal and charismatic churches, valuing and focusing on exciting and emotional experiences. The Adventurer's sin is gluttony, they overindulge in good experiences and do not manage or regulate their consumption.

Type 8 - The Challenger

This personality type sees the world as one made up of two types of people, the powerful and the powerless. They see God rightly but often only as the one who sets captives free and dismantles unjust people and powers. This type is reflective in liberation theology and churches with a strong social justice orientation, valuing external action over the internal life. The Challenger's sin is lust. It's not that they are more sexual, but rather they often over do things, or cross the line. They do not know when to stop.

Type 9 - The Peacemaker

This personality type sees the world as one connected and harmonious ecosystem. They see God rightly but often only as the one who seeks and desires unity over everything. This type is reflective of contemplative, Quaker, and liberal churches which emphasize peace. The Peacemaker's sin is sloth, the avoidance or rejection of healthy conflict, for the sake of peace and progress. This may overlook various behaviors or beliefs of people, in order for there to be a sense of peace or lack of conflict.

Conclusion

Although I do not know what this man was like, I imagine him to be not the most terrible person in the world. Yet after what seems to be only a short time later, Jesus finds the man at the temple and tells him "Look, you have become well. Don't sin any more, lest anything worse happen to you" (v.14)

The word sin in Greek, is an archery term that means to "miss the mark." To sin is to not do what is ideal.

I think Jesus told the disabled man to not sin anymore because he knew the man was or would be tempted to go back to the pool. To go back to what he knew. And I think he therefore, is telling us all that. Because aren't we all guilty in some way or another, of going back to the pool? Going back to what is familiar?

What was once our hammer in life at some point becomes our hindrance to life.

Are not all our sins, simply misguided, misdirected attempts for life? Who in their right mind wants to languish? To suffer? To not flourish? Yet, somehow, we all find ourselves not flourishing. By listening to the voice of Jesus tell us to not sin anymore, is not to hear the voice of condemnation but of compassion. Jesus says, "don't go back to your old ways that don't work

anymore. Don't put yourself through all that trouble. You have been healed and I am continuing to heal and strengthen you. Keep standing up, Keep picking up your mat, and keep walking.

By understanding ourselves and the Enneagram, we can be better aware of what it might mean for us to stand up and walk. It also helps us to see our hammers and hindrances, our temptation to turn back, to sin again. And hopefully, it helps us stand up, pick up our mat, walk, and to not sin anymore.

Questions for Reflection

1. Read the story of the disabled man and Jesus (John 5:1-15). What might you suppose is preventing you from flourishing? What is your disability?
2. Spend some time praying to Jesus for healing. What would it mean for you to be healed? What could you do that you can't do today?
3. Jesus tells the disabled man "Stand up! Pick up your mat and walk." What do you think it means for you to "stand up, pick up your mat, and walk?" What habit, pattern, or way of life might you have to stop or leave?
4. Which Enneagram type and approach to life did you most relate to? (Download for free Ryan's book *The 9 Kinds of Christians* for a reminder of each type) How has this way of life suited you and benefited you? Do you identify with your type's primary sin? How have you seen it play out in your life for your ill and languishing?
5. How are you tempted today to go back to the pool? To go back to the ways in which you once lived.

Module 11: Suffering

Summary: This module attempts to develop a theology of suffering and allow participants to grieve. It shows that suffering is not only a part of life but central to the gospel, and ultimately, to life.

Full Manuscript:

One of the things I learned in seminary and continue to think about its implications is that Protestant crosses are empty whereas Catholic crosses have have crucified Jesus. Generally speaking, Protestants tend to have what we can call a resurrection theology whereas Catholics have more of a crucifixion theology.

Protestants see the focal point of the Christian story at the resurrection and tend to focus on all its implications, hope and happiness. Because Jesus rose from the dead and defeated sin and death, Christians today can live in confidence and power. Catholics however, see the focal point of the Christian story at the crucifixion and tend to focus on its implications, self-denial, sacrifice, and suffering. This resurrection theology has been taken so far in some circles, that people believe suffering is indicative to the person's lack of faith. That if you truly follow Jesus and are faithful, you will not experience any suffering in this life.

One of the causes for suffering, languishing, or a lack of flourishing in our lives I want to argue, is due to our Protestant resurrection theology. You could have grown up Catholic, or even an atheist, and still be impacted by Protestant resurrection theology. North America, and especially the United States, was partially founded upon it. On this highly positive, everything is going to be better, nothing can stop us, attitude. All of us, in some way or another, have been taught that our lives should be awesome and that we should be happy.

A need for a theology of suffering

You might think it is strange that I am dedicating a module to suffering when this course is about flourishing. Isn't the whole point of this course to move from suffering toward flourishing? It is, and you are right. I believe however, that we cannot truly flourish, unless we truly understand and embrace suffering.

If you were to ask any faithful and mature Catholic monk or nun, and told them about the loneliness, pain, and suffering you are facing and feeling, they may say something like,

“Of course you are experiencing that, loneliness, pain and suffering is the way of Christ. Don't you think he experienced what you experienced? And even worse? Is not our lives on earth meant to experience what Jesus experienced so we can ultimately come to appreciate what he did and love him even more?”

Jesus knows it

In my darkest hours of pain, when I feel that I have no certainty of my future, when I think I'll be alone forever, when someone who I can see a future with ends things with me, I have always found great comfort in reading the story of Jesus' crucifixion and death. At what we may consider the pinnacle of his pain, Jesus shouts with a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” If you look at this text in your Bible, you will likely see a footnote telling you that what Jesus is saying, is a reference to Psalm 22:1. In this Psalm, David writes,

My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

I groan in prayer, but help seems far away.

2 My God, I cry out during the day,

but you do not answer,

Something I find comforting in these 2 different parts of the Bible is that the two people considered to love God the most, more than anyone in the rest of the Bible, felt completely alone and abandoned by God. I don't need to tell you that as a single person, it can often feel like we are alone and that we have been abandoned by God.

Continuing through the Psalm, David says,

4 In you our ancestors trusted;

they trusted in you and you rescued them.

5 To you they cried out, and they were saved;

in you they trusted and they were not disappointed.

6 But I am a worm, not a man;

people insult me and despise me.

7 All who see me taunt me;

they mock me and shake their heads.

8 They say,

“Commit yourself to the Lord!

Let the Lord rescue him!

Let the Lord deliver him, for he delights in him.”

Matthew at Jesus' crucifixion records the crowd around Jesus to say, “42 “He saved others, but he cannot save himself! He is the king of Israel! If he comes down now from the cross, we will believe in him! 43 He trusts in God—let God, if he wants to, deliver him now because he said, ‘I am God's Son’!”

Unfortunately, what often comes with suffering is shame. For both David and Jesus, the crowds taunted and mocked them, saying, “If God loves you so much, if you are so faithful,

where is your God now?” Although nobody is saying that to our face, I think all of us have experienced in some form or another, the taunting and mocking of the crowds. We have been told that if we truly loved God, we would not be where we are, feeling what we are feeling.

It has always given me great comfort to know that both David and Jesus, experienced both loneliness and languishing. That we can feel completely alone, depressed, at our wit's end, and yet still be right where God wants us, that is, in his hands.

On this side of heaven, we cannot escape sin. We cannot escape its impact on our world and our lives. Suffering is unfortunately a part of life. And as much as this course is about avoiding or reducing this suffering, it will never go away, whether single or married.

Jesus will use it

Sometimes, if not often, I try to tell myself that my pain is suffering is all for something I do not know yet. I think there's a big difference in having someone tell you that, and having yourself tell you that. With the former, it can sound simply as a Sunday school response. A well-meaning attempt from someone who doesn't understand, or maybe even cares, to make you feel better. A sort of spiritual pep-talk. “All things for the good of those who love him,” they say.

However, when I am alone. When it is just me and Holy Spirit, and I remember this truth, I can find great solace in it. If I didn't experience so much grief in my own singleness, I would not have made this course.

I know it means very little coming from me to say that the pain will pass, that somehow at some point, God will use it and redeem it. But, that is the truth. That is not Protestant or Catholic theology, that is Christian theology. Out of the deepest pain God brings the greatest joy. Out of death, God brings life. Only until we can embrace our crucifixion can we then enter into our resurrection. Only until we can embrace our death can we embrace our life.

Jesus is making us all. I can't imagine anyone that would be taking this course that isn't in some way following Jesus with all their strength. You are doing what you can and I believe, because Scripture and the life of Jesus teaches it, that it isn't for nothing. That God will use it for your good.

It may be that God is using our pain to make us into a better partner, a better parent. It might be that God will use our pain to help and bless many other people in the future. It might be that God wants to use our pain to help us more fully appreciate and love him. I don't know what it is because it is different for each of us. But what I do know is that, God works for the good of all those who love him and have been called according to his purposes.

Conclusion

If you are like me, I love a good story, admittedly, a unhealthy one. I can get lost in movies and television shows. And something I must keep reminding myself is that every good story, must have suffering. In fact, often the stories with the greatest suffering, almost always are, the greatest stories. And in these stories, we sometimes can see a direct correlation between a negative event and a positive outcome later. And sometimes, just a ton of bad things happen.

But at the end, we know that all of that pain and suffering was necessary. That the person wouldn't be the person they are, without it. And I want to suggest that that goes for all of us as well.

Although might not be able to see it all, or understand it all. We can still hope, hold on to the belief that God is present and God is doing something in our lives. And that one day, some day, God will reveal his master place.

Questions for Reflection

1. Reflect on your formation and theological development on suffering. What have you been taught about suffering in the church and have come to believe?
2. What are your habits or patterns when you feel pain? You may want to look over your Enneagram type for some guidance.
3. How does it make you feel to know that Jesus suffered and was shamed? That Jesus knows your pain and even more?
4. Reflect on the hardest parts of your life. How have they made you the person you are today? How have they made you more mature, more whole? How did this small moment of death become a medium for life?
5. What do you supposed Jesus is doing and wants to do in your suffering now? What do you suppose he may eventually do?

Module 12: Leadership

Summary: In this final module, participants are encouraged to practice leadership and engage the “system.” Participants are encouraged to share their struggles as a single person, teach others what they’ve learned in this course, and focus on building and developing friendship and community.

Full Manuscript

Last night I had a date. And like most, my doctoral work and this course on singleness comes up. Unlike others however, we had a really meaningful conversation on singleness at church. Or I went into preaching mode, and she was wonderfully kind and attentive to my sermon/rant. At some point, when the topic seemed to have been exhausted, she said, “I feel like I need to talk to my pastor and share some of what you’ve said to me.” And in response, I said, “Well you know, that just happens to be the final module in my course for true single flourishing.”

A system to be changed

When it comes to singles in the church, I consider us to be a minority like any minority in the church: misunderstood and neglected. It’s not so much that the church doesn’t care or have compassion for us as people or followers of Jesus, but its that they simply do not understand the situation and the system we are all in together. The one that is powered and controlled by married people.

And when it comes to any minority, any group, one cannot flourish unless the whole flourishes. This means that at some point, whether today or tomorrow, you will need to engage intentionally, in changing the system, in leading change.

Now I know that the terms leading, leadership, and leader can be a frightening word to many. Many people in the church have told me “I am not a leader.” When most people think of leader, they think of some formal and organized position. To be a leader, to be a person who leads

however, is simply a person who is intentional and active about changing something and inviting people to join them.

And so when it comes to changing the system for singles, leadership will be required. It might not be formally or organizationally, but every single person I believe is called to lead individually and from their lives. Jesus changed things by the way he lived. By our modern definitions, Jesus was not a “leader.” He didn’t get into power in the Roman Empire or the Jewish Synagogue, yet he changed the world. And so, let’s take a look at what Jesus did to change the system and ultimately the world.

ACE

Acknowledgment

Jesus got in trouble a lot during his ministry. Did you know that? He would regularly go around telling people he was the son of God which equated himself to God. The Jews did not like that because Yahweh alone was god, and the Romans didn’t like it because Caesar was god. His family and his hometown thought he was nuts. Yet despite these reactions, Jesus acknowledged his reality, that he was the son of God.

In a similar vein, single people must acknowledge their singleness. As often and as objectively as I can, when talking about my thoughts and feelings on something, I will try to say, “as a single person, I feel or think that...” or, “being single, I feel or think that...” This is to

simply acknowledge and raise awareness to the reality that I am single, and that as a single person, I have a reality and therefore a potentially different perspective.

The other thing you want to do is not to hide your singleness. Although you want to acknowledge your singleness at times, don't also start every sentence with it. People know you are single, so just don't hide it and talk about it. Talk about its difficulties, it's challenges. Talk about dating if you are or want to. Talk about everything in your life that is affected by being single, which is likely everything, and talk about it normally.

There's nothing wrong with being single. There's nothing to be ashamed about. What did Adam and Eve do when God came around after they ate the fruit? They hid because they were ashamed. Do not hide. Just show up, as your true single self and acknowledge your reality.

Community

When Jesus started his ministry, Mark records that Jesus "appointed twelve so that they would be with him." (Mark 3:14a) As the Son of God, Jesus could have changed the world in a lot of ways. So many people who say they cannot believe in God without a sign or miracle, would probably think that Jesus should have done more miracles while alive. He should have done so many miracles everywhere, that every history book around the world at that time, would have recorded him and that there would be pictures and paintings of him everywhere.

Because most if not all single people face some sort of loneliness, building community is essential. And because you are here, the reality is that your current church, if you are part of one, does not have the structure to help you build meaningful relationships. Unfortunately now that you have been taken the proverbial blue pill and now see the systems and structures that prevent singles from engaging in meaningful relationships, you might just have to start making them on your own, for yourself, and for others.

Here is a short list of very practical things you could consider starting:

- A community home - You can do this with 1 person or multiple people. It could be a person of the same sex, or with people of both. If you only are going to live with 1 person however, I would encourage someone of the same sex. The most important thing however is that the community is intentional about being in relationship together and not simply a bunch of people sharing the rent on a place. There should be regular and mandatory meals, and time spent together.
- A fitness group - At least where I am, fitness is a part of many people's lives, or, is something many people wish was a part of their life. The thing about being fit or healthy is that it requires regular work. Therefore, doing something fitness related is a easy way to see people regularly that doesn't require having to have conversation. Running is the easiest since most people can. However you can do a biking group, or an indoor fitness class. With Covid, you can even consider doing the fitness class via video call together.
- Meal group - As Rosaria Butterfield said, the Sabbath is the loneliest day for singles. Sundays are an opportune time to create regular meals with people. This can be a pre-service breakfast, post-service lunch, or maybe you want to have dinner together.
- A men's or women's group - If you know just 2 or more people of the same sex, you might want to make a men or women's group. Generally in the church, these groups are focused on "men's" and "women's" issues. This is not what I am talking about. In this group, it doesn't matter if they're single or married, so long as each person is simply willing to commit in meeting regularly. This could be weekly at

6am before work or during the lunch break. Or it could be a monthly Friday or Saturday night, having a good meal and catching up on life.

Remember, one of the main differences between being single and being married is that single people do not have consistent and committed relationships in their lives. Therefore, building relationships that are highly consistent is the primary goal. If one of the greatest gifts of marriage is the consistency, the faithfulness of a person, then as much as we can, we want to try and mirror a form of consistency and faithfulness between others.

Education

Jesus however, didn't just hang out with his disciples, hoping that through osmosis they would become more like him and eventually live and lead the way he did. No, Jesus also taught them. Although Jesus spoke to the public through parables, "...privately he explained everything to his own disciples." (Mark 4:34) And how can we forget that at the end of his ministry, Jesus says to his disciples to make other disciples, other apprentices, other students, teaching them to obey everything he commanded them. (Matthew 28:19-20)

Hopefully through this course, you were able to gain some knowledge, some insight, some wisdom for your life, the lives of others, and your church community. Information and teaching alone doesn't change hearts or the world, but change also can't happen without it. As you begin to help other singles flourish, you will need to help them understand what it means to flourish and how they can practically go about doing so.

If you are currently in some sort of small group bible study or want to start your own group, considering doing this masterclass together. Or if you know the group well, focus on one of the particular elements we've covered in this class. Just be careful in overemphasizing that one and ignoring others.

Conclusion

The fight for flourishing for singles is a hard and an uphill battle. We are against centuries if not millenia, of church culture, our society's culture, and our family's culture. And because the world has changed so quickly in terms of what we value, how we live and communicate, our churches likely won't be pivoting as fast as we would hope.

And our culture is only going to get ingrained in its present habits even more. Although I can't say for certain, I suspect we will only become more isolated, more distracted, more tribalistic, more emotionally unhealthy, more demanding, and more self-centered.

It is imperative then why we must all take up the task of leadership. First and foremost, leading ourselves. And then, leading others. We must strive to flourish and to help others flourish too. We must simply, follow Jesus well and help others follow him well also.

Flourishing as a single person is not rocket science. Whether married or not, we are all humans made by God, and all designed for the same things. But our environments are different. Times have changed. And therefore we must change as well. I hope this class has been fruitful for you. That it has produced fruit. That it has in some way led you to flourishing.

Questions for Reflection

1. How do you feel about the terms leader and leadership?
2. How does being called to leadership or to be a leader, make you feel? Is there another word or term that you prefer?
3. What do you think the practice of acknowledging your singleness look like in your life? Can you think of any specific moments recently that you wished you spoke up about your life situation?
4. What do you think about the practice of building community? What do you feel would be the greatest blessing to you and to others? A community home, fitness group, meal group, men/women group or something else? Who do you need to talk to, to get this started and on its way?
5. How do you feel called to start helping educate other singles on singleness? Is it mentoring something through this class? Starting a singles group on vocation? Or maybe its joining a ministry in your church or outside of it, that works toward helping people heal and grow. What can you start doing to help people learn and grow?
6. What anxieties do you hold about your leadership? End by lifting these worries to God, remembering he is with you and praying for more of his presence and power in your life.

ASSESSMENT

Critical Success Indicator #1: Video Quality

Success

The video was shot in 1080p with a 35mm, 1.8f camera with three professional lighting sources. In addition, video and audio were recorded separately and then combined post-production using DaVinci Resolve. Music was not unfortunately added at this point but could easily be added into in the future. Slides were created using Canva, and all photos used were taken from Unsplash. By using Canva, slides were able to be created “transparent” so that Scriptures and quotes could be layered onto the video while maintaining a view of the speaker.

Improvements

One thing that would increase the quality of the video would be having at least 1, if not 2, additional cameras/angles of myself, the speaker. Ideally, there would be a shot that is zoomed in, and one from the side.

In addition, after editing and watching the videos myself, I realized that the script might require changes not so much in its content but its style. Because these videos are short, but with lots of information, I may need to speak faster and add more illustrations or imagery to keep the viewer's attention. If I were to redo it, I would try to create a more “friendly” tone and atmosphere to the videos compared to the present more “heavy” and serious nature.

Critical Success Indicator #2 and #3: Community Engagement and Mentorship

Success

Throughout the course, meaningful relationships and community and not simply marriage are considered integral components of human flourishing. In Module 5: Marriage, participants are encouraged as their exercise to seek and speak to respected married couples in their community to listen to their story of marriage. In Module 7: Vocation, participants are encouraged to think about people they respect, look up to, and develop a relationship with that person. In Module 8: Community, participants are encouraged to pursue community through professional help, such as a spiritual director, life coach, or therapist. They are encouraged to serve and mentor others in their youth or young adults program. And they are encouraged to be intentional with their friendships and consider moving closer to their church or friends. In Module 9: Prayer, participants are encouraged to find a prayer partner to be held accountable to or a spiritual director. Finally, Module 12: Leadership encourages participants to lead other single people into community, learn about singleness, and lead their church toward better and healthier community rhythms that would serve single people.

Improvement

At the very beginning of the course, participants could be encouraged to tell their pastor, small group leader, or a more mature Christian they know they are going through this course and ask to be supported.

In addition, although community and mentorship are encouraged throughout the course, it may be necessary to add another module entirely devoted to friendship. Participants may not

realize truly how important friends are to their well-being and may not even know practically how they could foster deeper friendships with them.

Critical Success Indicator #4: Positive Experience

Success

One of the primary challenges for single people is being alone and ashamed. By going through a 12-week course that continually acknowledges singleness as a significant life factor and the struggles and challenges associated with it, students should leave the course at the bare minimum, feeling less alone and less ashamed of themselves. Furthermore, each module has many questions for reflection that should help the student genuinely reflect and make positive steps toward biblical flourishing.

Every module was written to be as biblical and practical as possible, using as much scripture as possible while providing as many tangible action steps as possible.

Improvement

The first draft was written with only two things in mind: content and time. This focus likely led the course to have a tone that may come across as too serious or heavenly for some. For example, in the module on marriage, some students may feel judged if not personally criticized for their current opinions or life choices regarding dating and marriage. As marriage and love are sensitive topics, more time may need to be spent writing and crafting an informative, challenging, yet winsome video. The next will have to include the audience, in particular those who may not be convinced simply by scripture or “the bible says.”

PROJECT LAUNCH PLAN

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

NPO STATEMENT: Single people lack community and a formation path toward wholeness due to the church's focus on family and evangelism.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: My project is a digital masterclass or course where participants choose and pay for the level of commitment, relationships, and depth of content for themselves. Those who want to consume some content and reflect on their own can. While those who want and are willing can connect with others who also want to. The rationale for a tiered cost structure is to bring together singles that genuinely want to learn and connect with like-minded individuals.

Depending on the level of investment, participants may be able to experience group spiritual direction or meet with a spiritual director and form accountability partners and weekly discussion groups with their peers. See below for an example:

Tier 1 (\$)	Tier 2 (\$\$)	Tier 3 (\$\$\$)	Tier 4(\$\$\$)
Content	Content	Content	Content
	Large group (entire class)	Large group (entire class)	Large group (entire class)
		Small group (4-6 students)	Small group (4-6 students)
			One-on-One conversations with me

AUDIENCE

My audience for the Project is single Christians in their 20s and 30s. They want to follow Jesus faithfully and flourish as a single person but are unsure how that happens. The plan in

engaging these people is divided into two primary avenues: content and invitation. By content, prospective users will find me through speaking engagements, social media, and be drawn to content that encourages and guides them in their faith journey as a single person. By invitation, Christians who may not be as intentional or engaged with their faith will be invited by a more faith-driven friend into the course directly or through their own church small group.

DEVELOPMENT TIMELINE

- Test content, attain feedback, with a few individuals (3-4 months)
- Remake videos from feedback while adding music (3-4 months)
- Run/launch “new” content with a group of 8-12 people (4-8 months)
- Create a talk/sermon on singleness that can be presented to young adult groups and churches along
- Create marketing material and a website link to download additional materials in order to attain their information (6 months)
- Build a website and social media accounts that allow prospective students to stay engaged with me as I develop my course and create other content (12 months)
- Build an online school that accepts and handles payments (e.g. Thinkific, Teachable, New Zenler)
- Develop more content for higher tiers (12 months)
- Launch paid course offering “content-only” and “community” option with 20-40 paid students in the community option (12-16 months)

ITERATION PROCESS

After the initial testing with a few individuals and having in-depth conversations about the topic matter after each module, I will then begin utilizing surveys during the course and at the

end. At the end of each module, participants will be encouraged to send any questions they may have about the topic and during the week through their reflections.

Once I have established a website/blog and social media presence, as I create content related to singleness, I will also be asking for questions and for people to share their stories and struggles. By doing so, I hope to retain relevant knowledge of what the myriad of single Christians is going through.

If and when I have a talk/workshop for churches on singleness, this will also be a great way to field questions and collect data.

Lastly, by having all students register and pay for my course, I will be able to send out a regular questionnaire every year, to see the progress that students have made since the course.

APPENDIX A—MILESTONE 1 THE NPO CHARTER

Personal Research Manifesto

I will commit to listening to those who differ from me in theology and practice, trying my best to see through to the heart of the issue.

NPO Statement

Pastors who are mainly married do not understand the struggles of singles within their church and therefore provide the necessary attention and ministry.

NPO Scope

The foreseeable challenge associated with the NPO is that it was formulated upon experience and feelings rather than facts. Aside from feeling neglected or stigmatized, finding concrete solutions to this NPO may be challenging. Another challenge will be presenting a compelling reason to married pastors that their current approach to ministry may be severely neglecting and isolating a large group of people in their church. Finally, one question that will lie throughout the research journey is, “how much of the problems are self-inflicted, and how much of these problems are a responsibility of the church?”

NPO Context

The context of the NPO is in a large, urban multi-site church. It is in the heart of Vancouver, British Columbia, and is made up of both local and commuting attendees. Accordingly to its latest survey, the church comprises about half singles and half married people with the median age around 36.

Within this community, singles and married couples do not generally mix.

The church is ethnically approximately 45% from an Anglo-Saxon background, 45% from an East-Asian background, and 10% of other ethnicities.

Denominationally, the church is of the Christian and Missionary Alliance. They are an evangelical and contemplative community. The senior pastor promotes a spirituality based on contemplative practices. All the pastoral staff (about 20) are married except 3.

Root Causes

One of the potential root causes of the DSS and the 1x1s are the church's tendency to be pastored by married people. These pastors often forget or simply do not understand the complete picture of being a single person in the church, especially as one gets older.

Another potential root cause brought up in one 1x1 is the church's preference towards families. Families bring numbers to a church, stability and a dual-income. There are many more family ministries and sermons on marriage than there are on singles.

Lastly, pastors and married people do not recognize their place in the church community to be in community with singles. Participants vocalized the benefit of couples inviting singles over for dinner regularly, and/or living with them in some form of intentional community. Both of the single 1x1 participants expressed the importance of living with others.

Discovery Session Stakeholders

Same-sex attracted

- 1) celibate, male, 50s
- 2) married, male, 30s

Straight, single and 30s

- 3) engaged, female
- 4) female
- 5) male
- 6) new believer, female

One-on-One Interviews

- 1) Female, pastor, married, 50s/60s
- 2) Male, parachurch, single, 30s
- 3) Female, pastor, celibate, 50s

Academic Resources

The key fields I believe my current research suggests that I delve deeper into is that of monasticism, friendship, and community. I will pay particular interest in experiential and theological works from monastics and celibate same-sex attracted Christians. Voices will include Aelred of Rievaulx, Wesley Hill, and Sam Alberry, all celibate men. Barry Danylak who did his DMin on singleness and Greg Peters a specialist on the history of monasticism. Looking at the Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox understanding of community and what it means to be human will be helpful.

Discovery Session Description

Participants in the Discovery Session were comprised of people primarily in their 30s with one in their late 20s and one in their 50s. Three were women and three were men. 2 were same sex attracted men, but one who is married and one who is celibate. The other man is single but dating. Of the three women, one is single, one is dating, and one is in the process to engagement. Participants range in church background and length of time being a Christian starting as early as 1 year up to 20 years depending when one considers a lifelong Christian to be born again.

During the Discovery Session, participants were informed that the topic matter was singleness, however other than that, they were able to narrow and define the topic. I told them that I simply wanted to learn their perspective on “singleness” and how the church could do better at responding to the growing number of singles in our church.

Participants then went through a process by which we discovered an (1) audience (the people group that could most impact single people), (2) a need, problem or opportunity (NPO) regarding singles in the church, (3) the root cause of the NPO, and (4) the fruit in the church if this NPO was addressed and “solved.”

Discovery Statement

Considering church leaders and pastors (audience),
we’ve discovered that they are unable to understand singles (NPO),
which is caused by a lack of knowledge and intention/willingness to understand single people in the church (root cause).

If solved, it would mean a more inclusive community, safer spaces for singles, greater representation in ministries and decisions (outcome).

Key Insights from Discovery Session

Although many issues were brought up, participants collectively decided that three main issues existed: a lack of understanding by a dominant married leadership in the church, a stigma towards single people, and a lack of intentional community for singles. Participants then came to the conclusion that all three aided one another, but ultimately begin at the education of leaders.

Going into more detail, participants felt that church leaders/pastors do not understand the real challenges of single people either because of age (times have changed), or that they never experienced singleness in their late 20s and 30s. They felt that this resulted in a lack of sympathy for singles (their challenges are not real), and a “they’ll find someone eventually” attitude which therefore leads towards a lack of intentionality towards ministering to singles.

This ultimately leads to a stigmatization that single people feel from married people, and a lack of community and support in their singleness.

One-on-One Interview Discoveries

1) The pastor who was married was surprised with the discovery session findings since most singles were in small groups and that half the church is single. She believes that married couples must be intentional with inviting singles into their homes.

2) Former pastor and current para-church leader agreed with findings but that something is required beyond knowledge and understanding. He believes singles and couples living together in community is necessary and that being single today, is truly harder and more difficult than before.

3) Pastor and denominational leader agreed whole heartedly with findings. Married people do not understand and even prefer young families over singles. Young families are easier to relate to, bring in more tithes and energy into church life. She like interviewee #2 believes a

much deeper experience of communal living is necessary. Lastly, she mentioned the necessity of opposite-sex friendships to a healthy sexuality and singleness.

Synthesis

Overall, the Discovery Session and 1x1 interviews were consistent in its perception that there is a very real problem singles in the church face which can only be solved by a greater understanding and involvement of married couples in the church. Whether it be couples and singles or parents and children, it is hard to remember exactly what it was like to live in the former life stage. Furthermore, as society and culture changes rapidly, the differences of experience between married couples and singles only grows.

What is clear from both discoveries is that singles and married couples must be in community together. Singles need married couples but also married couples need singles. However, there does seem to be a greater awareness of this need for community from singles.

One of the more noticeable distinctions between the two discovery approaches, was the 1x1 interviewees' general encouragement of communal living which was not mentioned at all by the Discovery Session group. One of my suspicions is that although singles may be correct in thinking that married couples do not understand modern singleness and lack relationship with singles, singles will ultimately need to take greater responsibility for their singleness and building community compared to married people.

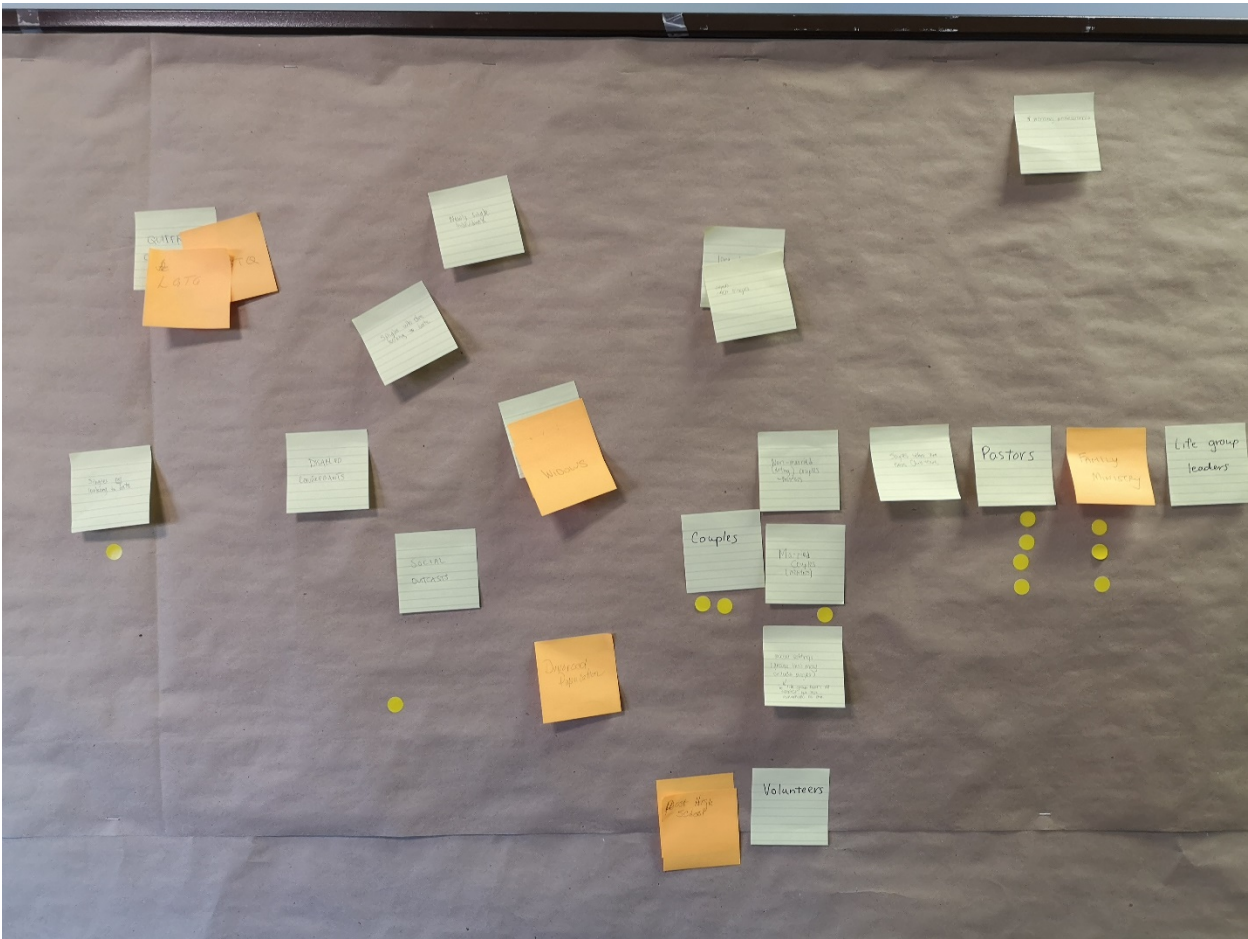
Next steps

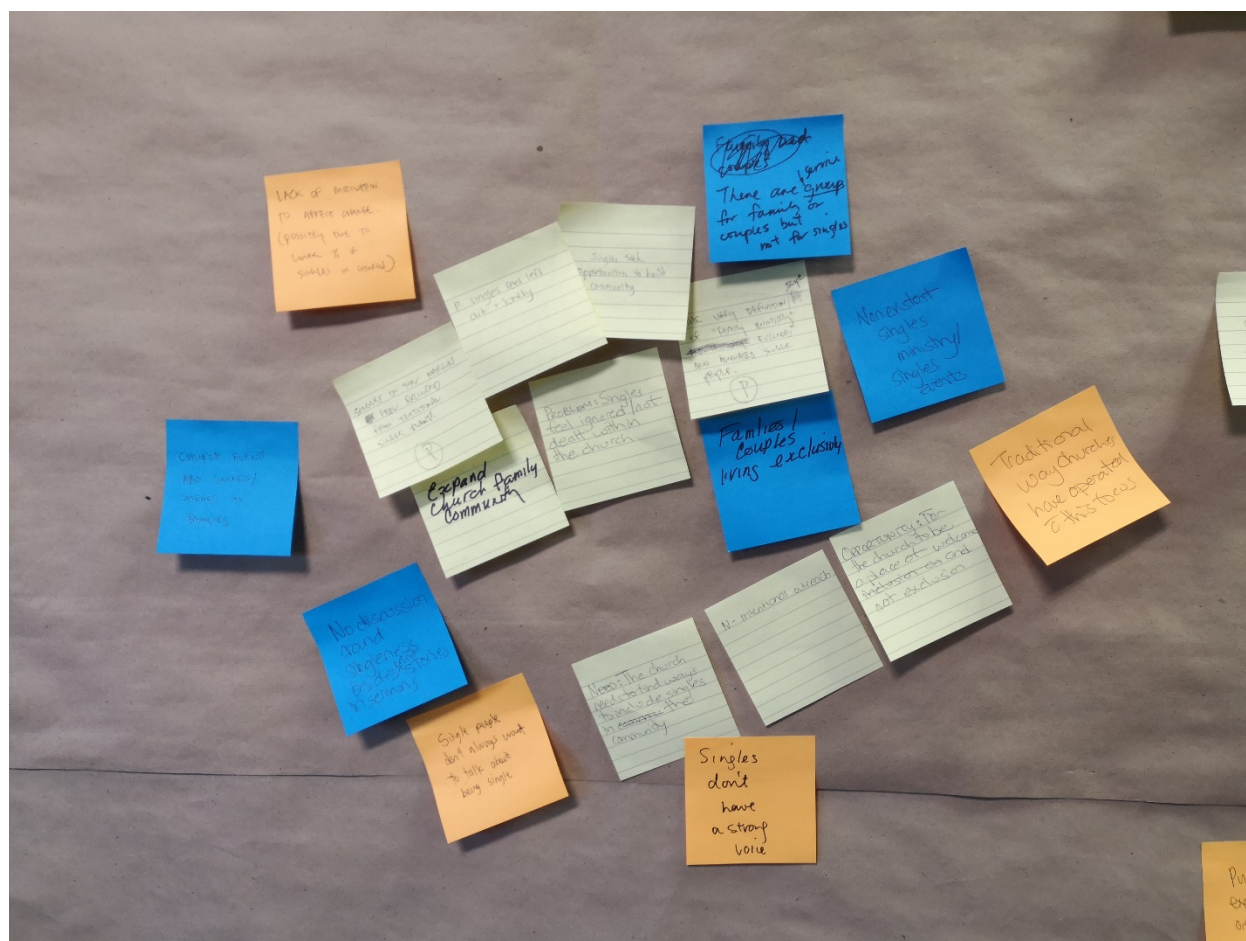
What seems to be clear from both discoveries, is that there is a lack of theology and consequently practice of biblical Christian community.

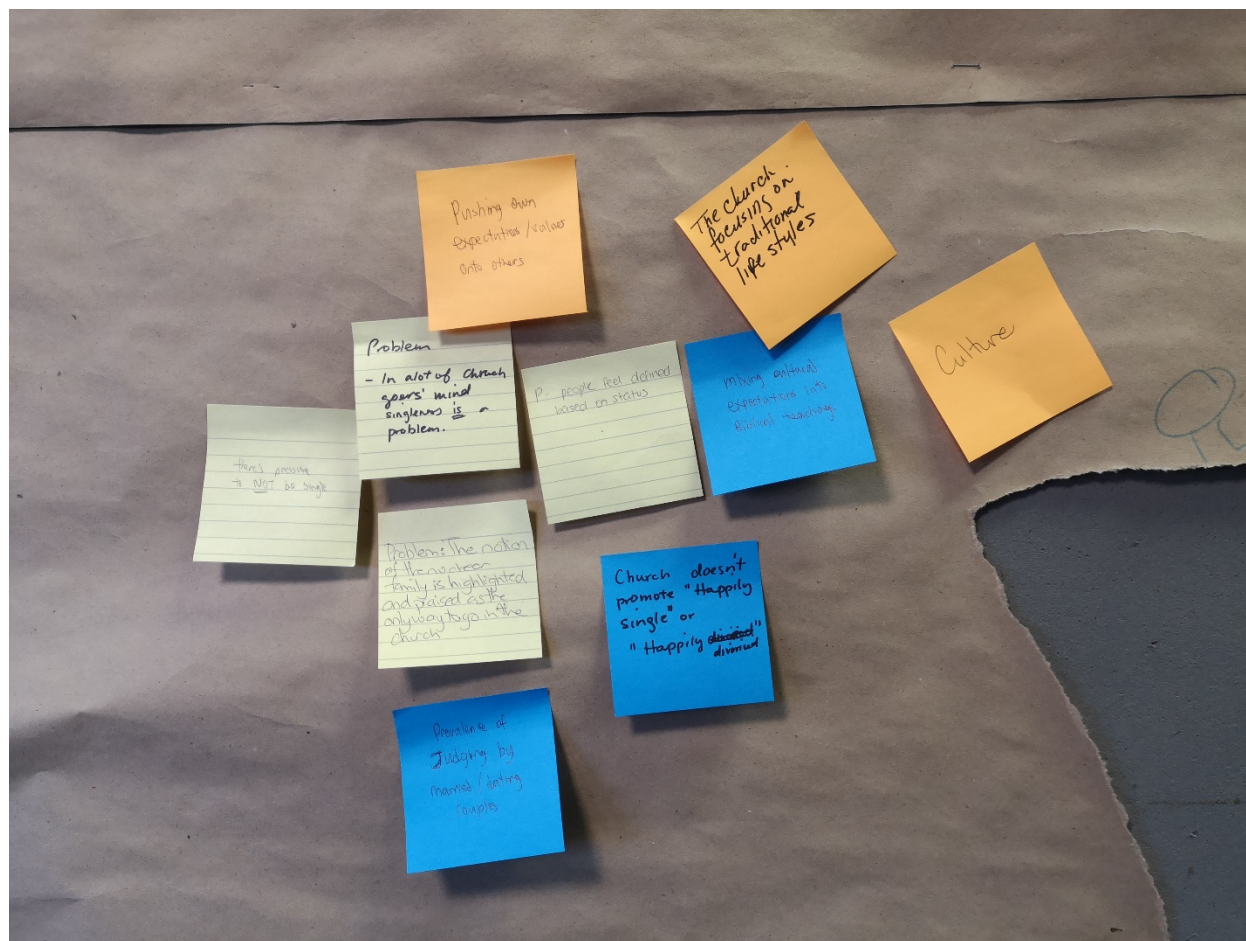
For my academic research, I will pursue a thorough understanding and theology of what Christian community is and should look like practically. This will involve looking at the biblical definition and implications of community, the historical approach to and theology of community, the theology of the person and sexuality, and modern approaches and solutions to developing holistic and healing communities.

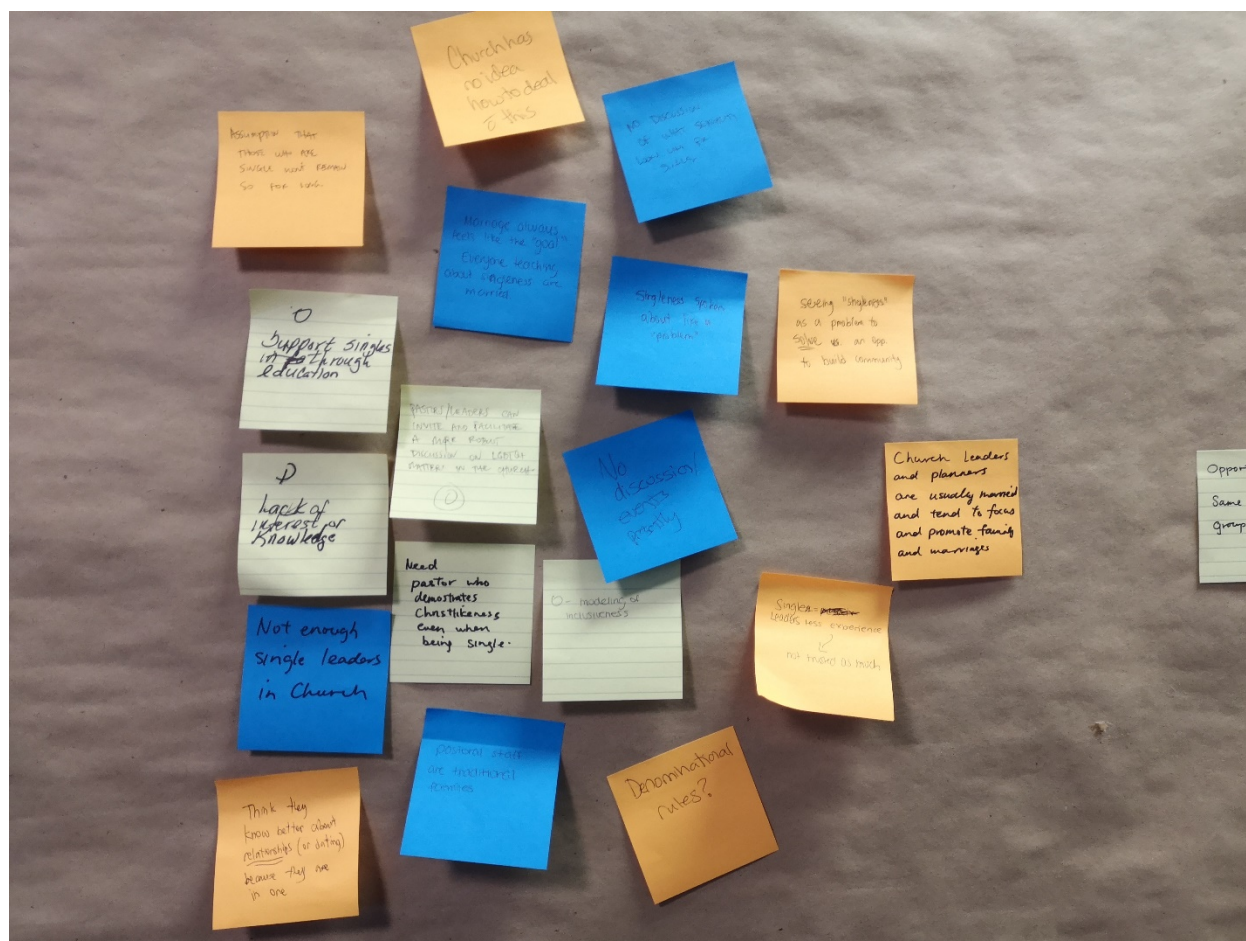
Some research in sociology and psychology may also be helpful in considering the mental and emotional impact of loneliness and modern living, such as the use of technology.

Appendices









- (4)
- larger community
 - > empathy/understanding
 - opportunity > problem
 - clearer stance/position.
 - Robust theology of singleness
 - Voice for singles
 - > Transparency of life
 - > willingness to hire single pastors
 - less guilt + shame of singleness
 - > communication between $\text{♀} + \text{♂} + \text{♀♂}$

THINK

SAY

FEEL

DO

THINK
- ask
- ask how they feel about
the issue

THINK
- Don't understand
single's in leadership role

SAY
- Speak up for single's
in a common Christian
context

Educate
Congregation

The single will
have greater
spiritual freedom
of what they're
expected to do
in the church and
honestly adjust
strategy

THINK
- Be more mindful
of direction that
church is going
- more inclusive

S
- single's more
- single's more
- single's more
- single's more

T
- don't include
single's experience

Single's more
- single's more
- single's more
- single's more

F
- empathy +
- understanding

Greater Empathy

Feel
- Joy and love
- that they not
- intentionally or accidentally
- leaving single's
out.

DO
- Think a lot about
- or actually be single
- in the past or

DO
- single's more
- single's more
- single's more
- single's more

Help them
- single's more
- single's more
- single's more
- single's more

DO
- single's more
- single's more
- single's more
- single's more

DO
- invite more single's
- to brain storm
- on issues or
- other solutions

DO
- Create
- opportunities

- 1 - Can't relate - married too long
- 2 - Won't relate - out of comfort zone
- 3 - Marriage focus
- 4 - Assume singleness = temporary
- Don't understand singleness = calling
- Singles aren't speaking up (shame, Don't want attention)
- Overwhelmed w/ other needs of church

THINK

SAY

FEEL

DO

Think

Think

Don't understand

SAY

Speak up for single
in a marriage-hungry

F

Empathy +
compassion

DO

Find a safe place
to express the single

DO

Make sure to
be visible to the
church community

Audience

- Pastors are uneducated
- " have power

NPO

- Education
- Community/Inclusiveness
- Stigma/Mortality

Root Cause

- Traditions
- Safety
- Assumptions
- Shame + Judgement
- Lack of voice

audience
Considering Pastors

We've discovered (NPO)
that they don't understand
Singleness

significance.

(root)
Which is caused by
lack of education
→ lack of intention / willingness / capacity

If solved, it would mean (outcome)

- Inclusiveness / acceptance
- Safer spaces
- Representation

APPENDIX B—MILESTONE 2 NPO TOPIC EXPERTISE ESSAY

In Genesis 1 and 2, we are given a glimpse of human flourishing. Everything was created “good,” one thing was created “very good,” and one thing was deemed “not good.” What was not good? That man should be alone. In Revelation 21, we are given another glimpse of human flourishing. This time however it is not with a man, a woman, and a garden, but communities and a golden city.¹⁶ In between Genesis 1 and 2 and Revelation, the scriptures provide the narrative of a growing family and community that runs through Abraham to Jacob, to the people of Israel and to the early Christian church.

Singleness as a state of life in the modern church therefore is a matter of great importance not because we all must be married like Adam and Eve, but rather because all people, including single people are called to flourish and to be in community. Unfortunately, many single people find themselves alone or without stable and committed relationships. To be human is to be lonely said Ronald Rolheiser.¹⁷ And the answer to loneliness is not marriage, but rather friendship and community.¹⁸ Throughout scripture we find that community is not simply a good idea for the welfare and flourishing of humanity, but because humans are ontologically relational because they are made in the image of a relational God. In Genesis, God says, “let us make man in our

¹⁶ Revelation 21:18

¹⁷ Ronald Rolheiser, *The Restless Heart: Finding Our Spiritual Home in Times of Loneliness*, (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 3. Rolheiser begins his book with this statement in the first paragraph and prefaces his book by acknowledging that all humans have desires that will be unfulfilled in this world. He ascribes his book to that unfulfillment, which he would describe as loneliness. To be human is to have unfulfilled desires, and to have unfulfilled desires is to be lonely. Therefore, to be human is to be lonely.

¹⁸ Throughout this paper, friendship and community will be used interchangeably.

image,” and in John, Jesus says “may they be one as we are one.”¹⁹ It seems that to be truly human is to be like God. And if God is at the core a community, a social-trinity, then it would suggest that humans must in some way live to reflect this divine community.

So, the question that begs to be asked then is this: “why community?” and “what is biblical community?” This paper therefore will seek not to fully answer these questions that most likely have no definite or practical answer, but will attempt to provide a biblical, theological, historical and practical response to the matter of human flourishing and Trinity-reflecting living.

Genesis 1:26-27; 2:18, Ecclesiastes 4: 8-12, and Acts 42-47 will serve as the foundational texts for the defining of biblical community. It will first argue the significance of community, answering “why community?” It will then be followed by the application of community, answering “what is community?” After the scriptural exegesis will follow a historical and cultural exegesis, guided by commentators on singleness and community throughout the centuries.

Textual Discussion

The Image of God (Genesis 1:26-27)

This paper begins with Genesis as should any analysis and response to what it means to be human. What does it mean to be made in God’s image and what does that have to do with community? In order to answer the first question, we first must ask, “who is God?”

¹⁹ Gen 1:26. John 17:21

Reflecting on the Trinity, Stanley Grenz argues that although the biblical writer did not have a fully trinitarian model and theology,

...reading the narrative in the light of the entire canon does indeed suggest that the One who stands at the genesis of the plurality of humankind as male and female is internally a plurality. And consequently, we can look to the dynamic among the trinitarian persons for the clue to understanding what characterizes godly human relationships.²⁰

In one word, Grenz characterizes the “fundamental dynamic within the triune God” as “mutuality.”²¹ Looking to the Cappadocian Fathers, they would say “persons in relation... A society of three beings in *perichoretic* relationship...a mutual co-inherence.”²² Richard of St. Victor on the relationality of the Trinity therefore suggests that “each divine person is essentially only out of, and in relation with the other person.”²³ If the deepest mystery of God’s being is an intimate relationship, a fellowship, a community of love, then human relationship, fellowship and community must be defined, or in the very least influenced by this truth.²⁴

Made for Relationship (Genesis 2:18)

Seeing that humanity was made in the image of a God who is fundamentally relational, God further emphasizes this divine reality by stating the only thing in pre-fall creation

²⁰ Stanley J. Grenz, “Theological Approaches to Male-Female Relationships” in *Christian Perspectives on Gender, Sexuality, And Community*, ed. Maxine Hancock (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2003), 85-86.

²¹ Grenz, 86.

²² Peter R. Holmes, *Trinity in Human Community* (Tyrone: Paternoster Press, 2006), 28.

²³ Holmes, 37.

²⁴ Darrell Johnson, *Experiencing the Trinity* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing), 51.

to be “not good,” is “for man to be alone.”²⁵ Though one may think that a pre-fall relationship with God would be the perfect recipe for human flourishing, we see that God thinks otherwise. “It is not good for man to be alone.” Considering this text, John Calvin states that “man was formed to be a social animal.”²⁶ He regards this text not solely for Adam but as a rule for all people and encourages each person to hear God declaring this over themselves.²⁷ In this one statement, God reveals the necessity of community. In order to be God’s actual image on Earth, the first human being must be in a community with other human beings that would reflect the divine-triune-community that is God.

The Hebrew term translated in English as “not good” in Genesis 2:18 does not express the full measure of its meaning. The term is “highly emphatic” and suggests that it is “bad for Adam to be alone.”²⁸ Some commentators who see this text will suggest that it emphasizes the goodness of marriage.²⁹ However, when read in light of the New Testament, one can see the emphasis of community and not solely marriage.³⁰ We see that the relationship between Adam and Eve had no barriers, that nothing could drive a wedge between the two as suggested by their unashamed nakedness before one another.³¹ The declaration that they will

²⁵ Genesis 2:18.

²⁶ John Calvin, *Genesis* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001) 37.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 88.

²⁹ See John Calvin, *Genesis* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001), 37; Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 88; Gordon J. Wenham, David Allen Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, and Bruce Manning Metzger, *Genesis 1-15* (Word Books Publishing: Waco, 1987), 69.

³⁰ Jesus was not married, Matt. 22:30, 1 Cor 7:8.

³¹ Victor P Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 181.

become one flesh further emphasizes God's design for spiritual and social unity rather than physical intimacy.³²

Brueggeman adds that Genesis 2:23, whereby Adam says "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" was not simply a statement of their shared biology, but a covenant promise.³³ Reflecting on the submission of Jesus to the Father in his incarnation, suffering and death as a cornerstone to their relationship, we may consider that commitment and loyalty as not only helpful to community, but a foundational characteristic of it.

Human community found in Genesis 2 is not only good sacramentally but also practically. The term used to describe Eve and her purpose is translated most often as "suitable helper." She is to help Adam in working the garden and taking care of it. Iain Provan therefore says, "it seems that the human vocation in the cosmos can be fulfilled only in community, not individually."³⁴

Made for Teamwork (Ecclesiastes 4:8-12)

Another text which further establishes the problem of aloneness and the importance of community is that of Ecclesiastes 4:8-12. It begins with a man "all alone" who had "neither son nor brother." Although many may use this text like Genesis 2:18 to support the importance and necessity of marriage, this text refers to all meaningful relationships; friend, business partner, wife, son, and brother.³⁵ In his aloneness, there is no one to partake in the fruits of his labor such

³² John E. Hartley, *Genesis* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), 64.

³³ Hamilton, 179.

³⁴ Iain W. Provan, *Seriously Dangerous Religion*. (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014), 87.

³⁵ Tremper Longman, *The Book of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 140.

as a son to inherit his wealth or a brother to celebrate his success, therefore making his toil “meaningless.”³⁶ In verses 9-12, we are presented with an alternate way of life and work; teamwork. In teamwork, one can enjoy the fruits of their work and give it to others, but also able to develop character and to find happiness.³⁷

Although most of this passage refers to two partners, it ends with a statement regarding three. Although there are many hypotheses to the meaning of this threefold cord, Longman and Fox both suggest that the text argues that although two people together is good, three people together is even better.³⁸

Filled for the Image of God (Acts 2:42-47)

Whereas in Genesis, God breathes physical life into Adam and Eve, God breathes spiritual life into the early church. One of the fruits of the Holy Spirit was the formation of fellowship or *koinonia*. The word *koinonia*, was used in the contemporary Greek language to refer to close relationships among people or the common way of life among followers of

³⁶Thomas Krüger, O. C. Dean, and Klaus Baltzer. *Qoheleth: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 98.

³⁷ Ibid., 99-100.

³⁸For dialogue about the three-cord meaning, see Tremper Longman, *The Book of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 140. Michael V. Fox, ed., *Ecclesiastes* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004), 30. It is recognized also that throughout history, the threefold cord has been often used to refer to the relationship of a man and woman with God as the third person.

Pythagoras.³⁹ Here, it then refers to a “communal manner of life” of the early church.⁴⁰ Biblical community involves a common way of life.

The early church met together in the temple courts daily for prayer, broke bread regularly and gave according to whoever had need.⁴¹ Though it is unclear whether the breaking of bread referred to the practice of the Eucharist or simply a meal together, it was a new and visible expression of the church.⁴² Regardless of its form, it was “a mark of unity, solidarity, and deep friendship, a visible sign that social barriers which once plagued these people have broken down.”⁴³ Willimon proposes,

...perhaps every meal for the church was experienced as an anticipation of the Messianic banquet, a foretaste of Jesus’ promise that his followers would ‘eat and drink at my table in my kingdom (Luke 22:30).’ In their eating and drinking the resurrection community is already a partial fulfillment of that promise, enjoying now what shall soon be consummated in the kingdom of God.⁴⁴

In the early church, it appears that a meal together was never simply a meal, but a sacrament of the divine unity to come. This unity not only transformed their meals but also their

³⁹ F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1990), 270.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Bruce Milne, *Acts: Witnesses to Him* (Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications Ltd., 2010), 87.

⁴² William H. Willimon, *Acts Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 41.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

possessions. Although the practice of common property was not distinct to the early church,⁴⁵ what made it unique to the early church was its spontaneity and enthusiasm.⁴⁶

Synthesis of Themes, Values, and Commitments

Whether the primary task of humanity is to reflect the image of God or accomplish its original mandate in caring for creation, it appears that it is God's design to achieve either of them in community. Community is both a divine sacrament reflecting the triune nature of God and also the means by which God has designed his mission to be accomplished.

Looking at my context in regard to my NPO, it appears that there has been a loss of understanding and valuing of community as defined by scripture. The importance of community as a reflection and sacrament of the tri-unity of God, the practical benefits it provides people, and the impact it had in the early church have diminished in the modern church. What Genesis, Ecclesiastes and Acts show is that whether one is single or married, there is a fundamental need for relationships. Each of the texts show in some way that marriage, and God for that matter, does not provide for all of one's God-designed needs.

Considering these biblical texts, it appears that the church requires a fresh understanding and a renewed approach to how it has defined and formed community. Though it would be impossible to fully reflect as a local congregation the mutuality of the Trinity, might this be a worthy goal to strive toward? Could the practices of the early church, the daily prayer meetings,

⁴⁵ Communities such as Qumran made it mandatory to "share" property. See James D. G Dunn. *The Acts of the Apostles* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996), 36.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

the regular meals, and the sharing of property be practices the modern church may need to revisit?

NPO Topic History

In order to begin a dialogue regarding ministering to singles, there first needs to be a conversation on the history of the church's posture towards singleness and marriage.

Singleness and Marriage

For the last fifty years in the Western world, the proportion of married adults to singles has been in decline. In the UK, approximately half of the population is married and is projected to decline further to 42% in the next twenty years. In 1935, 51% of men and 75% of women were married by the time they turned 25. By 1985, those numbers decreased to 6% of men and 12% of women.⁴⁷ In 1880, the divorce rate was 1 in 20 and by 1920 it was 1 in 6.⁴⁸

What effect might these two social shifts cause? According to a 2018 survey from the Economist and the Kaiser Family Foundation, 22-23% of adults in the United States and United Kingdom said they “always or often feel lonely, lack companionship, or feel left out or

⁴⁷ Office for National Statistics, *Population Trends*, Report No. 136 (Summer 2009), p. 82, Table 1.5; pp. 114-5, Table 1, quoted in Barry Danylak, “Developing a Biblical Theology of Singleness” in *Marriage, Family and Relationships: Biblical, Doctrinal and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Thomas A. Noble, Sarah K. Whittle, and Philip S. Johnston (London: Intervarsity Press Publishing, 2017), Kindle ebook, Location 1189.

⁴⁸ Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage*, read by Callie Beaulieu (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), audiobook, Chapter 13, 17 min., 57 sec.

isolated.”⁴⁹ A Cigna survey said 46% of Americans always or sometimes feel alone or left out and 54% said they always or sometimes feel that no one knows them well.⁵⁰

Although some of these numbers may include married people, it is unquestionable that the church must look seriously to its singles and the problems of loneliness and isolation arising. Whether it is because people are waiting longer to marry, not getting married altogether, separating or divorcing, or losing their spouse from death, the church must reevaluate its perspective and approach to ministering to its body.

Both Protestants and Catholics have in their own way idealized marriage and family. Catholics, under the guidance of Vatican II, describe the family unit as “the domestic church.”⁵¹ Bookstores are littered with writings on marriage and family but very few on singleness. Stephen Post writes, “This absence [of books on singleness] suggests a two-tiered system in which marriage and family rank higher.”⁵² According to Stephanie Coontz, in her book *Marriage, A History*, marriage became the determining factor of adulthood by the 1950s. Men who remained single were regarded as narcissistic and childish.⁵³ Being single has generally throughout history been regarded as a problem. Marriage, on the other hand, has been regarded as the higher and greater expression of life.

⁴⁹ Neil Howe, “Millennials and the Loneliness Epidemic,” *Forbes*, May 3, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/neilhowe/2019/05/03/millennials-and-the-loneliness-epidemic/#7e5023b67676>.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Jana Marguerite Bennett, *Water Is Thicker than Blood: An Augustinian Theology of Marriage and Singleness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 10.

⁵² Bennett, 24.

⁵³ Stephanie Coontz. *Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage*, read by Callie Beaulieu (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), audiobook, Chapter 15, 1 minute, 55 seconds.

Many Christians see marriage as the solution not only to the individual's problem of singleness but also to the culture's problem. Bennett would go so far as to suggest that groups such as the Religion, Culture, and Family Project, a well-known organization within the Catholic community that supports marriage and family, make marriage to be the savior of American society.⁵⁴ Within the Roman Catholic tradition, marriage is one of the seven sacraments along with baptism and the eucharist. John Paul II even goes so far as to call marriage the "primordial sacrament."⁵⁵ On the Protestant side, Timothy Keller and Gary Thomas can be considered leaders in the sacramental perspective of marriage.⁵⁶ Although neither would say marriage is better than singleness, their writings do promote the benefits and meaning of marriage.⁵⁷

Commenting on the Reformation, Bennett writes,

Since the Reformation and Martin Luther's insistence on marriage as a natural, earthy, and beneficial foundation, virginity has fallen out of favor and, indeed, has become almost nonsensical. From a Protestant perspective, an overemphasis on virginity makes the Christian life appear to be based on merit rather than on faith and grace because the better Christians are the ones who are able to be continent.⁵⁸

Bennett continues, however, shifting from Protestants to Catholics, writing,

Since Vatican II and the document *Gaudium et Spes*, Catholics, too, have become much more inclined to write about marriage and family while paying less attention to or even maligning single states of life, especially the celibate priesthood. While Catholic theology has not wholly turned aside considerations of celibacy, the thrust of the conversation moves toward marriage. One might even go so far as to say that, in the common

⁵⁴ Bennett, 8.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 17.

⁵⁶ See Timothy Keller and Kathy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God*, (New York: Dutton, 2011). Gary Thomas, *Sacred Marriage: What If God Designed Marriage to Make Us Holy More Than to Make Us Happy?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2015).

⁵⁷ Keller and Thomas' main thrust of their books is that marriage is meant to make one more like Christ.

⁵⁸ Bennett, 86.

understanding, celibacy as a state of life has been found wanting and that the best state of life for happiness consists in marriage, or, at least, the semblance of marriage...⁵⁹

Not only is marriage being lifted higher than singleness, but singleness itself is also being questioned. With the Catholic sexual abuse scandal, Garry Willis, in his article “The Case Against Celibacy,” writes, “The whole celibacy structure is a house of cards, and honesty about any one problem can make the structure of pretense come toppling down... Treating pedophilia as a separate problem is impossible, since it thrives by its place in a compromised network of evasion... the real enemy is celibacy.”⁶⁰ For Willis, the celibate life is beyond difficult; it is dangerous.

Richard Sipe, an American Benedictine monk, a psychotherapist, and writer on the clerical sexual abuse scandal estimates that nearly half of celibates are not truly celibate at any one time⁶¹. In reflection to Sipe’s estimation, Sarah Coackley wonders whether this estimation is a consequence of Freudian thinking that “celibacy is unnatural and even harmful; or if not *inherently* ‘unnatural,’ then distinctly ‘unusual’ and ‘utopian.’”⁶² With movement towards pro-marriage and anti-celibacy, it is no wonder then that the single life is seen as impossible or a life sentenced to misery.⁶³

⁵⁹ Bennett, 86.

⁶⁰ Sarah Coackley, *The New Asceticism: Sexuality, Gender and the Quest for God* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 35.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ “The single life” or a “life of singleness” assumes celibacy or at the very least believing sex is between a man and woman united in marriage.

Against the backdrop of a culture that may overvalue the state of marriage, the church at times has viewed singleness as something good in and of itself. In fact, in the 4th and 5th centuries, celibacy was much more highly viewed than marriage. Looking to the virginity of Mary, the lifelong celibacy of Jesus and Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians, many concluded that celibacy was the higher state.⁶⁴ Augustine took this a step further and subdivided celibacy: virginity was the highest state, followed by monasticism, then by widowhood.⁶⁵ In the 4th century, thousands upon thousands left the city and flocked toward the desert, joining monastic communities in the wilderness. One person wrote, "There are as many monks in the desert as there are laymen in the rest of the world."⁶⁶

Into the 6th century, St. Benedict popularized and populated the monastery with his writings and ministry. In addition to the vow of celibacy and poverty, Benedict added the vows of stability, fidelity, and obedience.⁶⁷ "Benedict defined the spiritual life as a community sharing life together under the guidance of the Rule."⁶⁸ Although most likely unintentionally, St. Benedict, along with the monastery, provided and continues to provide a ministry to singles and a medium in which they can minister from. Within the monastery, singleness and friendship were not only affirmed but also elevated.

⁶⁴ Bennett, 85.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Diana Butler Bass, *A People's History of Christianity: The Other Side of the Story* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 47.

⁶⁷ David Robinson, *Ancient Paths: Discover Christian Formation the Benedictine Way* (Brewster: Paraclete Press, 2010), Kindle ebook, Location 147.

⁶⁸ Robinson, 16.

Friendship

In the ancient Greek and Roman worlds, “friendships were the noblest things in the world.”⁶⁹ However, when Christianity came forth, agape was raised as the ultimate love. The value of *philia*, a value in the secular world, was in many ways then lost: “Agape, not *philia*, was the characteristic Christian virtue.”⁷⁰ Although friendship was theologized by some, for the most part, friendship was not held to a high value. John Henry Newman, however, in the nineteenth century, speaking against Kierkegaard and others who believed friendship was not in line with Christian values, wrote that “the best preparation for loving the world at large, and loving it duly and wisely, is to cultivate an intimate friendship and affection towards those who are immediately about us.”⁷¹

In the Russian Orthodox Church, however, men and women participated in a public rite called *adelphopoiesis*, the rite of brother-making. This was when two friends, much like two people betrothed, “exchanged vows of commitment, pledging fidelity to each other even as they made promises to remain celibate.”⁷² After this rite, each person was to be known in relation to their friend: “I am John, the friend of Thomas”; “I am Thomas, the friend of John.”⁷³

As will be explored more deeply in the coming section, friendship throughout the history of the church was not something highly valued. Although biblically and theologically from the texts exegeted earlier, one would think that friendship would be one of the highest values.

⁶⁹ Wesley Hill, *Spiritual Friendship: Finding Love in the Church as a Celibate Gay Christian* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2015), 49.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 27.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 37.

Through friendship, people could reflect the Trinity, partner in ministry, and practice the ways of the church of Acts. Despite the possibilities of friendship, it was not something too often discussed. However, there have been people throughout history who have seen the value of friendship and who have written on it.

Key Voices

In the following sections, we will look at three people, in three different millennia who have added in some way to the conversation of friendship.

Augustine

In the first millennia, Augustine in his *Confessions* famously wrote, “You have made us for Yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.”⁷⁴ Knowing only this quote, one might come to believe that Augustine believed a person only needed God and that friendship had no real significance in a person’s life. Gilbert C. Meilaender, however, argues that Augustine, through the death of his friend, came to believe that “the love of friendship is a sign and a call intended to draw the friends on towards love of God.”⁷⁵ For Augustine, it would appear that friendship was not good in and of itself, but rather a means to experience God.

Yet, upon further investigation, we find Augustine to believe that the friend was also a school in which the person learns to love like God.⁷⁶ The friend was a gift to be received from

⁷⁴ Ronald Rolheiser, *The Restless Heart: Finding Our Spiritual Home* (1st Doubleday ed. New York: Doubleday, 2004), 48.

⁷⁵ Gilbert Meilaender, *Friendship: A Study in Theological Ethics* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1981), 16.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

God and loved in God.⁷⁷ However, to be friends with another person did not mean that the friend was worth more than another person. In being friends with another person, Augustine argued that one learns how to care for another person and learn the love of God that is unconditionally universal.⁷⁸

One might be led to believe that any friendship will suffice since in any friendship one learns to love. Augustine, however, believed that a person could only be a true friend with someone who was a friend to truth.⁷⁹ In a letter, he expresses his deep joy over his friend becoming a catechumen. He rejoices because although they were friends before, they were friends of worldly reasons. However, because Augustine adopted the classic teaching that friendship involved desiring the best for one's friend, a Christian with a non-Christian could not truly be friends because one did not desire the other to love God. In Christ however, both know the highest good, that is God, and both desire that highest good for one another. For Augustine, that was true friendship.⁸⁰

Augustine also suggested that a friend is another self, the same soul but in two bodies.⁸¹ He believed that friends were one, and this had both negative and positive outcomes. According to Peter Brown, Augustine approached his early relationships as an "imperialist."⁸² To be a friend to the young Augustine meant revolving your life around his. As Augustine matured,

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 20.

⁷⁹ Liz Carmichael, *Friendship: Interpreting Christian Love*, (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 58.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., 59.

⁸² Ibid.

however, his approach shifted, but his convictions to oneness remained the same. When Augustine led, he expected his clergy to rid themselves of all possessions and to live with him in the same household just like the early church found in Acts. He believed so passionately about communal living that he founded not only his own household with others, but also his own biological sister's house, where they lived together under one roof.⁸³ For Augustine, true friendship involved both Christ as well as common property and communal living.

Friendship and the law of Christ to love one another were one and the same for Augustine. Paraphrasing him, Carmichael writes,

Like Christ who emptied himself (Phil. 2:4-8), and who said that the sick, not the healthy, have need of a physician (Mt. 9:12), we too should be the humble healers of our friends, bearing with their faults and anger... We should not judge but seek the good in each person and know that everyone has something to offer that we lack. Christ does not love us because of some good in us, but in order to heal us. In the same way a steady friend does not break off friendship when their love is not equally returned but continues to care even while it is not possible to enjoy their friend.⁸⁴

Since Augustine believed true friendship required desiring that the friend would love God, there was no difference for Augustine between loving the neighbor and loving the friend. Loving the neighbor or friend meant desiring and helping that person to love God.⁸⁵ Bennett echoes this in writing,

Augustine follows many other church fathers in proclaiming that true friendship occurs between people concerned toward developing each other in a life of virtue. If we are to be true friends with each other, we hope for the other's good, and we hope that they will be good. We

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 60.

also hope that those friends will have the same wish for us... Christian friends direct each other toward God. This Christian friendship is of the type that both married and single people may have and are expected to have.⁸⁶

Another interesting component to Augustine's view of friendship is that one can be in brotherhood but not in friendship. Although there were those who called themselves Christians, this did not mean that they were necessarily friends. For Augustine, the perspective of eternity was essential to his perspective of friendship. In heaven, all would be friends and therefore, friendship should be offered and pursued "until Christian brotherhood and friendship become synonymous."⁸⁷

Augustine believed however that this universal love or "friendship of all" could not be fully lived out because of one's own finiteness. So, he also believed in Aristotle's "preferential love" which says that friendship in this life will involve choosing some over others. For Augustine, friendship was love and that in heaven, the unity in which two friends have, will be shared among everyone, reaching the full expression of love and friendship.⁸⁸

For Augustine, the friend is a gift from God and a gift to be stewarded. When we (preferentially) love the friend that God has given us, we continually receive back from God the gift he wishes to give us.⁸⁹ Augustine writes this in *On Christian Doctrine* (I, xxviii), "All men are to be loved equally. But since you cannot do good to all, you are to pay special regard to

⁸⁶ Bennett, 180.

⁸⁷ Carmichael, 61.

⁸⁸ Meilaender, 17.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 18.

those who, by the accidents of time, or place, or circumstance, are brought into closer connection with you.”⁹⁰

For Augustine, friendship, or particular loves, “are the means God uses to lead his creatures toward the universal love of *caritas*, but they are still the means God has chosen.”⁹¹ Although Augustine wrote much on the topic of friendship, Augustine ultimately disappoints in providing a clear path forward. Carmichael writes, “Augustine’s theory and practice do not sit entirely comfortable with each other.”⁹² However, he is, as it is often the case with many topics, a good place to start.

Aelred of Rievaulx

In the next millennia, Aelred of Rievaulx, a Cistercian, a branch of Benedictine monasticism, and the Abbot of Rievaulx, wrote a short work titled *Spiritual Friendship*. In order to understand Aelred’s understanding of friendship, we must first look briefly to his understanding of love.

For Aelred, *caritas* was equal to *amor*, “both our innate power to love and its expression in action.”⁹³ The purpose of the monastic life was to turn one’s *cupiditas* (one’s selfishness) into

⁹⁰ St. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, vol. II (New York: Scribners, 1908), quoted in Gilbert C. Meilaender, *Friendship: A Study in Theological Ethics* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame Press, 1981), 19.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Carmichael, 67.

⁹³ Ibid., 75

caritas.⁹⁴ In reading Aelred, he is more clear in his view of friendship. Although Augustine presented friendship primarily as a means to friendship with God, a channel in which one can experience the love of God and practice loving people, Aelred sees friendship in and of itself as good. As there might be those who would consider valuing friendship as ungodly since God loves all equally, Aelred writes this:

Lest this most holy kind of love (*caritas*) might seem to be worth of disapproval, our Jesus himself, condescending to us in all things, patient and merciful to us through all things, transforming us in showing his love, especially grated to one, not to all, the reclining-place of his most sweet breast as a sign of love... although all the disciples were indeed embraced by the most holy, loving master with the sweetness of the greatest *caritas*, yet to him he granted this distinguishing name that showed a more familiar affection, that he should be called the disciple whom Jesus loved.⁹⁵

For Aelred, the enjoyment of a close friend was not only permissible, but good.⁹⁶

But what did it mean to be a friend? Aelred suggests a large part is opening oneself to another. Quoting Ambrose, Aelred writes, “he [Jesus] gave a model of friendship for us to follow so that we might do the will of a friend, open whatever secrets we have in our hearts to our friend, and not be ignorant of his mysteries. Let us show our hearts to him and let him open his to us. Indeed a friend hides nothing, if he is genuine. He pours out his spirit, just as the Lord Jesus poured out the mysteries of the Father.”⁹⁷

According to Liz Carmichael, in reflection of Aelred, she writes, “Aelred’s reflections on friendship make a unique contribution, an experiential, practical theology of love whose

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Carmichael, 79.

⁹⁶ Carmichael, 79.

⁹⁷ Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship*, ed. Marsha L. Dutton, trans. Lawrence C. Braceland (Collegeville: Cistercian Publications, 2010), 106.

originality lies in his belief that Christian life on earth should afford an experience of eternal union, not only with God in prayer but also between human beings...Aelred's affirmation ran counter to the theological trend that narrowed *caritas* to love directed to God while love of all else was secondary."⁹⁸

Wesley Hill

Wesley Hill, a contemporary voice that has been inspired by the topic of spiritual friendship, contributes to the ongoing conversation on singles and the church. Hill is assistant professor of biblical studies at Trinity School for Ministry and an outspoken and respected voice as a celibate gay Christian. He is the author of *Spiritual Friendship*, and blogs at spiritualfriendship.org.

Hill begins his book *Spiritual Friendship* with a story about how, when asked what the deepest prayer of his heart was as he was moving back to the States, responded with the word "friendship." Although he was slightly embarrassed at the time of saying that out loud, as opposed to "focus," "wisdom," or "grace," Hill chose friendship. But after reflecting on it some more, he said, "Without people to love and be loved by, I don't imagine faith is very sustainable."⁹⁹

Hill is not like the patristics who believed that the celibate life is the greater and better life. He affirms both ways of life but speaks about the power and importance of friendship in

⁹⁸ Meilaender, 96-97.

⁹⁹ Hill, 6.

order to provide single people seeking to honor God in their relationships a space to discuss and pursue Jesus. He says, “friendship’s number one enemy, at least over the past half century or so, is the elevated importance we have attached to spousal, parental, and extended familial bonds.”¹⁰⁰ Instead, Hill says, what we find in Scripture is that love climaxes not in family love, but primarily, in our friendships.¹⁰¹ He prophetically writes,

I’m inclined to say that, for all its potential problems, what we really need today is a return to...hope in the possibility of vowed spiritual siblinghood. What we need now isn’t disinterested, disembodied companionship. We need stronger bonds between brothers and sisters in Christ. We need ways to voluntarily surrender our freedom and independence and link ourselves, spiritually and tangibly, to those we’ve come to love.¹⁰²

Speaking theologically and from personal experience, Wesley Hill says,

What I and others like me are yearning for isn’t just a weekly night out or a circle of people with whom to go on vacation. We need something more. We need people who know what time our plane lands, who will worry about us when we don’t show up at the times we said we would...More than that, we need people for whom *we* can care. (As another single friend of mine put it recently, you want to be able to make soup for friends who are sick, not just have someone who will make soup for you when you’re sick. In the absence of mutually recognized commitments, it’s not always clear that that kind of reciprocity is welcome)...In short, we need our friendship ties to shade into and perhaps even overlap with our ties of brotherhood and sisterhood, of marriage and kinship.¹⁰³

SYNTESIS AND CONCLUSION

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 11.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 28.

¹⁰² Ibid., 41.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 43.

Synthesis

Through the literature and scholarship examined, it has become clear that single people in the church have been put in a difficult situation. Although it has not always been the case, the church over time has slowly veered to the position that marriage is a state of life greater than that of singleness. Through biblical exegesis, it has been affirmed that the married life is not the only means toward a flourishing life. Genesis 1 and 2, Ecclesiastes 4, and Acts 2, all point to the greater reality that community, not marriage, is what is at the heart of God's design for human flourishing.

Looking towards key voices such as Augustine, Aelred of Rievaulx, and Wesley Hill, who have all written extensively on friendship, it appears clear that friendship is good in and of itself. Friendship is good both ontologically and practically. Through Augustine, Hill, and the scriptures, we see that friendship is a means by which God uses to make human beings greater lovers of God and neighbor. Friendship, whether in marriage or community, is the means by which God intends for us to fulfill the Cultural Mandate, the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.

Biblically and historically, there is very little that would suggest marriage as a tier higher than singleness despite current realities. The challenge going forward however, is how should the church shift and change in order to foster greater friendship among its members?

Looking at Genesis, Ecclesiastes and Acts, all three friendships or communities had a common goal or mission. In Genesis, it was to tend the land. In Ecclesiastes, it was to labor, keep warm and defend themselves. In Acts, it was to devote themselves to the teaching of the apostles,

to fellowship, to meals together and prayer.¹⁰⁴ In Christian friendship, all these goals can be pursued together.

As mentioned earlier, Augustine believed that only those who believed the greatest good in life was to love God, were able to truly be friends with one another. Fast forwarding a thousand years, Aelred of Rievaulx, looking at the life of Jesus, argues that friendship is simply good. Jesus loved John. And reflecting on his own life, Hill suggests that faith without friendship is unsustainable.

Both in the highlighted scriptures and key voices, true friendship appears to include a belief in God, desire for God, and a will to serve God. This however becomes problematic today in our Christian and consumer culture. Because there are many people who ascribe to the faith but not necessarily follow it, it becomes challenging for single Christians seeking to live faithfully to find like-minded friends. Augustine and Aelred were both Catholic monks whose friendships were made easier through the priesthood and monastery.

Augustine required those closest to him to sell their possessions and live with him. Aelred lived with the same people for his entire life as a Benedictine monk. In following God, they all sacrificed much in order to follow God and live in community. Sacrifice was a great value in the early church. We see in Acts that they sold according to whoever had need. Quoting Hill again, he writes, “We need ways to voluntarily surrender our freedom and independence and link ourselves, spiritually and tangibly, to those we’ve come to love.”¹⁰⁵ What seems to be fundamental to friendship is commitment and sacrifice.

¹⁰⁴ Acts 2:42.

¹⁰⁵ Hill, 41.

This then raises the question of how the church should approach formation and build community. How does the church disciple and spiritual form its people? What are the understood expectations? What sort of commitment and sacrifice is necessary? The monastery simply required chastity and poverty. The Benedictine monastery included stability, fidelity and obedience. For Augustine and Aelred, they both shared with their friends a relinquishing of their former life for their new life together.

What kind of relinquishing then is necessary for the modern Protestant Church to require of its members, for the purpose of becoming a flourishing community? Should it require a tiered system of membership? Just as there were monks and then members of the church, would the Protestant Church benefit from a similar system? Would the church and its singles benefit from practicing the Orthodox way of *adelphopoiesis*? Is there a way to equally value the commitment in marriage and also in celibacy?

A question that requires further study is, “can true friendship be developed without a common life together that involves sacrifice and a shared mission?” Further research will need to be conducted into the theology and practice of covenant making in the monastery and membership in the Protestant Church. It will also require a deeper look into discipleship and formation. How did people like Augustine and Aelred become the type of people that gave up their former way of life to live in community with others?

If the Protestant Church truly desires and seeks to help singles flourish as a single person, the Protestant Church will need to reevaluate some of its theology and practices. It will need to think about how it forms people and how it invites people into community.

The last area that may need to be researched more thoroughly is the actual status of singles within the church. So far, it has been generally assumed from a small group interview and a few statistics, that singles are not flourishing as well as they could be in the church and in the world. Although it is impossible to truly flourish this side of heaven, could the lack of flourishing felt by singles simply be a product of today's idealism? Marriage is known to have its own set of challenges and crosses to bear. Could the struggles that singles face simply be the cross that they are to bear?

Conclusion

In conclusion, it appears that what the church has is not so much a problem in its theology of singleness and marriage, but rather a problem with its theology and praxis of formation and community. To suggest or even teach that singleness is equal to or even greater than marriage, would not necessarily help. To create opportunities for people to make friends, may not either.

What the scriptures and key voices all seem to point to, is that when followers of Jesus sacrifice their former ways of life for a common life together, to pursue a common mission, formation and friendship naturally arise. The Protestant Church therefore must seriously review its current perspective and practices on formation and community, and make the necessary shifts so that people, single and married may flourish.

APPENDIX C—MILESTONE 3 DESIGN WORKSHOP REPORT

NPO STATEMENT

Although there are many singles in the church, they feel marginalized and shamed by the church culture and unequipped for their life stage.

NPO SCOPE AND CONSTRAINTS

One of the primary challenges when dealing with a group of people is bias. Single and married people will have different perspectives from which they understand the NPO. Because everyone has their own set of experiences, some may be very sympathetic to the NPO, whereas others may not even see it. Another challenge will be the reality that the church is/should be a community of diverse backgrounds and life stages. A church community only of young and flourishing single people is not a flourishing church. Resources such as finances, pulpit time, and pastoral time, cannot be dedicated exclusively to singles. Children, youth, and those outside the church community will always have needs and should be tended to by the church.

NPO CONTEXT

The context of the NPO is in a large, urban multi-site church. It is in the heart of Vancouver, British Columbia and is made up of both local and commuting attendees. According to its latest survey, the church is made up of about half singles and half married people with the median age around 36.

Within this community, singles and married couples do not generally mix. Ethnically, the church is approximately 45% from an Anglo-Saxon background, 45% from an East-Asian background, and 10% made up of other ethnicities.

Denominationally, the church is of the Christian and Missionary Alliance. They are an evangelical, and contemplative community. The senior pastor promotes a spirituality based off contemplative practices. All the pastoral staff (about 20) are married except 3. Most of the pastoral staff are also not in a small group with lay people nor are intentionally mentoring others.

ROOT CAUSES

According to the workshops, and one-on-one interviews, there are multiple root causes for the NPO. One of them is the lack of awareness or acknowledge of the myriad of challenges faced by single people in a modern and urban setting. Therefore, the church is in ways, ill-equipped to minister well to its singles. Secondly, because of this lack of awareness and acknowledgement, single people often feel marginalized or shamed for their life stage. With the value of marriage and family, singles are left feeling as second-class citizens.

THREE BIG IDEAS

- 1) Make the language of singleness normal.
- 2) Teach explicitly to the whole church why singleness is not a problem.
- 3) Teach single people how to navigate life as a single person.

DEFINITION OF 'DONE'

Single people will have a sense of community in the church, comfort in their life, and clarity in their calling in the world.

3 NAPKIN PITCHES

Napkin Pitch #1

Big Idea: Make being single a normal part of the church culture.

Audience: This is intended for the entire church.

NPO: Singles feel either intentionally or unintentionally shamed by married people for not being single.

Benefit: The church will have more awareness of singleness and more empathy for single people. Single people will feel like an integral part of the church body and not as invisible or as a people group in need of pity or fixing.

Approach: The church will intentionally increase the visibility of singles at the church through featuring stories of single people in the sermon and referring to it as a normal and good stage of life.

Risks: Could create either a discontentment in marriages or encourage unhealthy complacency in single's lives.

Assumptions/hypotheses to test: We are trying to test the perception of singleness in the church.

Benchmarks of success: The two main pieces of information to measure are married people's perception/empathy toward singles and singles people comfort in their singleness at church.

Other Approaches: Maybe instead of having a sermon once in awhile about singleness, every sermon and piece of communication will be filtered by asking if singles are directly related to.

Napkin Pitch #2

Big Idea: Provide a thorough biblical understanding on singleness.

Audience: This is intended for both single and married people.

NPO: This is to address the sentiments that a person's singleness should be solved or that there is something wrong if the person is single.

Benefit: Singles will feel more open and comfortable with their life and will not chase marriage as the ultimate goal.

Approach: This would be approached by incorporating specific sermons/teaching on singleness.

Risks: Since most preaching pastors are married, they may not be able to provide the relevant teaching and experience to connect to singles.

Assumptions/hypotheses to test: We are trying to find out if what is lacking is a biblical understanding of singleness.

Benchmarks of success: Search for feedback from singles on the sermons on singleness.

Other Approaches: As most churches have a series on marriage each year, a church may provide a series on singleness also or instead.

Napkin Pitch #3

Big Idea: Teach how to live as a single person.

Audience: This approach is intended only for single people.

NPO: Single people have no clear understanding or guidance on living as a single person.

Benefit: Singles would feel supported and confident in making decisions and living as a single person.

Approach: This approach would focus specifically on living as a single person as opposed to general living or a class on dating and marriage.

Risks. Teaching may seem prescriptive or singleness may be elevated as greater than marriage.

Assumptions/hypotheses to test: Trying to see if singles will feel more confident and make wiser decisions.

Benchmarks of success: We will need to measure how singles are both feeling along with what kind of decisions are they making and how they are making them.

Other Approaches: Most teaching would be for a broader audience, this approach would be specifically about being single but not merely on dating.

DESIGN WORKSHOP STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholder #1 – Late 20s female, single. Grown up in church but never in a formal leadership role.

Stakeholder #2 – Late 30s female, single. Grown up in church, small group leader, and elder.

Stakeholder #3 – Early 50s female, single. Grown up in church, small group leader and deacon.

Stakeholder #4 – Mid 30s male, single/divorced. Finding way back to God, grown up in church, small group leader and faithful tech volunteer.

Stakeholder #5 – Mid 30s male, single. Fairly new Christian, small group leader, and faithful volunteer.

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS

Interviewee #1 – 60s married male. PhD on singleness. Former pastor and currently starting a ministry for singles

Interviewee #2 – Mid 30s married male. Pastor at a church of 1800+ people (60% single, average age 32).

Interviewee #3 – Late 20s single woman. Started a ministry organization for women.

APPENDIX

DESIGN WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

Location

Zoom

Date

November 21, 2020

Schedule:

12:30-12:40 Opening

12:40-1:10 - Exercise #1: Revisiting the NPO

1:10-1:20 - Break

1:20-1:50 - Exercise #2 (Reverse It)

1:50-2:35 - Exercise #3 (Cover Story)

2:35-2:45 - Break

2:45-3:05- Exercise #4 (Forced Ranking)

3:05-3:35 - Exercise #5 (Napkin Pitch)

3:35-3:50- Debrief

Stakeholder Description

Stakeholder #1 – Late 20s female, single. Grown up in church but never in a formal leadership role.

Stakeholder #2 – Late 30s female, single. Grown up in church, small group leader, and elder.

Stakeholder #3 – Early 50s female, single. Grown up in church, small group leader and deacon.

Stakeholder #4 – Mid 30s male, single/divorced. Finding way back to God, grown up in church, small group leader and faithful tech volunteer.

Stakeholder #5 – Mid 30s male, single. Fairly new Christian, small group leader, and faithful volunteer.

Activities:

Context Map

Reverse It

Cover Story

Forced Ranking

Assessment

On a scale of 1-5, I would give the workshop a 4. It went very smoothly and people were engaged and even stayed after it formally ended to debriefing. Many of them seemed particularly grateful for the opportunity to think about such a topic and talk about it with others. The reason I do not give it a 5 however is because I feel that because the stakeholders do not have theological backgrounds or any formal teaching on spiritual formation and leadership, I felt the solutions at the end were typical and nothing particularly new was discovered.

DESIGN WORKSHOP DOCUMENTATION

REVISITING THE NPO

Group 1: Identify and shame single people:

- No specific opportunities for connection
- Shame single people
- Have ministries for married, kids, families
- No sermons about singleness, don't mention it in sermons
- Talk about singleness in a negative manner
- Glorify kids, families, married
- Singleness needs to be "fixed"
- No singleness representation
- Mandatory to be married or in relationship to be a part of the church, to be an elder, to serve.
- Giving single people higher expectations, more responsibilities, for serving.

- Segregation of single people
- Have to identify yourself as single
- Not accepting single peoples' feedback

Group 2:

- You're not good enough for our church (attack their character)
- You don't have enough faith/shame you (as a solution to your problems)
- too accepting (yeah go ahead and sin, God loves you anyways)
- Overarching: Giving advice through pride or with ulterior motives, not from a place of love. (pride gets in the way of empathy)

**COVER STORY – THE MOST SUCCESSFUL TRANSFORMATION STORY OF
A SINGLE PERSON**



FORCED RANKING OF SOLUTIONS

deas							Totals
	Workshops on decision making						19
	Singles only community						30
	Making being single part of the culture						38
	Ways to celebrate (the single) life						25
	Biblical study/teaching on singleness						32
	Mentorship for life (casual/pastoral)						21
	Focused discipleship (intentional/coaching)						18
	Teaching/courses on inner healing/ self-knowledge/ formation						22
	Teaching on how to form Christian friendships						20

NAPKIN PITCHES

IDEA #1: Make Singleness Part of the Culture

What is the big idea?

- Making being single part of the culture

Who is it for?

- Everybody

What is the need, problem, or opportunity?

- Singles feel left out or marginalized
- Singleness is not talked about or considered its own stage of life
- Opportunity to create a culture where various stages of life - including singleness - is valued.

How does the user (single person) benefit?

- Increased awareness/empathy for single people
- Feel more part of the whole church rather than “less than”
- Illustrate or describe how it works
- Transcending singleness as part of the culture by increasing visibility of single Christians at the church (featured speaker/biblical verses or character), and how it is discussed as a stage of life for those who are no longer single.

- Including sermons which highlight the positive effects a single person can have on the the kingdom of God will showcase the God-ordained stage of life instead of painting it as a place you “shouldn’t be” too long

Why might it fail?

- Saturation of content/information in the information age; a lot of issues competing for people’s attention.
- It could be too heavily focused on, leading to the opposite effect where married couples feel as though they are lacking guidance
- Could potentially create a culture of complacency for those who are unwilling to take the risk of entering into a relationship.
- Why specifically are we trying to accomplish?
- Make people aware that singleness is a stage of life, not a transitional stage until someone starts dating/gets married
- To create value, understanding, and celebration of singleness.

How might we measure success?

- Positive feedback from single people in the community - an increased feeling of inclusion and understanding.
- “Happiness” measure of singles at the church. Potential proxy to being at peace with just being.

What makes this stand out from other approaches?

- The culture of an organization/community is such a foundational piece of its structure - affects everything in some way.
- This is a paradigm shifting process which can radically change the future of a church (demographics, participation levels, etc)
- This can potentially help others be more aware and accepting of oneself
- Challenge the church community to explore our implicit assumptions, potential stereotypes and prejudice

IDEA #2: Biblical Preaching on Singleness (the goodness)

What is the big idea?

- Biblical teaching on singleness

Who is it for?

- Everybody
- Youth - cultivate the paradigm early

What is the need, problem, or opportunity?

- No dating examples in the bible
- Feeling like singleness is a problem to be solved in a church
- Stereotype that christians are usually married early
- Youth feeling like romantic relationship is a milestone in their life

How does the user (single person) benefit?

- Greater openness to whichever season God leads us to.
- Comfort in who they are and where they are at - rather than chasing the goal of being married
- Illustrate or describe how it works
- Incorporating preaching on singleness within the various preaching topics.

Why might it fail?

- Church pastors & leadership are often older in age and many are married - may not relate to those who are experiencing it “now”

Why specifically are we trying to accomplish?

- To create a church culture that dives deeply into all the various stages of life so that people in each of these stages feel valued, included, represented, and affirmed.

How might we measure success?

- Positive feedback on sermons from single people (and possibly others). This may be something as simple as the pastor receiving an email, or a conversation following the service. These positive affirmations, questions, thoughts would demonstrate that single people (and maybe others) appreciate this topic being part of the church culture.

What makes this stand out from other approaches?

- Reach the broader community

IDEA #3: Teaching on how to live as a single person

What is the big idea?

- Deep dive guided study on how to live a Godly life as a single Christian person (and the life God intended for us)

Who is it for?

- Singles who are searching for answers on “living the life” for God

What is the need, problem, or opportunity?

- There is a lack of guidance on what it means to live well as a single person.
- A need for mentorship
- Family pressure

How does the user (single person) benefit?

- Provides a Biblical foundation for living in today’s world as a single Christian.
- Illustrate or describe how it works
- Develop a guided study on how to:
 1. 1Accept singleness is acceptable in God’s eyes
 2. Give guidance on how to live out salvation through single life (friendships, serving, seeking God’s wisdom
 3. Mentorship

Why might it fail?

- Could be seen as “you must do this and nothing else”
- Might be seen as “singleness is better than marriage”
- Closes the door to “what might be out there”

Why specifically are we trying to accomplish?

- Provide ways to have contentment and trust that God can work through our singleness, and to give examples on how we can follow Jesus’ footsteps as a non-married person.
- How singles can have a flourishing life, regardless.

How might we measure success?

- Participants are engaged (but not to each other) and have new ideas that they can apply and live out
- Long term impact on course participants’ lives - do participants think/feel they are living better lives/more Godly lives because of what they learned from the course.
- Participant survey of anxiety levels regarding their future before/after the course

What makes this stand out from other approaches?

- Catered to single people, as there seem to be a lot more books/courses on marriage/family

ONE-PAGE POST-WORKSHOP MESSAGE TO STAKEHOLDERS

Hi everyone!

Thank you so much for your participation in Saturday's workshop! I felt like we may have unexpectedly had some fun while doing it and also getting to some good insights and breakthroughs!

Here's a little summary of what was discussed and transpired:

Need, Problem, Opportunity (NPO)

Although there are many singles in the church, they feel marginalized, shamed and unequipped for their life stage.

Three Big Ideas

1. Make the language of singleness normal.
2. Teach explicitly to the whole church why singleness is not a problem.
3. Teach single people how to navigate life as a single person.

Definition of Done

Single people will have a sense of community in the church, comfort in their life, and clarity in their calling.

Benchmarks of Success

Single people will regularly feel specifically affirmed and encouraged in being single; and engaged and equipped in their calling.

Additional Areas of Investigation

The formation of a singles-only community was brought up and requires further inquiry.

Additional Thoughts

If you have any additional thoughts please do not hesitate to write me! Or if you sense I interpreted something poorly, let me know also!

With much gratitude,

Ryan

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS DOCUMENTATION

Interviewee #1: Married male pastor of large urban church

Real clear vision on the single life and how it is a great option for life---how it can be beautiful.

“It’s a great option to remain single in life, if that’s what you want, then do it.”

Naming it as a good option.

Single vs dating ---- large portion of the conversations are about dating

View lectures tab on wisdom on singleness

The problem of loneliness--- problem of no “go-to person.”

People who are flourishing have a clear “go-to people.”

How do you form go-to people?

Soul-friendship--- people with whom you are having mutual soul-discernment--- deeply involved in emotional and spiritual lives

Class on friendship-sign up with closest friend

Interviewee #2: Single former male pastor and author of book on singleness

Direct relation between Great Commission and cultural Mandate

It doesn't matter if you're single or married, we're all called to make disciples

A large portion of leaders in the early church were singles

Thoughts:

All good things. All necessary.

Keep in mind distinction: what do we need as a church vs what do we need for our singles in the church

Inclusive language needs to be for the whole church. Even if you have something for singles, you can create a "we" vs "them". I was asked to be CC eyes and ears for when they weren't inclusive. -> Bless a family in need during Christmas. Important in every aspect. First step.

Bias: elevates marriage, family, sexuality

Goes into Darwin, Freud, Foucault. Show them how we've been sold a bill of goods. Goes into biblical narrative of what the purpose of marriage and sex is. Fundamental theology of identity, purpose. If we don't, people follow another narrative.

How we live follows who we are in Christ. You need the grounding of identity.

Singles only ministry

60% of singles don't need a singles ministry, 40% could really benefit

Experiencing spiritual family in a pretty profound way

For some singles, the church is their family.

Need a variety of community as there are a variety of needs/wants.

No one size fits all.

Shared life experience can be quite valuable. Some need them for a season.

Age does make a difference in singles. Women want connection naturally, men want theology/teaching and doing stuff.

Easy to be dominated by women.

Midsized + small group structure

Ideas:

Value and importance of theology

Get narrow-> What do singles need? How do we engage them?

Interviewee #3: Single woman who has started a ministry for women

Talk about it more is the number one main thing. In my experience, not part of norm. Everyone acts as if you're waiting. "You're great, you'll find someone." Starting at the culture is huge. Everyone sermon illustration is about marriage/kids. I can adapt it to my context, but as a single person "I am always adapting."

Married people married high school sweetheart. Sermons are flat.

You can't comment though because you don't want to complain.

Important to talk to the married people. They don't realize there's more to life than marriage.

Having a sermon series as challenging people to see singleness as the norm and not something to be pitied.

Celebrate single's people's calling, a new home, moving somewhere.

APPENDIX D—MILESTONE 4 [DESIGN RESEARCH REPORT] / [PROTOTYPE ITERATION REPORT]

PROTOTYPE #1: HOW TO BE SINGLE AND FLOURISH (COURSE)

Prototype Description.

Prototype #1 is a digital course where participants choose the level of commitment, relationships, and level of content depth for themselves. The course will provide not only content, but weekly prayer with different spiritual directors, accountability partners, life groups, and 1 on 1 mentorship.

Goldilocks Quality Strategy.

Prototype #1 will involve the use of a single website showing all the elements of the course.

Research Question.

Can providing a tiered structure of content and relationships, help single people flourish?

Assessment Benchmark(s).

If successful, participants will develop meaningful and long-lasting peer relationships. They will enter into a formal relationship with a spiritual director or coach. They will return to the next offering of the course as a group leader

Summary.

Worked: People liked the option of taking the course with other people and content specifically about singleness.

Improvements: There were no “improvements” suggested in regards to the contents of the prototype but rather questions and suggestions on marketing.

Important: Nothing was said about the offering of prayer workshops each week by spiritual directors. In addition, no one seemed to be interested in taking a course on their own.

Most Important Discovery.

The primary thing of interest seemed to be the ability to connect with other people.

PROTOTYPE #2: A COMMUNITY FOR SINGLES

Prototype Description.

Prototype #2 is an online community for singles to connect for virtual one-on-one spiritual friendships, small groups (bible study, book study, prayer), and social events.

Goldilocks Quality Strategy.

Prototype #2 will involve the use of an online platform showing the available community groups, topics, and “members.”

Research Question.

Can an online, young, professional, and singles-only community provide enough connection to aid individuals in their personal flourishing?

Assessment Benchmark(s).

Participants will engage in meaningful conversations with others in one-on-one and group settings. They will stay connected to the community and encouraging others to join it. They will develop meaningful relationships with others in the community that will spur them on towards being a faithful presence.

Summary.

Worked: People liked the idea of having a private community just to discuss matters of spirituality with other single people. They like the option of having events and being able to meet other people in their area.

Didn't work: Nothing according to the participants needed to be improved. However a couple of had questions on how the community and its members would be kept safe along. Some also made the comment that the success of the community is built on the quantity and quality of its members and so they wondered how this community would come to existence.

What's important:

Much like Prototype #1, participants were most intrigued by the idea of connecting with other singles on spiritual matters.

MOST VIABLE PRODUCT (MVP)

After assessing both Prototypes 1 and 2, it has become clear that what single people in their 20s and 30s most desire is the opportunity for connection with others. In the case of Prototype 1, participants articulated the most attractive component was not the material but the ability to go through the material with other people around the world through the same material. Similarly, in Prototype 2, participants were most interested in discussing spiritual matters and going through Christian education courses with others in the community.

The primary area of concern for both prototypes was also clear: how would either the course or community get participants? According to the participants, both products would need a high level of trust/relationship with potential participants in order for them to buy into either product. So in determining the most viable product, it seems to be that the main factor will be the product's marketability.

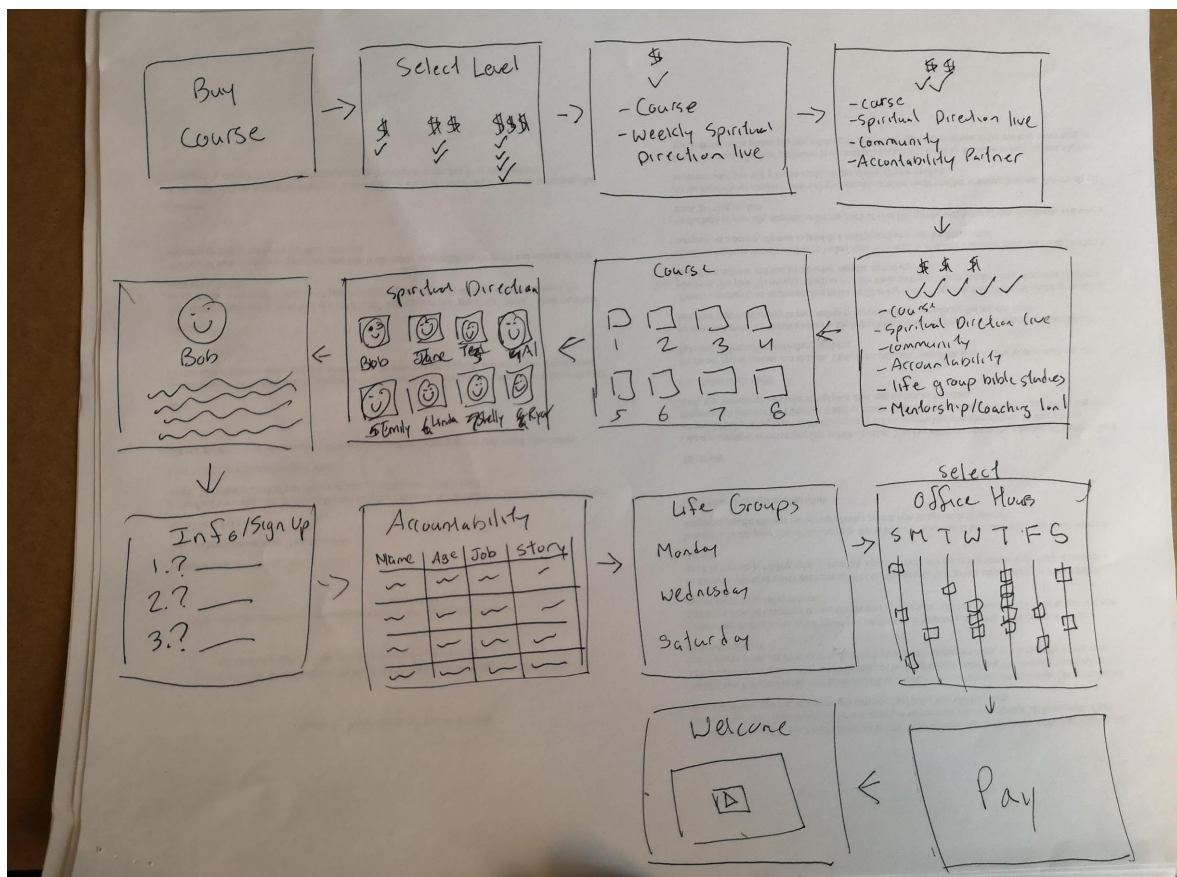
Comparing both prototypes/products, I believe that the most viable product would be the course. In our content-driven culture, a course done either individually or communally will likely be more familiar and comfortable than a foreign social media platform to engage with strangers on singleness and spirituality. At least with a course, there is specific content and an ethos, naturally bringing like-minded people together and thereby creating a type of community.

Assessing my gifts, resources, and limits, I believe the course will be better for me as well. As a pastor, teacher, and doctor, I can use these to “sell” the course better than a “community” which may be seen as a ministry or even another church. I can then pitch this course to other churches for their singles, and when ready, create a community just for them (Prototype/product 2).

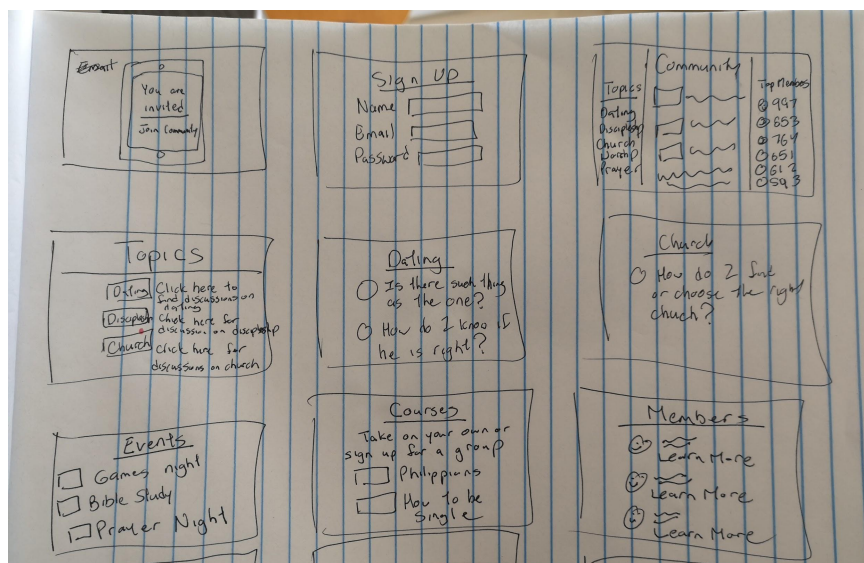
APPENDIX

Storyboard.

Prototype 1



Prototype 2



Recruiting Screener

Prototype 1

Who do you want to talk to?	What <i>exact criteria</i> will identify the people you want to talk to?	What screening questions will you ask? (Questions shouldn't reveal "right" answers.)
People who identify as a Christian.	They go to church somewhat regularly.	How often do you attend church?
Single people	People who are not married	Are you married?
Young people	People 22-39	How old are you?
Mix of men and women	3 men and 3 women	Gender?
Urban professional	Has a steady white-collar job	What do you do for a living?

Who do you want to exclude?	What <i>exact criteria</i> will identify the people you want to exclude?	What screening questions will you ask? (Questions shouldn't reveal "right" answers.)
Married people	People who are married.	Are you married?

People who have attended a bible college or seminary	People who studied theology	What is your educational background?
Minors	Under 21	How old are you?
Older people	Above 40	How old are you?

Prototype 2

Who do you want to talk to?	What <i>exact criteria</i> will identify the people you want to talk to?	What screening questions will you ask? (Questions shouldn't reveal "right" answers.)
People who identify as a Christian.	They go to church somewhat regularly.	How often do you attend church?
Single people	People who are not married	Are you married?
Young people	People 22-39	How old are you?
Mix of men and women	3 men and 3 women	Gender?

Who do you want to exclude?	What <i>exact criteria</i> will identify the people you want to exclude?	What screening questions will you ask?
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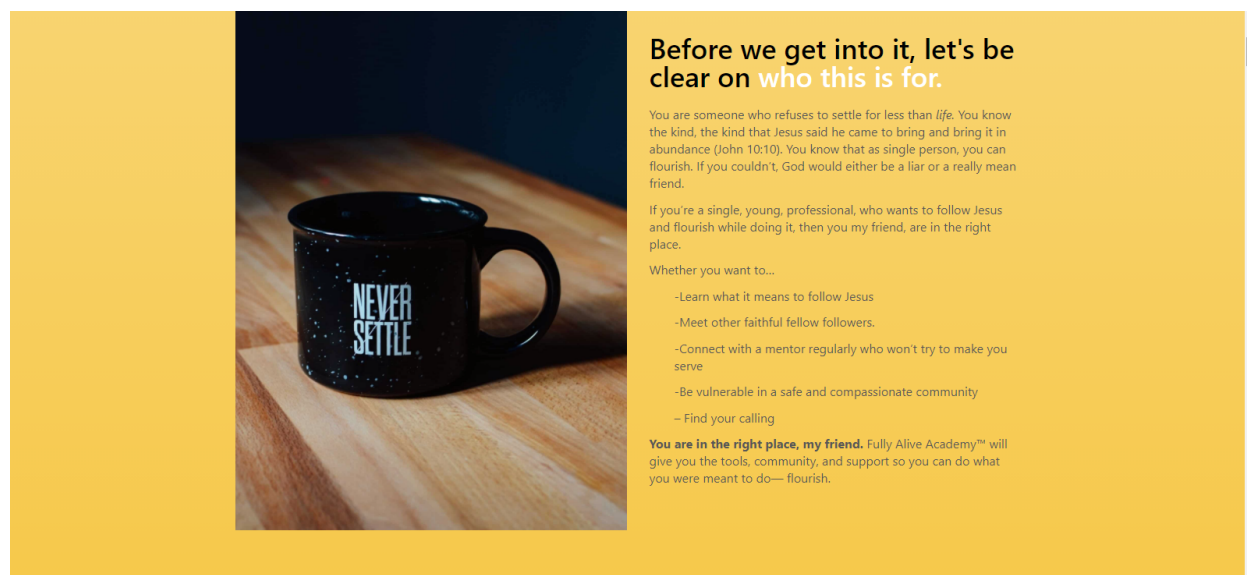
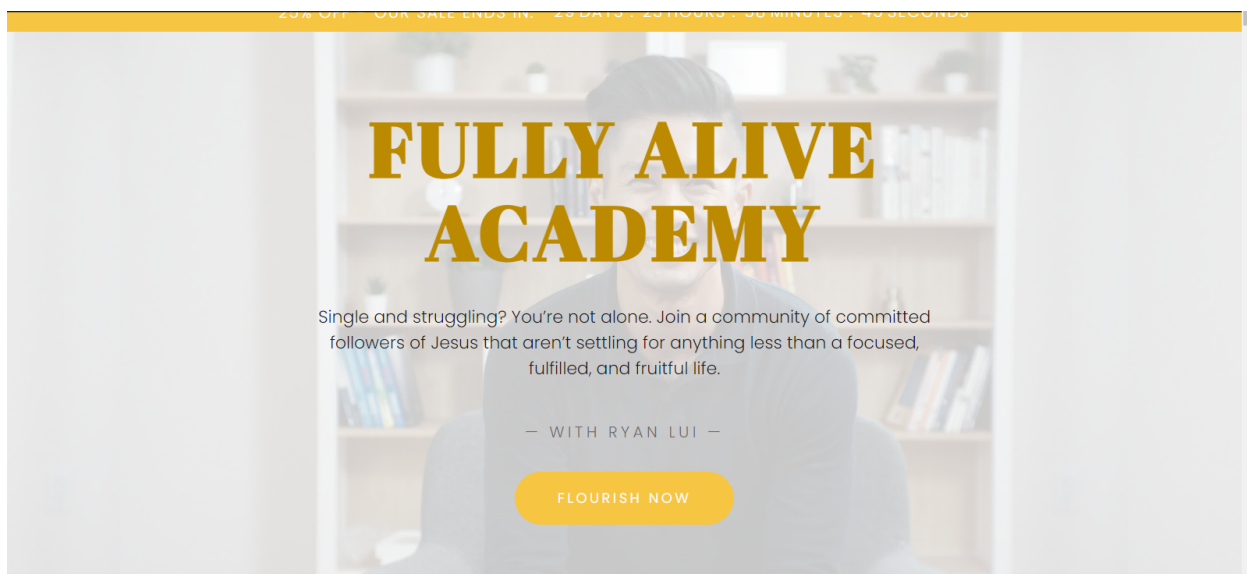
		(Questions shouldn't reveal "right" answers.)
Married people	People who are married.	Are you married?
Minors	Under 21	How old are you?
Older people	Above 40	How old are you?

Interview Script:

Hi [name], how are you doing? Thanks for your time, this shouldn't take any longer than 15 minutes. As I briefly shared in my email, I'm doing my doctorate of ministry in leadership and spiritual formation. Part of my doctorate involves creating a project that would be helpful to the church. I am focusing on helping singles in the church flourish. Currently, I'm in my 4th semester. And for the previous 3, I have been researching through reading and through group and one-on-one interviews on the particular problem singles face in the church and a potential solution. From all of that, I've come down to 2 potential "products." Just so we are clear, I am not emotionally tied to either of them. They are a result of the research and I just want to know what would truly be most productive for single people in the church. In a moment I'm going to go through the prototype with you. At any moment, let me know your thoughts. At the end, I'll ask you 3 simple questions: what you liked, what you didn't quite so like, and what would you change. That's about it. Let's begin!

Documentation of each Prototype (pictures, screenshots, etc.)

Prototype 1



THE PHILOSOPHY OF FULLY ALIVE ACADEMY

When we look at Genesis 1 and 2, we see that in a perfect world, something existed that was not good—being alone. And we also see that prior to the Fall, God had two purposes for Adam and Eve: make a family (a community) and shape the world (a calling). Community and calling, are at the heart of what it means to flourish and live in God's good life.

Fully Alive Academy believes that what singles in the church need most is a sense of community and calling. Single people need meaningful relationships and a clear purpose.

However, because of the Fall and our imperfect society, finding authentic community and following our unique calling is easier said than done. It may be because...

There might not be many singles in your church.

There might not be many young people your age.

Nobody seems to be serious about their faith

The pastors/leaders don't have enough time to mentor me

The pastors/leaders don't understand my life

Whatever the reason, being single and a Christian, is not easy. You are not flourishing. You are not living the life you are supposed to live. You are not wearing Jesus' yolk that easy and carrying his burden that is light. You are not living the abundant life he claims to offer.

Fully Alive Academy wants to fix that. It wants to help you survive and thrive in, your singleness. We want to give you the tools and teaching, community, and pastoral care and coaching, you've always wanted and needed.

The pastors/leaders don't understand my life

Whatever the reason, being single and a Christian, is not easy. You are not flourishing. You are not living the life you are supposed to live. You are not wearing Jesus' yolk that easy and carrying his burden that is light. You are not living the abundant life he claims to offer.

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Dr. Ryan Lui, Pastor, coach, author, and fellow single person.

MEET YOUR MENTOR

Ryan Lui

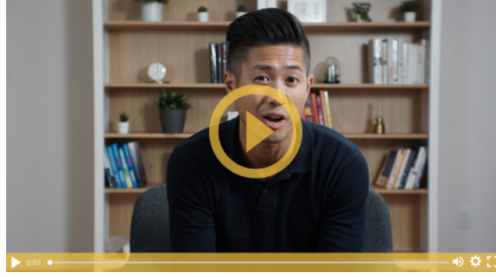
Hi, I'm Ryan! I've been in pastoral ministry for over 9 years in a wonderful urban church in Vancouver B.C. I attained my Master of Arts in Theological Studies in Applied Theology from Regent College and more recently, my Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Formation from Portland Seminary.

More importantly, I've been basically single all that time. And for this whole time, I've been on a hunt— to find a way to not just survive, but to thrive. I've been learning on my own and in my doctoral studies— and I think I've found a solution.

Let's be real. Being single and trying to be a faithful Christian sucks. Your (married male) pastor only has stories about his family. Your friends are all getting married, having babies, and forgetting you. And for whatever reason (too long of a list to write), you just can't seem to connect to the other singles in your church. Maybe you're one of those Christians that have given up on church and don't even go.

You're in a lot of ways, alone.

But it doesn't have to be that way.



One of the things I've (Ryan) become convinced of experientially and theologically, is the need for real community. One of the reasons why church and small groups are less than fulfilling is because, let's be honest, everyone comes for different reasons.

The families just want a place to raise their kids. Some singles are hunting for a partner. Other singles want a group of people they can connect with on their own terms. They don't do their readings. They don't engage. They don't share vulnerably. They don't give it their all. Put a bunch of people together with different desires, expectations and needs and you are going to get a frustrating group of people.

No wonder church and small groups are frustrating.

Fully Alive Academy recognizes that we all want and need different things. Some just want a new way to learn. Others want to connect to other single people over the challenges and celebrations of the single life. Others want to serve and lead well in their church, and form strong relationships with others who want to as well. Wherever you are at in your walk with Jesus and whatever it is you want and need right now Fully Alive Academy hopes to provide that for you.

Just as you can take a course in university for 1, 2, or 3 credits, so can you at Fully Alive Academy. The more credits you take, the more it "costs," but the more you gain. When you enroll in our higher tiered levels, you will be introduced to people just like you—single Christians that want to serve Jesus and lead lives of significant impact, while experiencing authentic relationships and joy.

Flourish Now

Independent For those wanting to learn more at their own pace.	Community For those seeking formation in community. POPULAR	Flourishing For those who want to full-on flourish. LIMITED
\$ One-Time	\$ \$ One-Time (Monthly Option Available)	\$ \$ \$ One-Time
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Live and On-Demand Teaching	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Live and On-Demand Teaching	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Live and On-Demand Teaching
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 12-Week Devotional	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 12-Week Devotional	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 12-Week Devotional
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 12 Prayer Workshops with 12 Spiritual Directors (+\$360 Value)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 12 Prayer Workshops with 12 Spiritual Directors (+\$360 Value)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 12 Prayer Workshops with 12 Spiritual Directors (+\$360 Value)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Community Directory	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Community Directory	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Community Directory
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A Private Facebook Group	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A Private Facebook Group	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A Private Facebook Group
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Weekly Group Discussion	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Weekly Group Discussion	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Weekly Group Discussion
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1-on-1 Mentoring (+\$400 in savings)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1-on-1 Mentoring (+\$400 in savings)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1-on-1 Mentoring (+\$400 in savings)
Enroll Now	Enroll Now	Enroll Now

What Students Say About Us



I'm super-inspired by Ryan, the way he presents the information really gives you a wide view of the field, which helps you to understand all the processes well. I really like it!

— Amanda



The course focuses on both theology and story. It is very informative and inspiring. All of it comes beautifully together and has made a real difference in my life. Highly recommended!

— John



I'm super-inspired by Ryan, the way he presents the information really gives you a wide view of the field, which helps you to understand all the processes well. I really like it!

— Beth



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— Brian



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— Cathy



The course focuses on both theology and story. It is very informative and inspiring. All of it comes beautifully together and has made a real difference in my life. Highly recommended!

— Kelly



I'm super-inspired by Ryan, the way he presents the information really gives you a wide view of the field, which helps you to understand all the processes well. I really like it!

— Kithu



The course focuses on both theology and story. It is very informative and inspiring. All of it comes beautifully together and has made a real difference in my life. Highly recommended!

— Mike

Meet Our Spiritual Directors

Each week, one of the amazing people below will guide Fully Alive Academy in their own specialized way of prayer.



Ryan Lui

THE ENNEAGRAM AND AN EVANGELICAL SPIRITUALITY

Ryan serves the Mount Pleasant community by working in the formation and development of life groups and their leaders.

Ryan was born and raised in Vancouver, just like his mother and attended the same schools she did—Kilmer and UBC. He has a BComm in Marketing as well as a Masters of Arts in Theological Studies from Regent College. Ryan loves the Mount Pleasant neighbourhood and could drink coffee, walk down Main St., and admire the houses any day.



David

SACRAMENTALISM AND PRAYER

David arrived at Tenth in November of 2020. As Executive Pastor, he is responsible for the leadership and management of Tenth. What brings him the most joy is seeing people flourish into who God created them to be.

David grew up in Vancouver after moving from the Philippines at a young age. After a long career in the marketplace as a businessman, he went to Regent College and graduated with a MATS. He then joined the Institute for Marketplace Transformation, an organization dedicated to helping Christians integrate their faith with all of life, especially work.

David and his wife Diane have two adult children and one in high school.



Innovation in 2017 (Klins College, Bend, Oregon) and is a 2005 graduate of the Arrow Leadership Program.

Anthony and Michele have been married since 2002, and have two children. Anthony loves coffee, is an avid reader, and takes any opportunity to travel and spend time with his family.



Annie

HAVING A CHILD-LIKE FAITH

Annie was born and raised in the south of England where she worked as a primary school teacher for many years. When not in the classroom, Annie spent her summer holidays regularly travelling to countries including Russia, Albania, India and Kenya with her husband, Dan. These travelling opportunities have deeply impacted the way Annie sees the world and her part to play in it.

In 2014, Annie and her family moved to Vancouver for her husband to attend Regent College. Vancouver captured their hearts and has played a significant part in their relational journey with God, creation, others and self. Together with their two children, the Whiteheads spend their time climbing trees, making sandcastles at Kits beach, and eating Honey's Donuts at Deep Cove.



teaches guitar, bass, and drums, writes and records music, grows organic vegetables, cooks, and enjoys good conversation.



Debbie

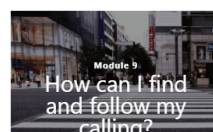
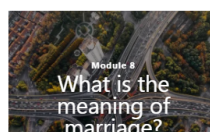
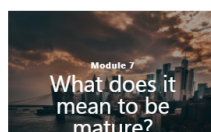
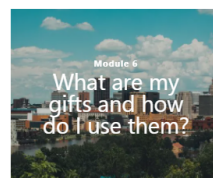
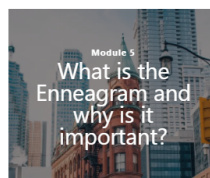
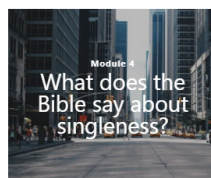
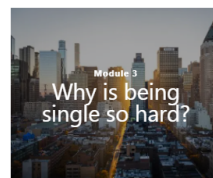
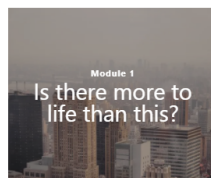
PRAYER AS JUSTICE WORK

Debbie serves as the Director of Local Community Engagement at Tenth Church. She is deeply committed to partnering with God and journeying alongside others in seeking peace and justice for the many neighbourhoods in our city. She brings over a decade of experience in the field of administration, public safety, non-profit management and inter-cultural engagement. Debbie finds delight in good food, loose leaf tea, organic gardens, farmers markets, bicycles, music, friends, and her young family.



A Look Inside The Course

Each Week Focuses On One Topic To Help You Flourish



Additional Bonuses

Plus these amazing additions to encourage and hold you accountable



Live and On-Demand Teaching

Every week, you will have the opportunity to hear Ryan teach live followed by group discussion



Private Community

In order to ensure your thriving, The Alive Not Alone Course comes with a private Facebook to facilitate connection and conversation. You can ask questions, organize a community event, or share a praise item or prayer request.



1-on-1 Spiritual Friendships

One of the convictions behind Alive Not Alone is that singles lack meaningful friendships with other singles. In Alive Not Alone, you don't only get the opportunity to connect, but have an entire list of your class. You will be encouraged to connect with at least 1 member weekly to keep each other on track with the course material, share life, and pray for each other.



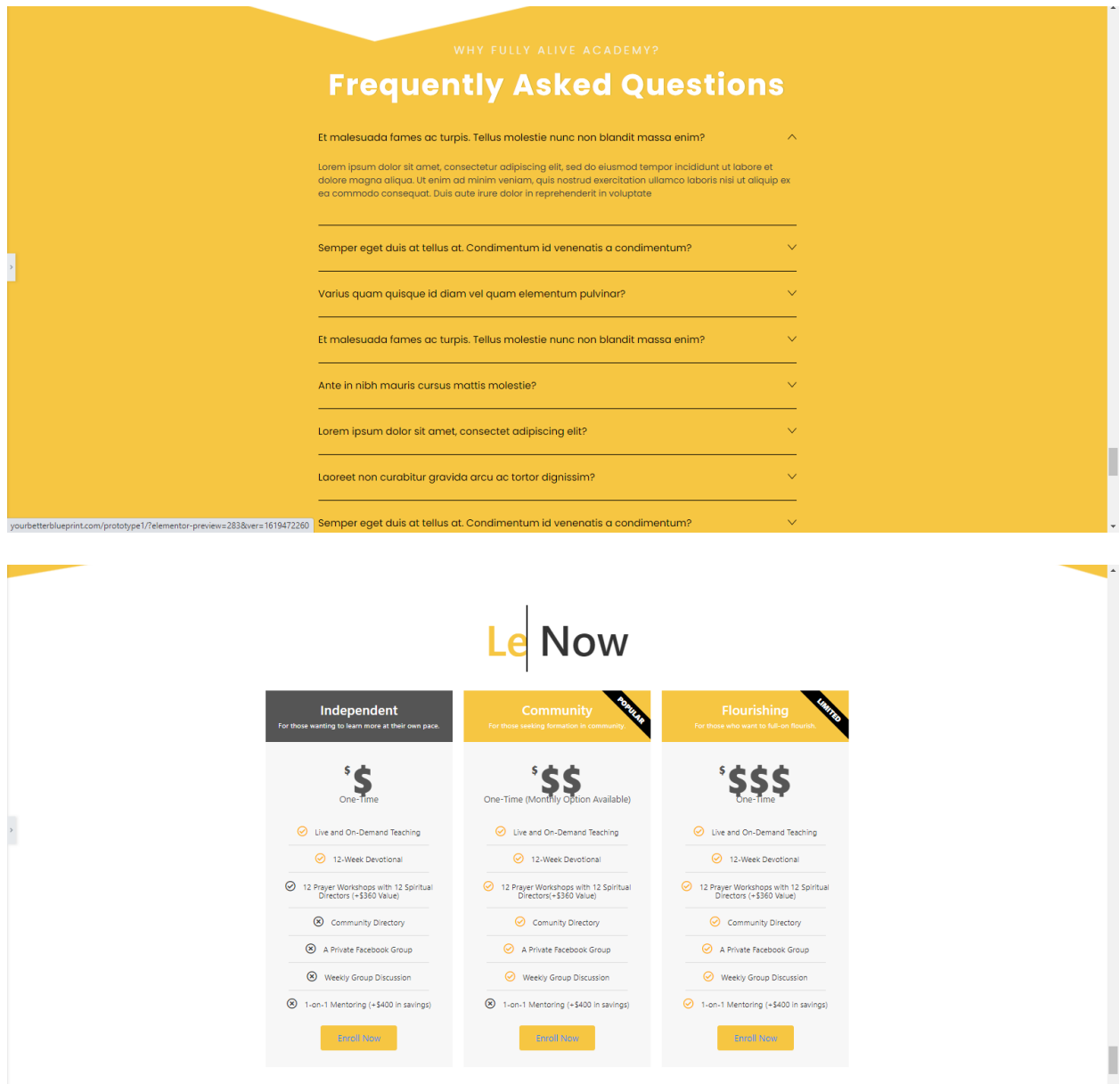
Group Discussion

In addition to the weekly post-live-teaching group discussion, there will be several other opportunities each week for students to connect with each other and Ryan, to discuss the week's topic.

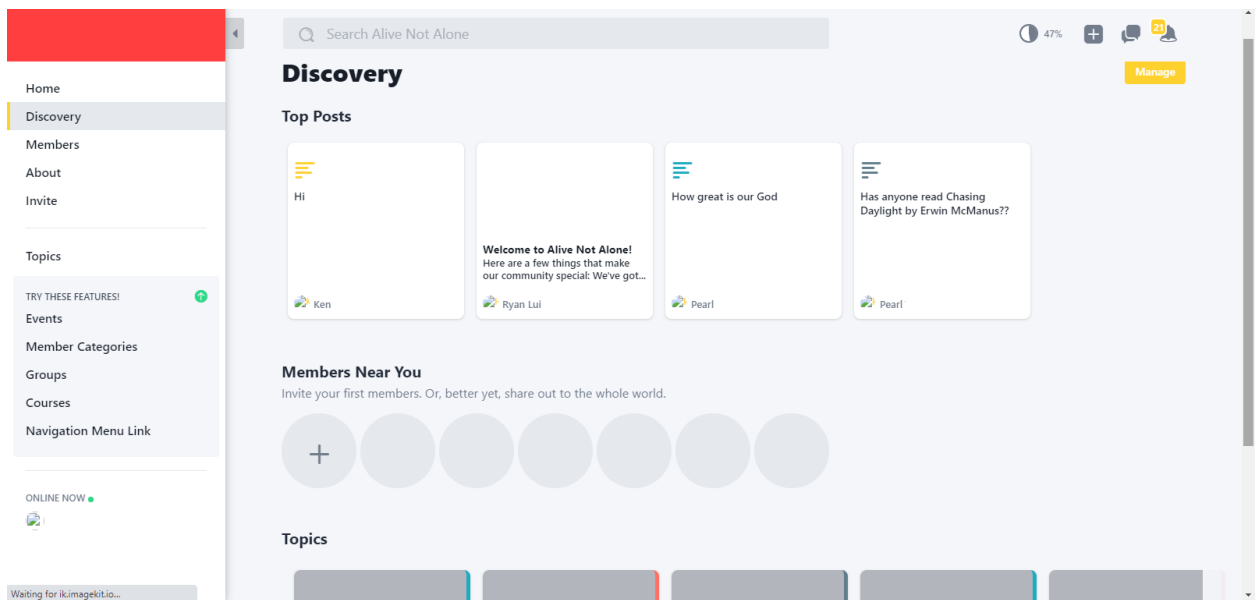
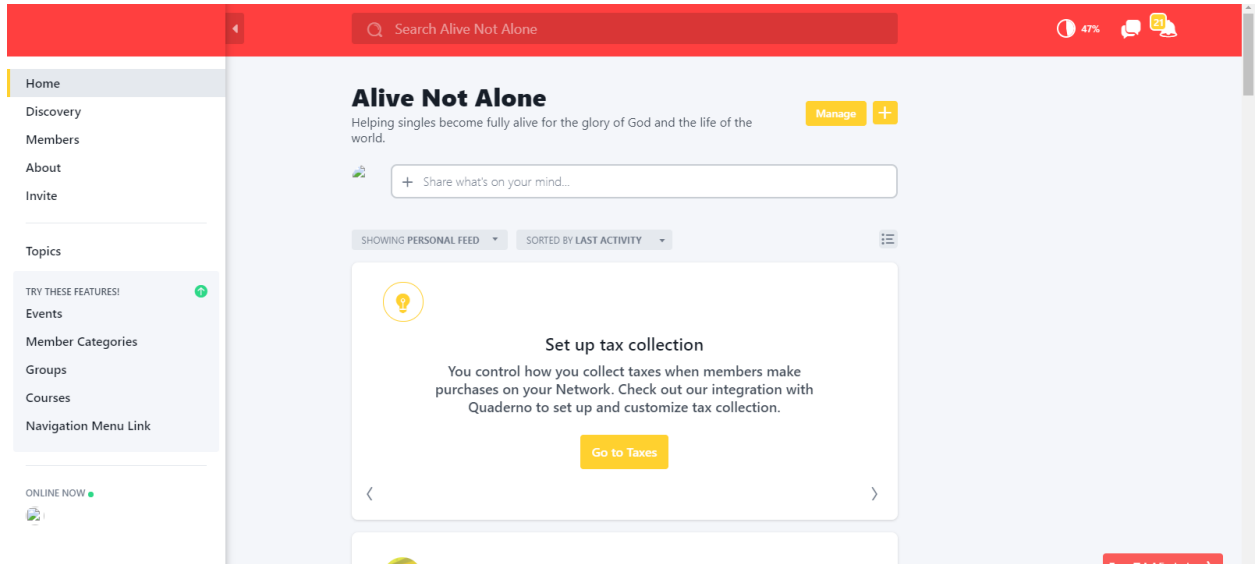


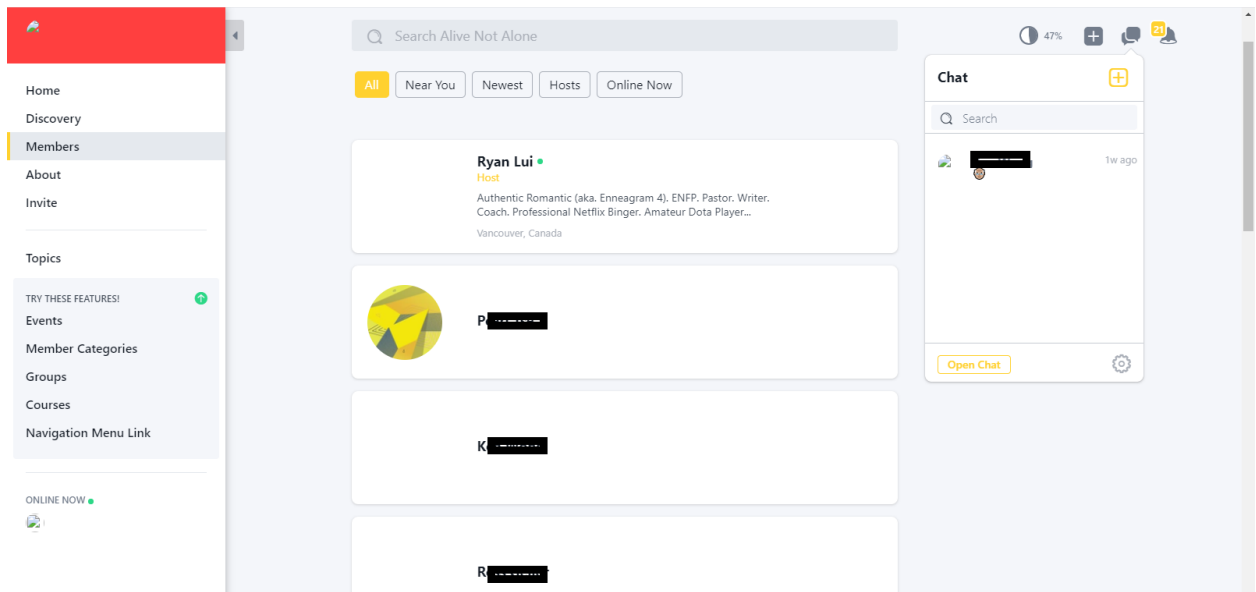
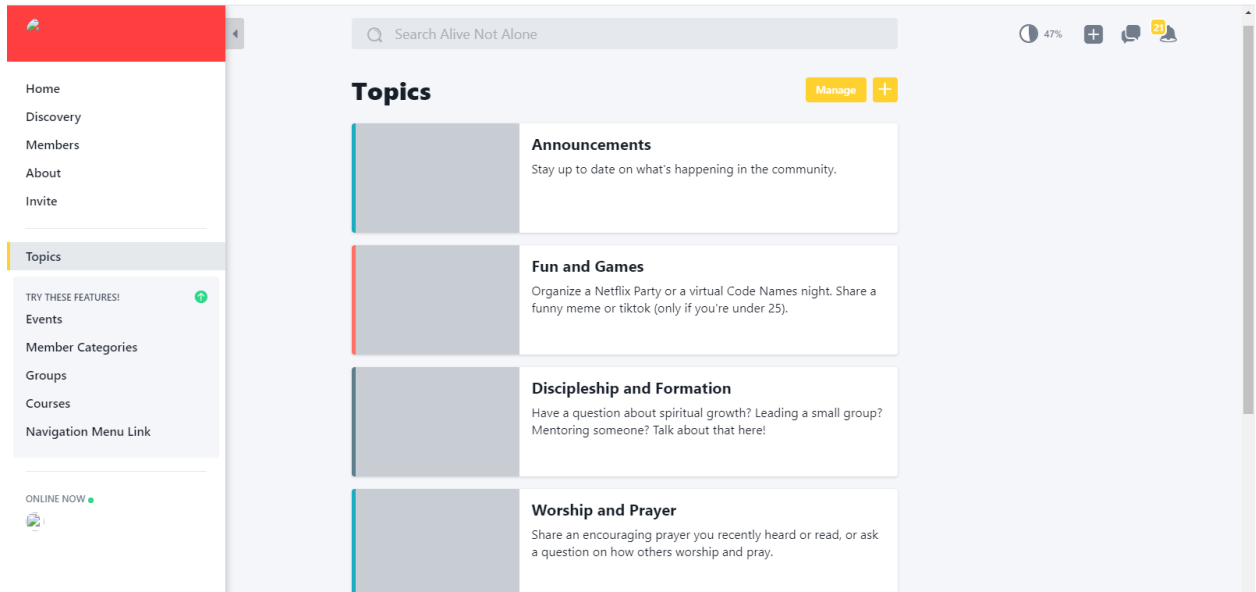
1-on-1 Mentoring

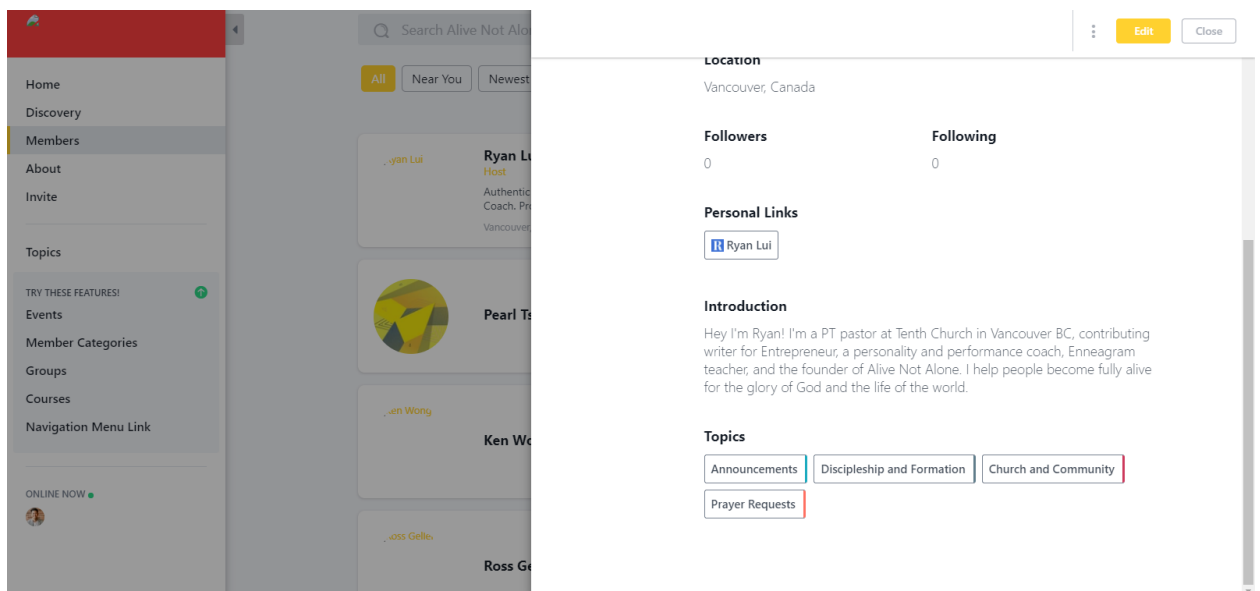
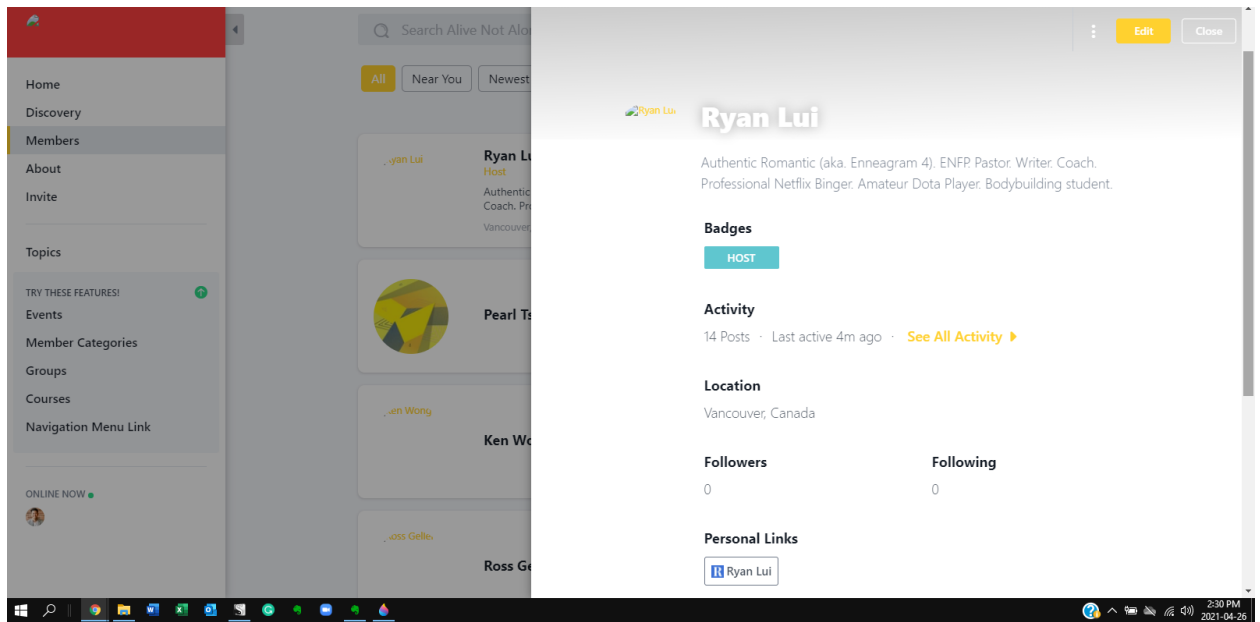
Each week, you have available times for 1-on-1 mentoring sessions to talk about your life, or something that's on your mind, and/or pray.



Prototype 2 (Site was down when screenshots were taken. In addition, many features shown to participants were from a free trial that has ended since taking the screenshots).



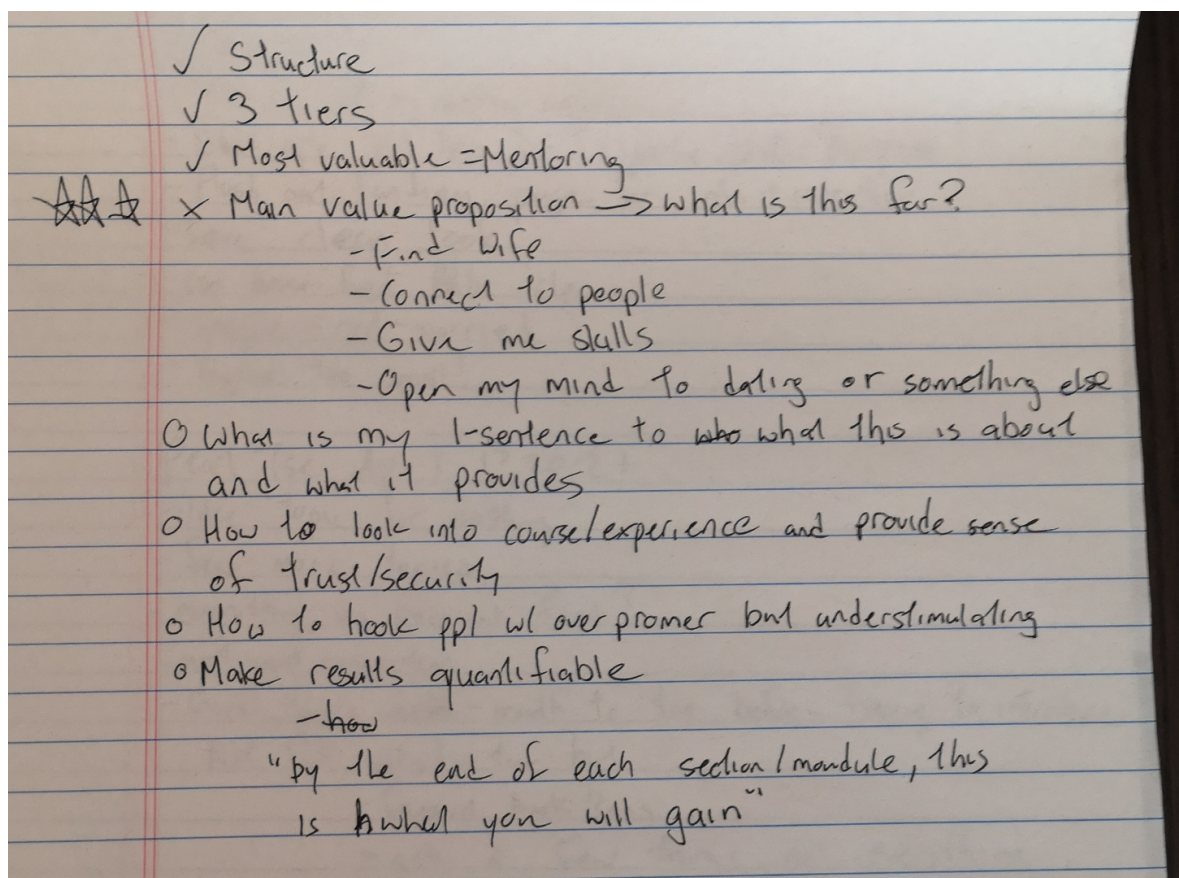




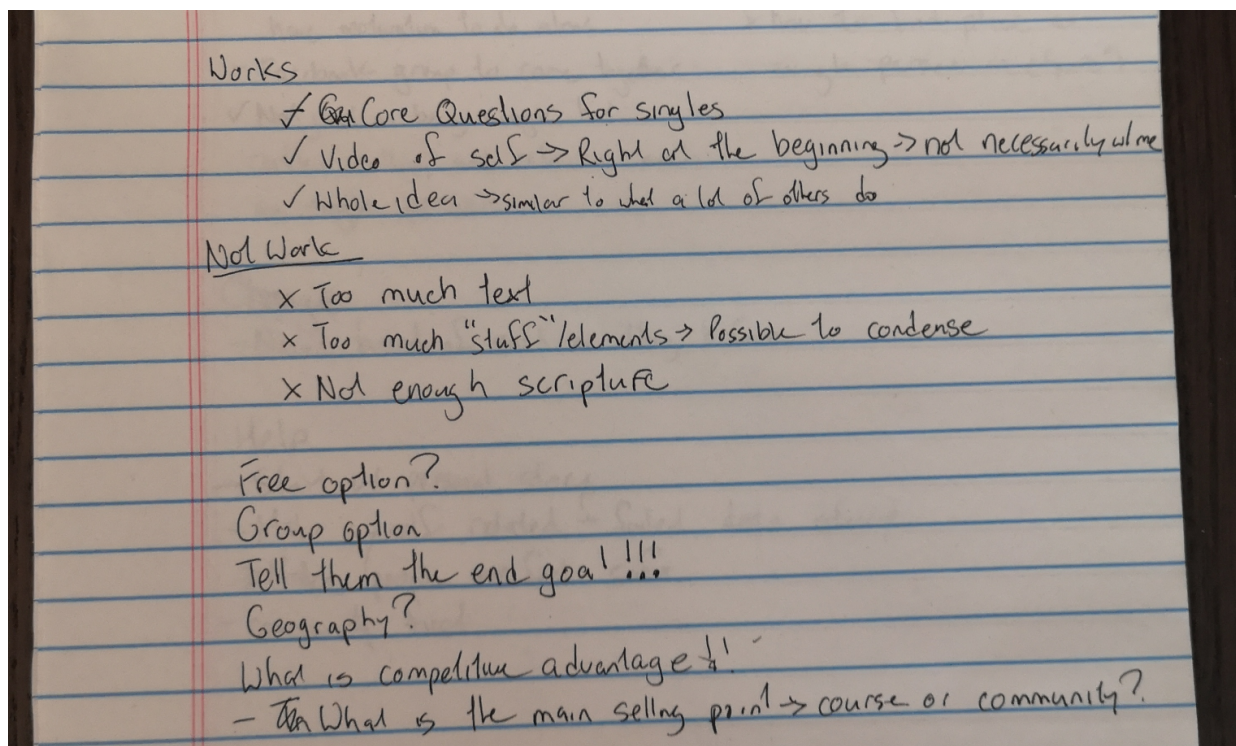
Interview Notes.

Prototype 1

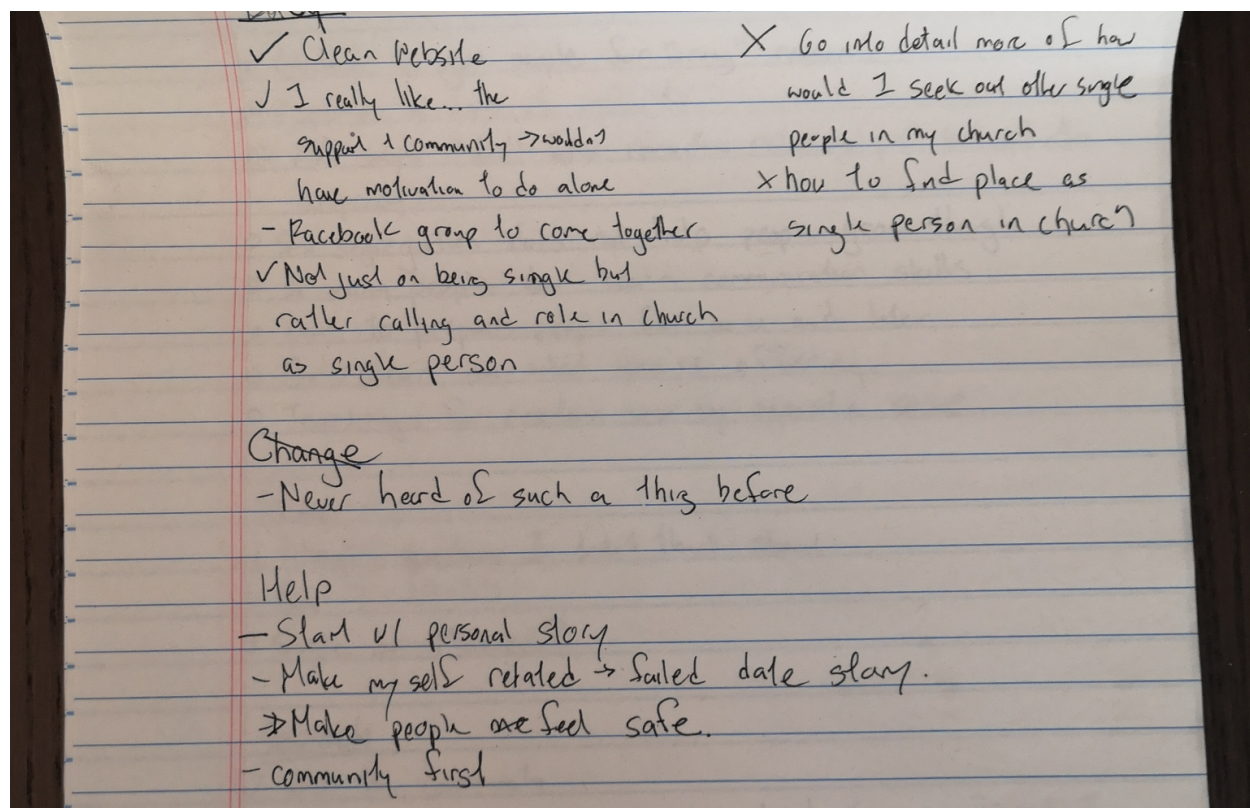
Participant 1



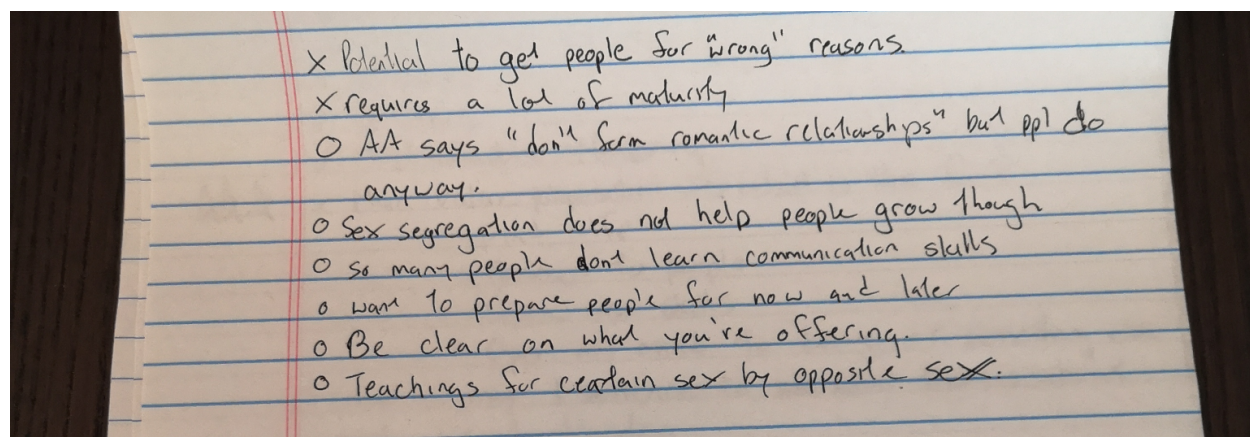
Participant 2



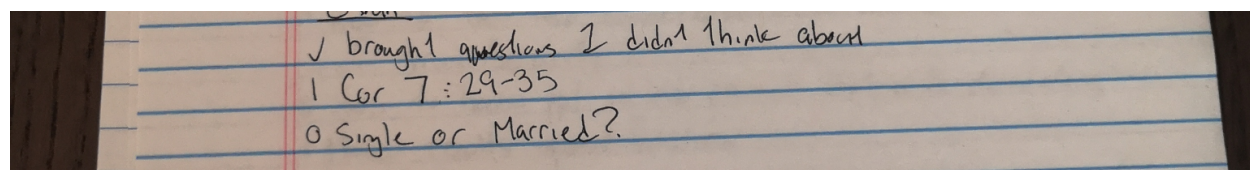
Participant 3



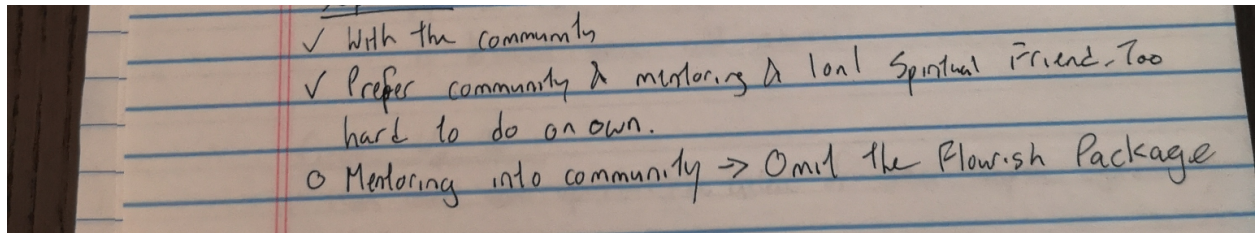
Participant 4



Participant 5

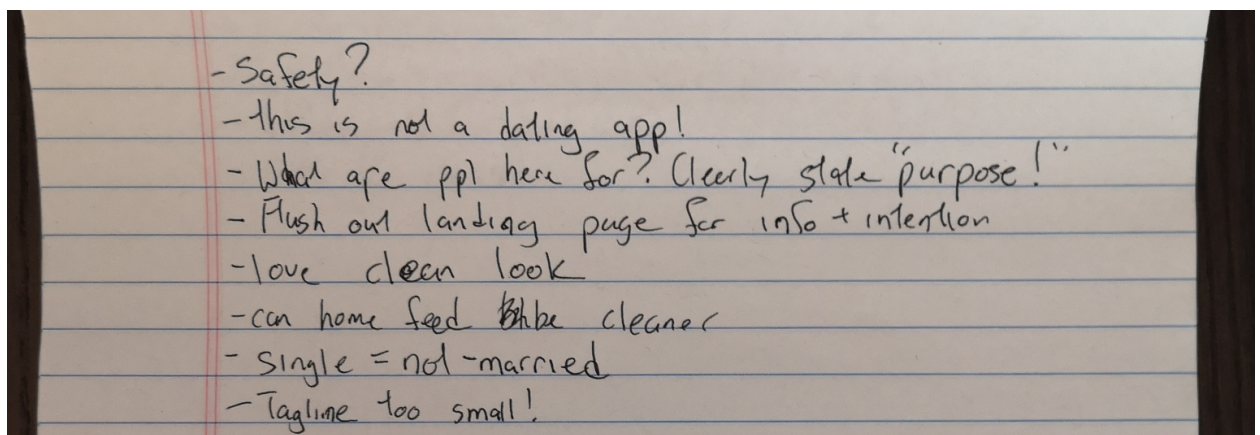


Participant 6

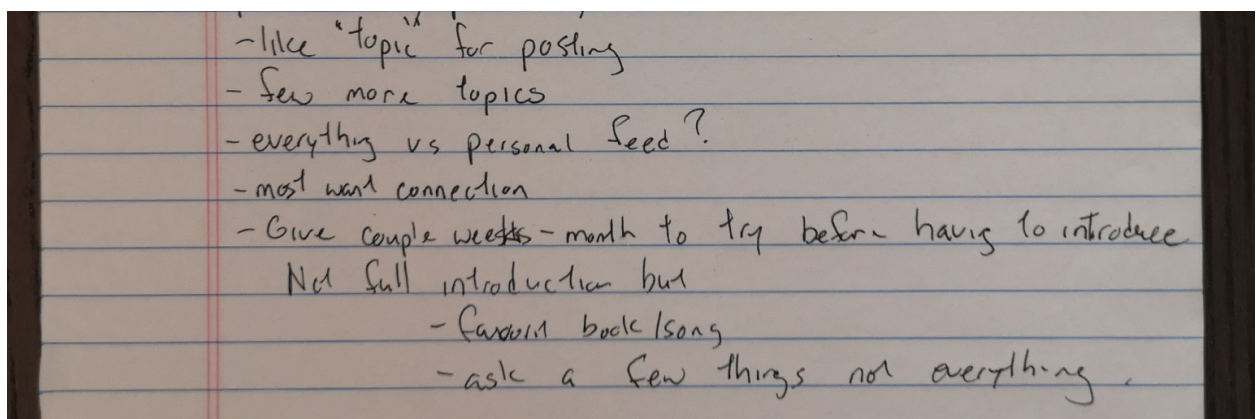


Prototype 2.

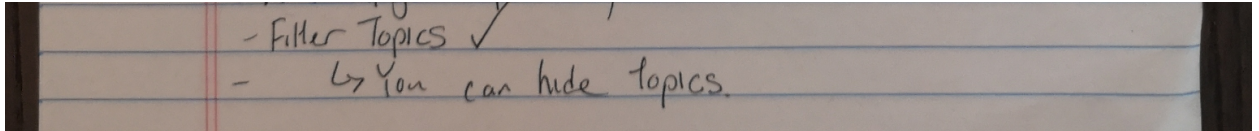
Participant 1



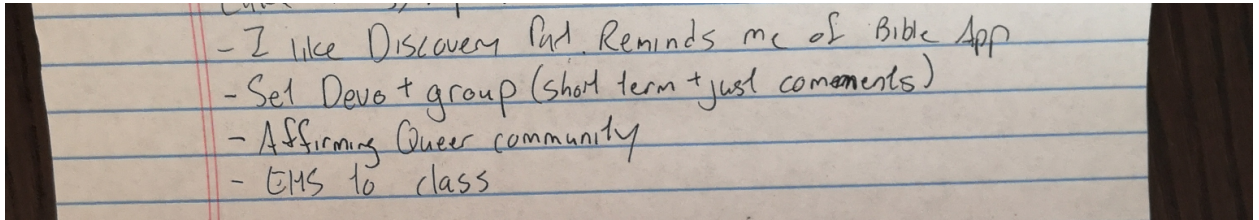
Participant 2



Participant 3



Participant 4



Participant 5 (notes were taken on Google doc)

Conceptually interesting

Resistance to join

The Facebook group then WhatsApp group. Mighty Network replaces it.

Helps gives me ideas (e.g. Pearl asking about Chasing Daylight)

Need moderators or people starting conversations

Need consistent activity or content

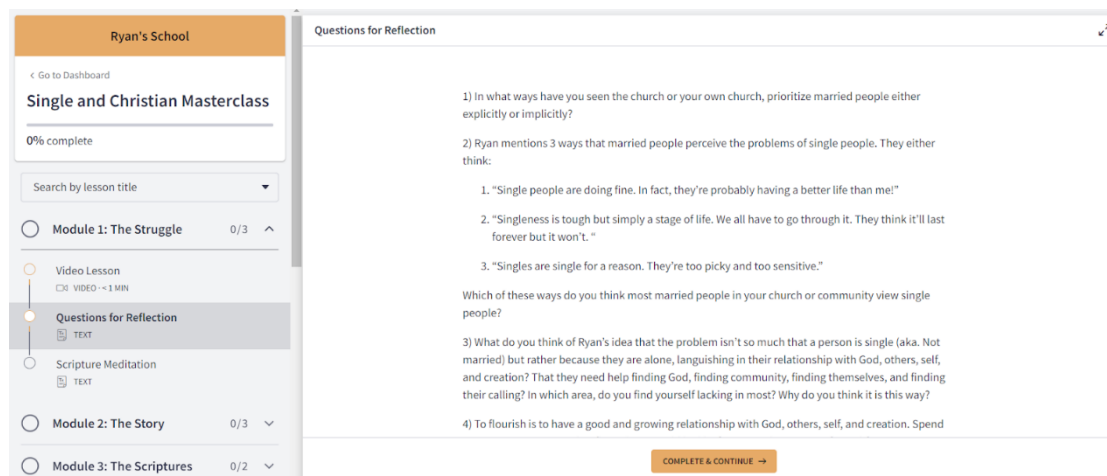
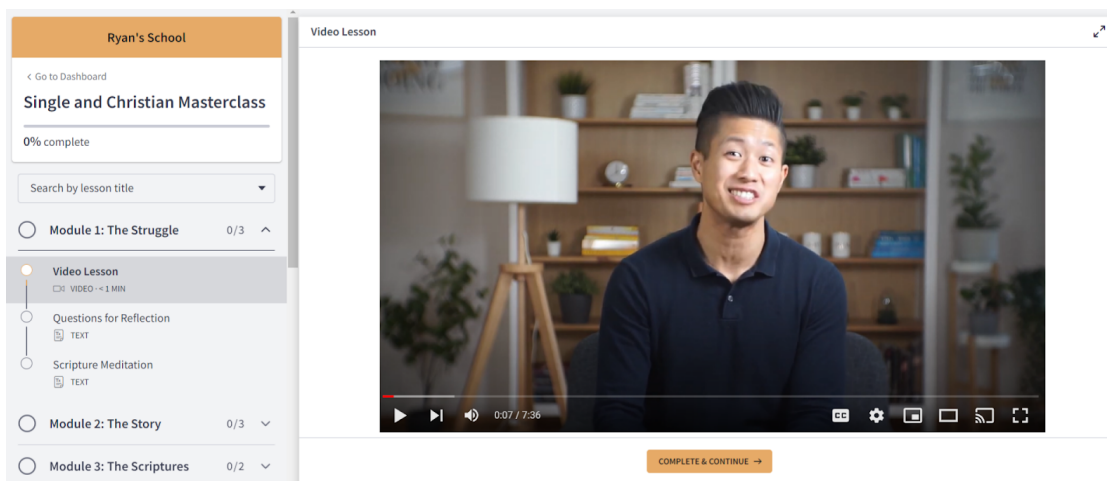
The filter is good/best feature

A good way to build friendships and relationships first

I like the flexibility with it not being a church specific group

APPENDIX E—SUPPLEMENTAL PROJECT DOCUMENTATION

Screenshots



Ryan's School

[Go to Dashboard](#)

Single and Christian Masterclass

0% complete

Search by lesson title

Module 1: The Struggle

0/3

^

Video Lesson

VIDEO → 1 MIN

Questions for Reflection

TEXT

Scripture Meditation

TEXT

Module 2: The Story

0/3

v

Module 3: The Scriptures

0/2

v

Scripture Meditation

In John 10:10, Jesus says that

"I have come so that they may have life, and may have it abundantly."

In other words, Jesus said and says today, that he came so that we may flourish and not languish, so that we may not be alone but rather, be alive.

Eugene Peterson, in his translation, writes,

"I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of."

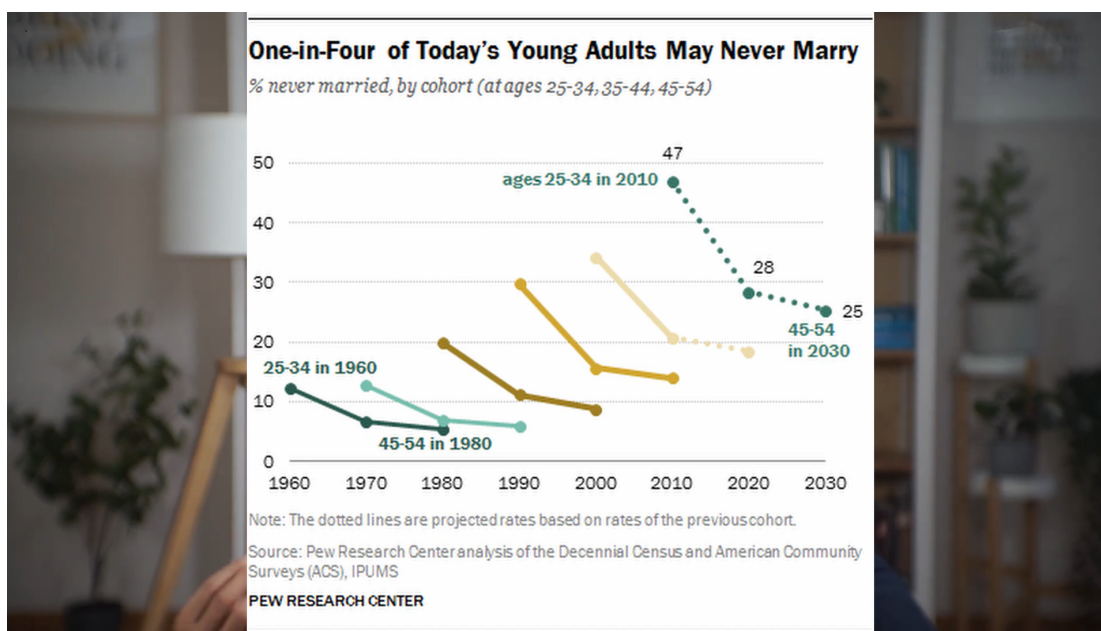
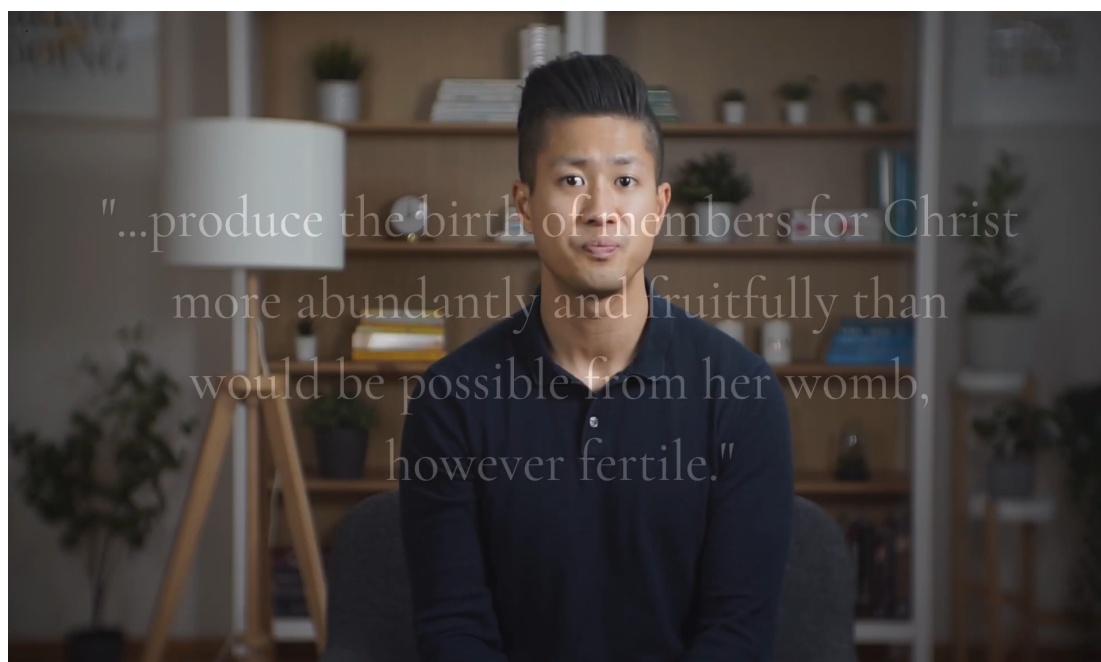
Whichever translation you prefer, commit this scripture to memory. And as often as you are able, meditate on it. Meditate on the biblical truth that Jesus came and is coming, so that you may be alive, not alone, and that you doing this course is exactly where God has wants you.

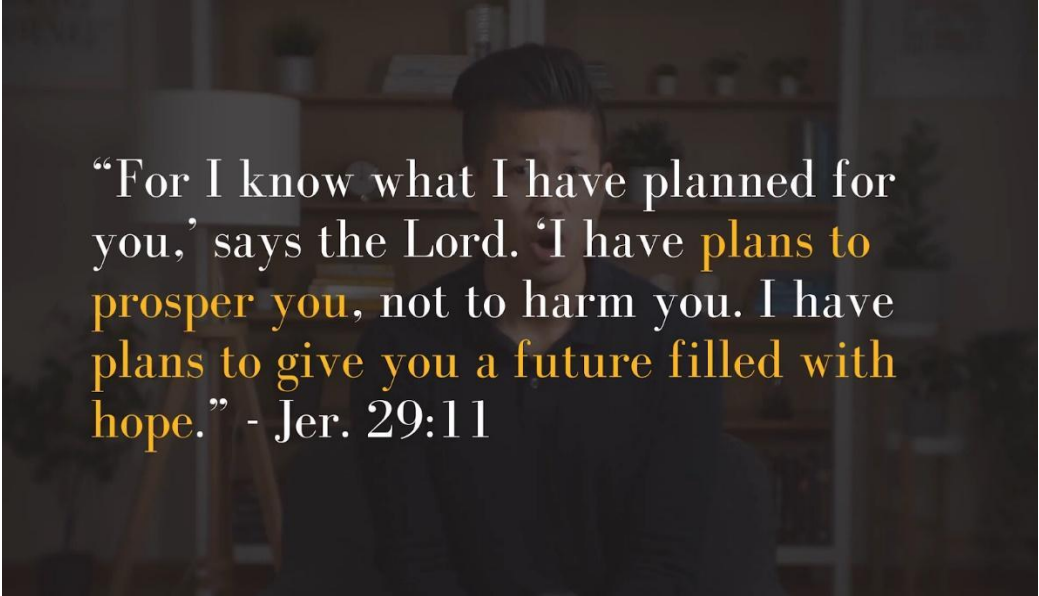
COMPLETE & CONTINUE →





"...produce the birth of members for Christ
more abundantly and fruitfully than
would be possible from her womb,
however fertile."





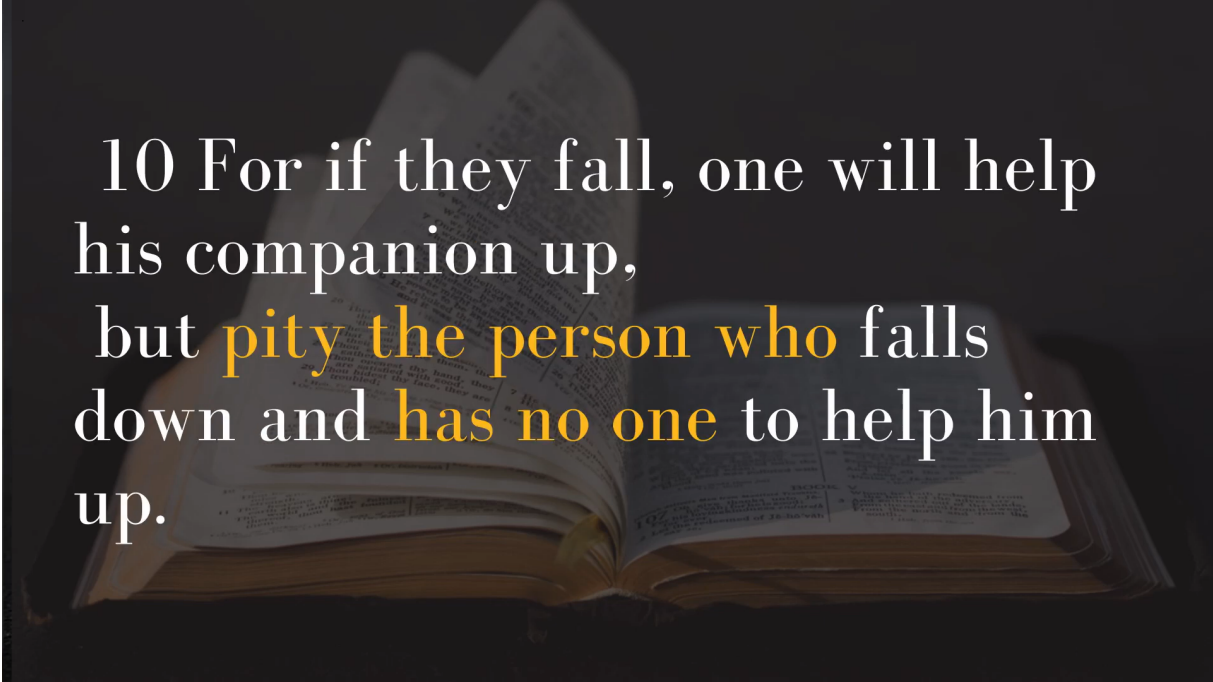
“For I know what I have planned for you,’ says the Lord. ‘I have **plans to prosper you**, not to harm you. I have **plans to give you a future filled with hope.**” - Jer. 29:11



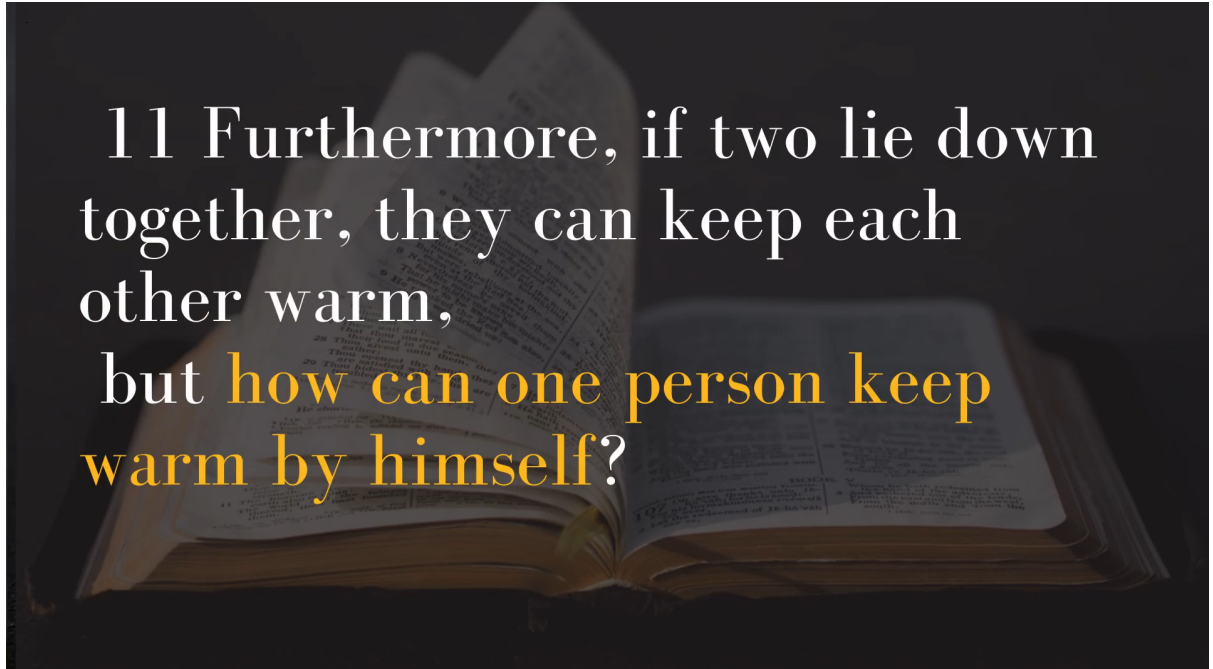
The LORD God said,
“It is not good for the
man **to be alone.**”
-Gen 2:18



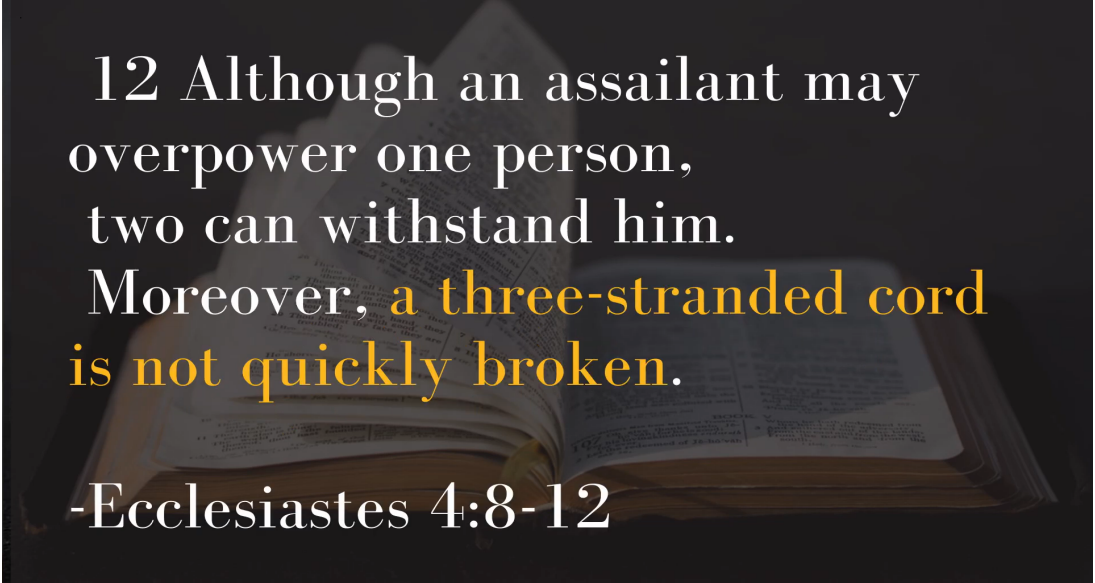
9 Two people are better than one
because they can reap more
benefit from their labor.

An open book is shown from a top-down perspective, lying flat. The pages are filled with small, dense text, likely from a Bible. The lighting is soft, highlighting the texture of the paper and the binding in the center. Overlaid on the book is a quote in a serif font. The words 'pity the person who falls down and has no one to help him up.' are highlighted in a golden-yellow color, while the rest of the text is white.

10 For if they fall, one will help
his companion up,
but **pity the person who falls
down and has no one to help him
up.**

An open book is shown from a top-down perspective, lying flat. The pages are filled with small, dense text, likely from a Bible. The lighting is soft, highlighting the texture of the paper and the binding in the center. Overlaid on the book is a quote in a serif font. The words 'but how can one person keep warm by himself?' are highlighted in a golden-yellow color, while the rest of the text is white.

11 Furthermore, if two lie down
together, they can keep each
other warm,
but **how can one person keep
warm by himself?**



12 Although an assailant may
overpower one person,
two can withstand him.


Moreover, a three-stranded cord
is not quickly broken.

-Ecclesiastes 4:8-12



THE IMAGE OF GOD

COMMUNION & COMMUNITY



“Then God said, “Let **us** make
humankind in **our image**, after **our**
likeness...”





Video Link

<https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLHY-msYv5OFx2TKETprVIqrVze1R4pKFB>

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