

single.

by
Ryan Peter

Sample chapter

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Why I wrote this book

Before we start this little book that I have written, I think it's good to first go over the reason why I have written it! Firstly, I think to write anything on spiritual things is quite difficult. I say this because no one is a fully-qualified expert in how God does things exactly, or what his SPECIFIC will (or purpose) is for every single person. Most of our lives we find out what God's purpose is *while* we are living - we don't get some sort of a blueprint when we are born (or, when we are born again.) And that's really the point, I think. It's about discovery. 'Life is a journey' as they say, not a bullet-point business document. Some people may come to this book looking for 'the secret' to living single or the 'top 5 keys' to finding your partner or that sort of thing. But that's not what this book can offer you. If wisdom was about formulas, the Bible would be written in bullet point. Wisdom appears, to me anyway, to be about relationship – just like the rest of Christianity.

I decided to write this book because I felt it necessary to talk about living a single life – specifically. Most books on this subject of 'romantic relationships' will tell you to take advantage of being single and live for God's glory. They'll tell you how to avoid ungodly relationships, prepare yourself for marriage, or what godly principles to apply in courtship or dating etc. That's all good of course. But I want to talk about singleness itself – I want to talk about loneliness and purposelessness. I want to talk about fear that maybe we won't EVER find someone, or that we've made so many mistakes in the past that it's too late. I want to talk about contentment – emotionally, spiritually, sexually, and any other word that goes. And finally, I hope to encourage singles to think, breathe, walk and live apostolically. Going to the nations and planting churches are callings on singles as much as couples. I want to talk about God's plan in this. I hope to encourage us to embrace singleness, perhaps even lifelong singleness, with joy and gratitude, rather than despair and fear.

The reason why I am mentioning 'lifelong singleness' is we need to perhaps understand that God really does call some to this. Perhaps even you or me. However, such a call is indeed a privilege and beautiful thing. This realization – that God may have just called me to celibacy (even though I don't feel he has) has certainly helped me to find contentment in my singleness. I'm happy to accept it if my notion is wrong – indeed, perhaps even CHOOSE it. But contentment is being happy with whatever he decides (or has decided) to do. In Christian history many were called to celibacy and found great joy in it. Surely, if this is the case, then there *really is* great reward – and great joy – in celibacy. And if there is great joy in celibacy, then there really must be great joy in singleness – whether we are going to be married or not.

This book is my little exploration into that idea – great joy in singleness. I pray it will be an encouragement!

I also pray that my little expose here on singleness will help to break some of the 'relationship formulas' I see floating around here and there. Both the world and the church present their own 'rules' for dating – or, in the church's case, rules for *not* dating.

As I said earlier, this book is really not a step-by-step formula in how to date correctly, or how to find your life partner, or God's Perfect Will in relationships. I've checked the Bible, and it really doesn't provide a formula for romantic relationships. Everyone has their own story... and perhaps that is exactly what God wanted to put across.

I also hope that this book will help those of you who (like me) feel a little guilty that we just don't know. We're not exactly sure of where we're going, or of who might be going with us. Perhaps we look at those 'winner Christians' who always seem to get everything right (and always know where they're going) in some envy. Why is it that everything just works out for them? They don't have to battle for anything, it all just falls on their lap. They seem to have all the self-control in the world and all the right qualities in the world. Yep, I've often looked on those guys with some envy. Perhaps we also look at those people who we know did everything wrong – they went from relationship to relationship, and didn't keep themselves very pure, and God seems to have

blessed them too with a partner. While we struggle on continuously with purity, trying to be faithful to God, and we get no clear direction – and nothing works out for us.

I've been there. A lot of us have. Some are probably just afraid to admit it. But Christianity is about faith and relationship, not about formula's and how-to steps to achieve your destiny. It certainly isn't about 'winning points' with God by being pure either, so that he would reward you with a partner. Your destiny is with Christ, and you are in Christ. God's will is that you'll know Him, and grow with Him. You are already in His will. His SPECIFIC PURPOSE for you is a slightly different story, and marriage may or may not be part of that purpose. But God is even going to work out those details. That is the difficult part, but also the most liberating part! God is sovereign and has his plans. Our formulas and religious ideas will not move the hand of God to give us what we want. No, Prov 19:21 NIV says, "Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails."

God is God, sovereign, and has all authority. By obeying so called formulas, or doing things the way others have done it, we cannot expect God to move in the way we want him to. He has his own plan, and in His own wisdom and goodness he will move as he pleases. And His way is always better, and full of life and joy.

I hope to share with you in this book tough lessons and revelations God gave me, of His Word and His Will. I think that once the singles in the church embrace their status and find contentment in God alone, with gratitude and joy, we'll have a stronger church. Because then singles will embrace an apostolic, sending, going, loving and serving Christianity instead of waiting to be married before embracing these great passions of this wonderful Gospel of the Kingdom.

So I hope that somehow this little book will help to- even in the smallest way- be part of building a stronger church. So we can advance the Kingdom forcefully and with all of our passion. With joy and gladness in our hearts to our great good God, who is worthy of all praise.

Thanks

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Ryan

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Part one
Treasuring God above all else



single

Joy in God - His command and our liberation

Why His Joy is our strength

We all seek for happiness.

Yep, every boy and girl, woman and man, really and truly – deep down inside – longs to be happy.

Hmmm... profound indeed! We all long to be happy. Bright new revelation there, Ryan. Good one. That should go down in the history books.

So why do we all want to be married?

Well, to be happy!

Objection: Its not about me, it's about others. Yes. I want to be married so I can love someone, make them happy.

But in fact, you *are* seeking happiness. And your happiness is this: your spouse is happy, and you will make them happy.

Ok, so that's my little philosophy for the beginning of this book that (hopefully) caught your attention to keep reading. In fact, that's really the premise of this book. We seek to be married so we can be happy. That's why singleness just doesn't make us happy, because we can't make someone else happy – and so therefore we think we can't be happy!

Well, I hope by the end of this book we'd find that (a) yes, this is true but (b) singleness was DESIGNED for our happiness too, just like marriage.

Yep, singleness was DESIGNED by God. And it was designed for our happiness.

It really isn't a coincidence that we're all born single – God didn't plan for us to be unhappy until marriage day. Marriage was designed for our happiness, and so was singleness. They're just... different. But, many of us may perhaps not be feeling this.

Am I advocating celibacy all the way? Well... maybe. Well, at least, for those who feel God has called them to it they shouldn't feel all that weird about it. Really. Celibacy is great – its God glorifying, it's full of joy, it's wonderful – and it's difficult. Sounds a lot like marriage doesn't it?

But this isn't a book about celibacy, mostly. It's a book about singleness. We're all single at some stage in our lives, and I'm sure that by you reading this book now that currently you are single too... just like me, at the time of writing this book. So, let's get this straight, I'm not advocating celibacy as the spiritual norm, we're all going to get married sooner or later. Really. It may feel like never, but to be honest we all will get married – unless we choose not to. Even if we're 75 and single, marriage could really be around the corner. And hopefully this little book will help us not look back at 75 years of singleness in bitterness and anger. But rather, with joy, gladness and gratitude. Because, singleness was designed for our happiness! God created all things good, and singleness is good. And we must be prepared to accept celibacy as a calling, with joy and gladness, or at least be prepared to serve God wholeheartedly if – perhaps – he has called us to celibacy (and we just don't know for sure yet!)

But doesn't the Bible say "it is not good for man to be alone...?" (Gen 2:18) Yes. Indeed. It actually isn't good for man to be alone, and "he who finds a wife finds what is good..." (Prov 18:22.) Yes. There's no reason for us to feel guilty that we would like to be married, and that we would like to be happy. But, when God created, he called it *all* 'good' and this includes singleness. Singleness is good. The Bible also says that those who don't marry do better than those who do (1 Cor 7.) We will deal with this seeming contrast throughout this book. If we read our Bibles fully, we see it claim that both singleness and marriage is good! God created all things good, and He 'richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.'(1 tim 6:17) ALL things includes ALL things, which includes singleness so singleness was also created for our joy and happiness.

So, what's all this about seeking our happiness? Well, let's start with how we are supposed to love God – happily. Emotionally. Just like we are to love our spouses.

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul and with all your mind...”(Matthew 22:37 NIV)

When you love someone, you enjoy being around them. And nobody says that you're selfish for acquiring the benefit of enjoying their company- or acquiring the benefit of the 'feeling' of enjoyment. In fact, the more you enjoy being around them the more there's evidence of the fact that you do love them.

Yet when it comes to loving God, many think that any enjoyment of this love (and of God) means we are loving God based on our feelings rather than on our decisions. While it's true that love is a decision, this doesn't mean there are no feelings whatsoever. If I truly love God, then I *enjoy* being with God, and I will – quite naturally – acquire benefits from this enjoyment. This doesn't mean that my love is self-seeking, it means that I truly love.

This is the Greatest Commandment. Love the Lord your God - with everything, absolutely everything. I like to lurk around Christian Theology Forums on the internet, and once picked up a topic where a guy was arguing that most worship music in church these days stirs up too many emotions. Their point was that people should worship God with their head not their emotions. They were scared that people would have a shallow, emotional, commitment to Christ. I can naturally understand the thinking – and may even be convinced – loving God without feelings seems like a noble idea. It means we can prove to God that we love him despite his gifts. But this isn't real love. God never created love that way. God doesn't even love us that way. The Bible is full of references to God's emotional feelings about us. To not INCLUDE your emotions in your worship is dry and, also unbiblical.

God tells us in his Word as to how to worship him in Mark 12:30 (NIV) “Love the LORD your God with ALL your HEART and with ALL your SOUL and with ALL your MIND and with ALL your STRENGTH.” (emphasis mine)

In other words, with your emotion and your mind and your body. Everything. Everything includes our emotions. After all, the Bible commands us to '*rejoice* in the Lord and be *glad*, you righteous; *sing*, all you who are upright in heart!" (Ps 32:11 NIV) or "Let the godly sing with *joy* to the Lord, for it is fitting to praise him." (Ps 33:1) These are not biblical commands saying we must worship the Lord without emotion.

So then the reason for this chapter, and why it is at the beginning, is I'd like to start by showing that God's commandment to us is to find ultimate satisfaction and happiness in Him. This is his will and command to us – and it is part of his free gift in salvation. I'd like to show that our natural inclination to seek for delight and pleasure and happiness is not, as it seems, a sinful or selfish thing. Sin might be where we go to be fulfilled, but sin is not having the need. I'd like to show that this desire and longing for pleasure and joy is in fact what God has instilled into us as a tool for finding Him. It's a way God has designed his glory to be shown to all the universe – when he is found to be the only and ultimate of all. Yes, he is shown to be the only person in the universe who can truly satisfy and give us living water. I'd like to convince you that it is only God who can bring us happiness, contentment, and joy. For He Himself is all we could ever need or want.

So contrary to what some Christians might say, I'd like to put forward the notion that God's desire is for our pleasure, and he understands that the only REAL pleasure we'll ever get is in Him himself. This is part of his way of loving us. Our happiness is His happiness, and His Glory is our true pleasure. He created us this way. This is why He died, so we could find Him and enjoy Him and worship Him freely. This is why he commands us to make disciples of all the Earth (Matt 28:19) and why His Word calls us 'friends of God' (Rom 5:11.) This is why we are now 'sons (and daughters) of God.'(Rom 8: 16)

He certainly didn't call us for our own glory (as if, we have any glory apart from God.) Rather, he called us for our GLORIFICATION - which is only in God himself. Rom 8:30b NIV "Those he justified, he also GLORIFIED" (emphasis mine) And, '...we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory." (Rom 8:17 NIV.)

God delights in His own glory, which means - he also is emotionally happy, and finds pleasure, in his own Glory. He delights in Himself. His commandment to us is to find delight in His glory and in Himself, just the same as He does. Why? Because there is nothing in the Universe that can bring more happiness than God. And God knows this. That is why he commands we praise him.

The ultimate reason that God's desire for us is that we should find pleasure and joy in Him, is that this is what will glorify God. Now, there is certainly no mistake that 'the heavens declare the glory of God' (Ps 19:1) and that God is 'all and in all' (Eph 4:6) so I am not saying that our pleasure and satisfaction in God is the only thing that glorifies God. God's very creation, made by His hand, glorifies Him. God's very existence glorifies Him. He is 'over all and through all and in all'(Eph 4:6) and everything works and exists for his glory (Rom 11:36.) But we are a part of that creation, and so it is our commandment to glorify him - and if we do not, then the rocks will cry out. He's command for us to worship Him is the very command that sets us free. Did he not say "whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."? (Matt 10:39, NIV)

Yet, it seems many Christians are scared of embarking on an actual quest to find satisfaction, joy and pleasure in God - on the idea that God is not interested in taking care of our emotional needs - or that emotional needs are not of God. Or because of some guilty complex that if we do so, we clearly don't love him enough or as we ought. But we must realise that our pleasure in God pleases Him. And therefore, if we are on a quest to obey Him, then we should also wholeheartedly seek to find our Joy and delight in Him. It pleases Him, because he loves us.

This is not selfish. This is God's gift to us. He has given us the gift of life, and now the self-sufficient God is calling us to partake in His self-sufficiency as his children. He's calling us to holiness. God is the very definition of Holiness, and He's joy and happiness that He finds in Himself is precisely the Joy and happiness he is calling us to partake of. Therefore, as we become more like Christ, we become more satisfied and full of Joy IN the Father just as Christ did and does in the Father. So, there is absolutely nothing wrong with pursuing our joy in Christ. The fact that we have emotions, desires, and longings is because

God created us that way. And everything He created is for His glory. And therefore, emotions, desires and longings are for His glory. They should not be snubbed; they should be used as tools for His glory. We should redirect our emotions to Him. And we should trust Him to give us the desire and ability to want to do so.

What this has to do with singleness

This is our starting, central, and finishing point when it comes to living as a single. In fact, it's a starting, central, and finishing point for our lives. We need to shift our goals to one goal - we need to seek one thing. Ps 27:4 says "one thing I ask of the Lord - the thing I seek most-is to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, *delighting* in the Lord's perfections and meditating in his Temple."

In other words, our central pursuit in life should be to gain Christ. In Phil 3:8,9 Paul says "Everything else is worthless when compared with the priceless gain of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have discarded everything else, *counting it all as garbage*, so that I may have Christ and become one with him."

The 'gain of knowing Christ' is more than just living forever - its eternal LIFE with the eternal JOY of the universe. Our lives on Earth are in preparation, anticipation and hope for that. For the final day when Christ's glory will be revealed. (1 Peter 4:13)

To bring it closer to the singleness factor - we should be considering marriage as worthless when compared to the priceless gain of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord. I'm not saying that we should consider marriage 'worthless' or 'garbage' but we should be considering the *pursuit* of marriage a 'worthless' endeavor or goal when COMPARED to the priceless gain of knowing Christ. This sets us free from worrying about it, or pursuing it as a main goal in life. It sets us free from looking to marriage for our happiness, but rather looking to making marriage happy. It helps to pursue Christ first. It doesn't mean that now we should feel guilty that we would like to get married, what it means is we understand that marriage isn't the highest form of satisfaction or intimacy in this life. Therefore, if God has a plan for us that does not involve marriage, we

have faith that he will supply us all the joy and intimacy we would need so that it will never become a stumbling block to us. And If we do get married, marriage doesn't get in the way of how we pursue or love God. It simply adds a different dimension to it.

The scriptures say "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness..." (2 Peter 1:3 NIV)

Our emotional needs are satisfied in God already... or, they should be. But unless we seek God in this way, with not just our minds, but also our bodies and our emotions, we will not find God satisfy those needs. We also won't find the power or desire to want to go to God to fulfill those needs. We have not surrendered them, or ourselves, to Him. Either we're afraid to, don't know we're supposed to, or just don't want to. Whatever the reason, we must surrender our all - and this includes our desire for marriage - to God. Then, trust Him to give us Joy in Him instead. He's Joy is our strength (Nehemiah 8:10.) And, "in You they trusted and were not disappointed," (Ps 22:5 NIV)

Marriage is not garbage

Now, I want to reiterate the point of calling marriage 'garbage.' I certainly wasn't saying that earlier. What I meant is that the pursuit of satisfaction in marriage is to be considered as 'garbage' when compared to gaining Christ. These are strong word Paul uses, saying he considers EVERYTHING garbage when compares to knowing Christ. It shows us just how wonderful our relationship with God can be. The reason for this is we will never be fully satisfied. Neither wealth, fame, glory or a wonderful marriage truly compares to Christ. There's nothing particularly wrong with those things, but that doesn't mean that they are on an equal playing field when it comes to knowing Christ. The world, however, will tell us otherwise. That's why most of the world is really struggling right now to keep lasting, fulfilling relationships going. Note my use of the word 'fulfilling' there. Didn't I just say that marriage will never be fulfilling or satisfying? No, I said that marriage will never satisfy ultimately. There is a difference. A satisfying marriage is not a marriage that satisfies ultimately. If this were the case, married people would not also run after money or fame. There would simply be no divorce factor at all. A satisfying, fulfilling

marriage is marriage that is satisfying and fulfilling. It's a good marriage. But it is not what satisfies and fulfills us ultimately.

But, is it *part* of our ultimate satisfaction at all? The answer, I believe, is no. Just as money can't buy you happiness, so marriage can't get you happiness either. Yes, it can make you happy. It's supposed to. It was designed by God to be a blessing. But blessings are blessings, they're not God himself. God is IN the blessings, and so we love the one who is IN the blessing. We don't love the blessing, we love the blessed.

Essentially, here is the phrase that I'm trying to get across with marriage: marriage was designed, by God, to *give* us joy - but not to *BE* our joy. Much like everything in creation, actually. The glorious sunset, the fresh sunrise, the cozy rain, the superbly fragrant flowers – and the exhilarating kiss – all designed to give us joy, but not to *be* our joy. When the exhilarating kiss becomes our joy, then we've launched into idolater zone.

So God *is* our joy, and everything else was created as pointers, reminders, pictures, sensations – that remind us of our true and lasting joy, God himself.

If marriage cannot completely satisfy, why get married at all?

Because you might fall in love.

And falling in love is a joyous thing, designed by God himself to remind us of him.

What I'm hoping for in my own life, is that if I ever get married, it would be because I've fallen in love. Doesn't sound particularly groundbreaking, I know, but only at first thought. Somehow, it actually does seem a little bit of a novel idea. At least in these days, I think it just may be the ticket. It almost takes the pressure off- because I *fell* in love. It was unexpected, spontaneous, a wonderful surprise.

Does this mean I should live like a hermit and somehow, in some way, God will have her knocking at my door? No, of course not. God calls us to be

in relationships with people. Not to be hermits. What it means is that God writes the story, and we react to the situations in our own particular godly way.

Why I say ‘own *particular* godly way’ is because we are all different, have our own personalities etc. So, we have our own ways of responding to things – and because we’re Christians, we respond in Godly ways and not ungodly ways. But this was never designed to take away from our own personality. Rather, it enhances it.

I’m careful with this because we all want to hear the formula of how we’re supposed to react. Suppose I see a girl who really attracts me. How am I supposed to react? Well, most times, we rip out the ‘rule-book’ and go through some weird list that we somehow have inherited from friends, family, the world and church ideals. Maybe your rules go something like this:

Rule 1 for seeing a girl you like, and find attractive, is ‘don’t talk to her.’ Yep. You wouldn’t want her to “sidetrack your walk with God,” so don’t talk to her.

Rule 2- kill your feelings. Didn’t you know you’re not supposed to have feelings until God makes you have feelings?

Rule 3 – if you can’t kill your feelings, and they don’t seem to be going away, marry her.

Ok, maybe these aren’t your rules. Let’s say (for the girls) you meet a new guy who seems to be doing it for you. Perhaps your rules go something like this

Rule 1 – date him.

Rule 2 – kiss him.

Rule 3 – realize you just ‘want to be friends’ and break up.

The first set of ‘rules’ probably falls more into a church idea, while the second a worldly one. Interestingly enough, whether its church or world, there seems to be these rules you need to abide by... the rules of dating, or the rules of not dating.

The great thing about falling in love, however, is that it hangs the rules! Now, we use rules generally to help us from getting hurt—alright, wise decision. Falling in love can also come with some falling into heartache. But, using the rules also helps us to not fall in love, and to be too clinical and downright too intense about our relationships. So, what do we do? Hopefully, the chapter on dating will help us see it a little clearer. This book wasn't designed to give 'dating guidelines' or anything like that, but we will have to take a good look at this, and examine the current two extreme trends of 'don't date unless you marry,' and 'don't marry unless you date.' Either of them don't seem to be very effective to avoid heartache, it seems.

Right, back to the point – we marry because we fall in love, and God created the process of 'falling in love' to be a joy and wonderful thing. Indeed, he did. I'm not being naïve about this, as if 'falling in love' doesn't come with some pain and heartache... so my definition of 'falling in love' actually means this:

(a) *two* people fall in love (its not one sided)

(b) two people decide to *commit* to each other in love (they decide to love each other, and continue to love each other)

The point is that love comes to us as a surprise, but from there it requires commitment and God's grace. It was God that brought it to us, and God that will keep it, but we have to decide to commit to it, and to our promise to each other and God.

Keep this in mind while we approach contentment in being single throughout this book. I will hopefully explain in more detail in Part 4 (Dating and Romance)

But what if He doesn't bring anyone?

Well, what does it matter? Your satisfaction is in Him, and your desire is for Him, so what difference does it make? If he decides to give you the gift of marriage, He will. If he decides to give you the gift of singleness, he will. As Paul says in 1 Cor 7 - 'one man has this gift, another that.' But ALL of us, who

believe, have received the gift of salvation- and that gift is worth more than singleness or marriage. I know this may sound overly simple, but that's the bottom line. Getting to that point in our thinking and emotions though, takes daily commitment and trusting in God.

So, because “it is not good for the man to be alone” (Gen 2:18) and, because we do fall in love - and God created it that way - it is not a sin to go ahead and get married. If you fall in love, get married. Otherwise you might fall into temptation. This is what Paul means in 1 Cor 7. If you fall in love, get married. If you don't, well, then don't. The problem now, comes into 'controlling our passions.' Paul says in 1 Cor 7:36 that “if a man wants to marry his fiancée because he is having trouble controlling his passions and time is passing, it is alright.” Get married. But, what if we have no fiancée? What if there is no romance in our lives? It seems Paul is saying that if we are struggling with our passions we should find someone to marry, but if we're not we do 'even better' not to marry. But to marry because of our passions could be the wrong reasons to marry. This could cause us to marry the first one who comes along, and this could end in serious problems later on. So, although this is wise advice, I don't think it's exactly what Paul is trying to get across. He is saying, it's wise to marry if you can't control your passions. However, if you CAN and you DON'T marry, you 'do even better.' Surely, we should be striving towards the 'even better.'? I believe we can – in God's grace we can. God has now, through Jesus, given us the grace where our passions can be kept under control and we can wait in patience to fall in love, and not to make a decision for any other reason other than love. That's what the 'even better' means – it does not necessarily mean lifelong celibacy (although, it could) it may also mean that you marry when you have 'fallen in love,' and not because you can't control your passions. The 'when' love comes around is in God's hands, so you do better not to concern yourself with it and find your satisfaction and purpose in God.

We'll address this question more clearly throughout the book, particularly in part 3 (Sexuality) and Part 5 (Making a choice.) For now, let's keep this idea in the back of our minds - God is REALLY in control, and understands love more than all of us. Let's rather leave it up to His wisdom as to when we meet

someone and when we fall in love. Let's relax, take it easy and not worry about it, and pursue what will bring greater rewards - Christ himself.

God commands we find happiness and joy

Now we must go back to the original premise of this chapter - which is that Joy in God is both His COMMAND and OUR LIBERATION. I say it is His command starting with the scripture that we should love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, strength, body and everything. You may say to me that the command to love the Lord is not necessarily a command to find Joy in Him, but I would beg to differ. You could criticise this idea by saying that to pursue joy in life is a selfish, self-centered approach and that God does not wish us to pursue joy, but to pursue Him. But, he IS love. To say that we must pursue Him means we must pursue love. Love comes with feelings and emotions. I don't think any friends, family, or spouses would be quite impressed with us if we loved them from a purely 'dutiful' unemotional kind of way. Our priority is to pursue him, and HOW we do that is by loving Him - and loving him with gratitude and joy in our hearts. But because only God can give us joy (Gal 5:22) and God commands we are to love him with joy and gratitude, we must go to God himself and ask for that joy. No one accuses a brother of sinning if He came to the Lord because he was seeking for peace and joy and love. We would say, 'welcome! This is the only place you will find it. In God Himself' so therefore, why are we not to continue to seek these things in God? To forget about them, would be to forget about who God is. To forget about who God is, would be depersonalizing God. Then, he becomes a mystical spirit rather than a loving, just, infinite and full of Joy sovereign supreme Lord.

God's command for us to rejoice and find joy in Him liberates us because we finally understand that our in- built desire for happiness, peace, joy and love is in fact God placed. These desires are used for His glory because when we seek to find all these things in Him, and are 'not disappointed', He's worth is displayed. Ps 89 : 15,16 "*Happy* are those who hear the *joyful* call to *worship*, for they will walk in the light of your presence, Lord. They *rejoice* all day long in your wonderful *reputation*. They exult in your righteousness."

The Lord's reputation is linked into the fact that He is indeed able to abundantly supply everything we need and desire (he is able to make us happy and joyful.) His reputation is at stake if he can't. "The Lord is my shepherd; *I have everything I need.* He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside peaceful streams. He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths, *bringing honor to his name.*" (Ps 23:1-3) We bring honor to God by walking right paths, and those right paths are holiness. And holiness is lived out by the fruits of the Spirit in Gal 5:22 "But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us : love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, gentleness and self control. Here there is no conflict with the law." This means that joy and peace are not things in conflict with the law; in fact, they are the very things that fulfill the law, which is why the Lord produces them in us by His Spirit. God guides me along His right paths - of love, joy, peace etc. and by doing so this brings honor to His name. He is glorified through Joy. So he gives us Joy not just because He loves us, but for the sake of His own name. The fact that he is able to supply our needs, and does not withhold any good thing from us, is evidence of His love. The fact that his love brings Him glory, liberates us and allows us to understand that to seek for these things - in Him - is indeed exactly what He commands us and expects us to do. Phil 4:4 - "Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again -rejoice!"

Therefore if we are desiring joy (because we need it, and he commands it!) we are not sinning at all! It is not the desire that is the problem- it's where we go to fulfill that desire that is the sin. For, if we go somewhere else besides God to fulfill our needs and desires, we are committing idolatry. We end up loving those things, when we should love God. We cannot love God truly if we are seeking to satisfy our needs somewhere else. The two cannot line up. Firstly, because we love Him through obedience and he commands us to find our needs in him.

"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink,"(John 7:37 NIV) and "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matt 11:28 NIV)

Secondly, because we "taste and see that the Lord is good"(Ps 34:8) and realise that he truly is everything we could want. You do not love your wife or

husband by living with or being with someone else. No, you've chosen to stay with them because you love them and they are exactly what you were hoping for in a partner.

Likewise, we are to do the same with God. In fact, first, and before everything else. It is the beginning, central and end of our lives. It is the only thing that satisfies.

Finding Joy in God is not easy

If I have managed to at least convince you that God's command (and therefore, our pursuit) is to find Joy in God, or to make our joy God, then you will probably be coming to the revelation that to find this joy is not easy - and most of the time we are not finding this joy. In fact, you may start thinking that it's downright impossible. If it is God's command we find our joy in Him, that doesn't necessarily mean we will. It's not something that might just 'happen.' Especially if we've been living as Christians for years, and maybe have even gotten bogged down with religion, rules and what I would call 'non-delightful dutiful, performance-oriented dry Christianity.' I call it this long name, because our duty should be to delight in God, but such duty only becomes delightful if we pursue it through Christ. Duty loses its delight when it is done for the sake of religion. I.e., when it is done just to look good, to impress God or others, or just to save our souls from punishment. Duty is not delightful when duty is done for the sake of duty. But duty and discipline becomes an absolute joy when it is seen as a means to acquiring a treasure. Indeed, a treasure that is worth going through pain and suffering. Such a treasure is Christ. Such a treasure is the Kingdom of God. And the joy and delight of discovering this treasure is what God wants to give to us.

Here is where I think contentment is so important, when we approach this idea in reference to being single. Most of us might not experience fulfillment and delight in God. Instead we find ourselves lonely, depressed, angry and dry. We serve God, but start looking for our joy elsewhere. One of the principle ways we try and find such joy is through relationships. Friendships don't seem to always suffice. (Although, with God I believe friendship begins to take on a whole new level and fulfillment. In fact, friendship is one of the principal joys

of singles.) But, often they do not suffice. We're looking for something more intimate, something that understands us more. Something deeper. Something that will accept us as we are. Something that we can also experience and enjoy. We feel like we can't find it in God, or don't know we're even supposed to, and so go through romantic relationship after relationship. We fall in love (in a one-sided, only us that are in love kind of way) too easily. We have romantic feelings for almost anyone of the opposite sex. We're thinking about it too often. We're constantly asking God 'who is it?' and 'when Lord?' and always looking for some sign to fall from heaven or even proof that it is the person who currently we have a bit of an infatuation for.

This kind of living is just way too intense and totally contradictory to the way God expects us to live. It ties us down. It keeps us from being free. And it produces repercussions that are not good for our enjoyment of life, and our enjoyment and joy in God. We don't appreciate what we have, and so can become bitter or depressed. We don't treat the opposite sex normally, but rather become intense around them. We start feeling that we're under pressure to impress and perform. We struggle to build proper friendships. All the pain and hurt of past rejection causes us to distrust people. Perhaps we even struggle to trust ourselves! We feel we are inadequate. We might start feeling worthless. We might feel that there is nothing attractive, good, or desirable about us. So our old enemy has stolen our joy, lied to us about our identity, separated us from the Flock and made us a stray sheep easy for the picking. We feel like outsiders. We think 'it's always better for everyone else.' We listen to the lies of the enemy, and feel that perhaps God doesn't care. Perhaps he is punishing us. We start living under the false allusion that everyone else is so happy, and we're the exception. We feel that we have a right to such happiness too.

Once we have been living in such a thought and emotional cycle for too long, it will start boiling over to our view of men and woman - and then all sorts of other sins creep in. Lust. Lying. Distrust. Misunderstanding. Perhaps even homosexuality. We stop allowing the Spirit to produce His good fruits in us, and instead start giving way to the fruits of the flesh. Lust is inviting, because it's our only source to intimacy (so we think.) If we can't have what we want legally, we'll take it some other way. We could get involved in the wrong

relationships, fall in areas we never wanted to. Pornography, dodgy movies, 'romantic' novels and the like seem to be more inviting as our loneliness and depression gets bigger. And so our minds become slaves to sin and the flesh. And we'll end up doing those things that we don't want to do.

But who will rescue us from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Rom 7:24,25 NIV)

I know I might be taking this to a bit of an extreme. But these extremes exist, and they tend to exist in many of our friends and family all around us. Some of us are more prone to it than others. Some of us are weaker to it than others. I totally believe that unless we are 'transformed by the renewing of our minds,' (Rom 12:2) there is only space for evil thought. Loneliness, depression, and frustration DOES lead to sin, unless we deal with it straight away. The world certainly provides no real solution to the problem. Its only solution is lust and selfishness. If we follow the world's way, we of course find ourselves in sin. We cannot ignore the problem- we have to let God deal with it.

Although I have devoted Chapter 4 for a look at loneliness and the fear of loneliness, I have devoted this first chapter to the principal defeat of it. Interestingly enough, I believe the problem is also linked with idolatry, which is why I'm addressing it here.

Chapter 1 in Part 3 also looks at lust, and here in this first chapter of the book I am also talking about the principal defeat of lust. If we are not seeking for God to fulfill all our needs, and seeking him as our treasure, then we are seeking something else to do what only God can, and wants, to do. This is idolatry. The throne of our heart is now shared with other things, and God's will is for this throne to be His alone. We are to love the Lord with all our heart. I believe the only way we can defeat lust and loneliness (and the fear of loneliness) is by finding something more delightful, something more pleasurable, and something that makes us completely happy. This we can find in Christ.

Your treasure is your joy

Because Jesus said in Luke 12:34 that “wherever your treasure is, there your heart and thoughts will also be.” I think that I wouldn't be far off by claiming that non-joy in God is indeed a *result* of idolatry. I make this link because I don't think it is possible to have your heart fully devoted to God, by finding your joy in the things of this world. In fact, that is the very point Jesus was trying to make. In Matt 6 he says it simply “You cannot serve both God and money,” and Jesus also said to the Pharisees that a kingdom cannot be divided against itself. If Satan drives Satan, his kingdom cannot stand (Matt 12:25.)

If your heart is in money, or in romance, then it cannot be in God. You cannot serve both God and money. “What union is there between God's temple and idols?” (2 Cor 6:16) Certainly, the principle is true for Romance as well. You cannot serve both God and Romance. If your aim and pursuit is constantly to find happiness and security in Romance, then it must be that Romance is your idol. Romance is your joy, and not *a* joy. It appears to be the end itself, and not really just part of the experience of life. If Romance is your idol, that is what you find all your delight and joy in. I don't think I'd be unreasonable to make this link. Surely non-joy in God is the result of something else having taken the place of God in your life? I understand that there are 'desert seasons' but those are seasons when your delight is still in God, but the spiritual experience might have been taken away for a short while. I'm talking here about an overall joy and delight, which is usually the result of our love towards something. (for example, if we 'loved' the sea, we tend to feel and excitement and joy from it when we see it, swim in it, or hear it crash on the shoreline while sleeping at night!)

The Idol of Romance is the idolatry I talk about in Part four. Consider this excerpt from a story about a traveller on his way to the City of God (having escaped from Christian City which represents religious, dry, surface Christianity.) On the way, he encounters 4 'wildernesses' that he must travel in order to reach the City of God. In one of them, the wilderness of worship, he will learn about worshipping God in spirit and in truth. In this wilderness the devil tries to stop him from going further. (The story is called *Escape from Christendom* by Robert E Burnell.)

Suddenly a person of unearthly beauty is standing a few feet away from the traveler.

'Greetings,' the being says. 'It's a long way across this stretch. Many have perished trying to make it on foot. I offer you a better way.'

After some discussion, the devil informs him that he can take him to the other side in a split second. The traveller asks the devil what he requires for this deed.

'All I require is a token act. If you will merely kneel to pay me homage, I will lift you across this wilderness with the speed of light.'

'But that would be worship to you, wouldn't it?' (asks the traveler)

I find the devil's response interesting :

"Why do you find that strange? People do it every day. You did it yourself long before you came to this wilderness. The citizens worship me in Christian City. Some there worship money - serve it like slaves. Their eyes light up at the thought of it. But the love of money is only a symbol of my reality."

"You aren't reaching me with your talk of money. Its never been a problem in MY life," the traveler retorts.

"How about Romance? What could be more beautiful or innocent than being in love? But when the state of being in love becomes a goal and dominates the mind, there is idolatry involved. And it is 'yours truly' behind that idol."

While many of us may claim that the 'state of being in love' has not become a goal for us and dominated our mind, what other reason could there be for a constant state of loneliness? Or, if you are indeed in love with someone, ask yourself how much thought you put towards this relationship? Do you think of them almost all the time? Are you always imagining yourself with them in some

¹ Robert E Burnell, *Escape from Christendom*. Originally published by Bethany House, 1980

form of romantic situation? I'm certainly not going to claim that every feeling of loneliness is idolatry, because we feel loneliness for different reasons. Also romantic inclinations can be good, but they should have their time and their place. Romantic thinking outside of marriage can be very dangerous. We'll talk about all that in the chapter on romance. But what I am trying to do is show the link between idolatry and pursuit of anything other than God. And I hope that I am proving that any non-joy in God is probably the result of us having made other things more important to us than God himself.

Now, there is a very real time when this sort of idolatry becomes obvious. We'll talk about this in Part 4 of this book.

But how do I seek God then - consistently, contently, and with joy and gratitude?

If we start doing some real introspective search of ourselves now, we probably feel liberated to know that a pursuit of happiness in God is not a sin.

Ps 86:4 "Give me happiness, O Lord, for my life depends on you."

There it is, straight from the Bible. It is His command. However, we might feel devastated to know that we don't seek God like we ought. John Piper's book *When I don't desire God (how to fight for joy)* is an excellent book that talks about this exactly. In fact, that is the very book that God used to help me on this path of contentment as a single (amongst many other things.) I would recommend it to any Christian, along with John Piper's famous work 'Desiring God.' Here is what he had to say in "When I don't desire God" after talking about his first encounter with realising he was free to pursue joy in God.

"Manageable, duty-defined, decision oriented, willpower Christianity now seemed easy, and real Christianity had become impossible. The emotions-or affections, as former generations called them- which I was now free to enjoy, proved to be beyond my reach. The Christian life became impossible. That is, it became supernatural."

²

John Piper, *When I don't desire God*. Pg 14 (Crossway Books, 2004) ISBN 1-58134-652-2.

Paul reiterates this in Romans 3:20(b) by saying, “For the more we know God's law, the clearer it becomes that we aren't obeying it.”

The more we understand HOW we ought to 'love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength' the more clearer it becomes to us just how far off we are from fully obeying this, the most important and Greatest Commandment (Mark 12:29,30)

Here is where I begin to close off this chapter, but where it all comes together. Earlier on in this chapter I said that I think that God wishes us to lay it all down. That is what I meant by quoting Phil 3- that marriage, too, we should consider loss for the sake of gaining Christ. I say this because marriage cannot fulfill us ultimately, only God can. I say this because I believe God wants to give us more joy and happiness than marriage ever can. Besides that - finding fulfillment in anything else is idolatry because we cannot serve both God and that thing. Plus, we are to obey God and His commands - and he commands us to find joy, and to find it in the only being that satisfies – himself. And he commands us to love Him with every part of ourselves. Where our treasure is, that is where our heart is - and we are to worship God with all of our heart.

But this loving God with all of our heart is impossible by human standards. Romans 3 tells us that 'all have fallen short of the glory of God.'(Rom 3:23, see also Rom 3:10-23) Delighting in God is His command, and we are not able to fulfill his law by our own strength- indeed, we can't. Rom 3:20 “Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.” We are all 'under the power of sin' (Rom 3:9) What we require is a CHANGE OF HEART, and a change of heart is only produced by God's spirit (Rom 2:29.)

I think one of the reasons why it is not possible to please God and be made right in His sight through external religious means is because God knows the heart and we cannot force the heart to love what it does not want to love. Rom 3:20 “For no one can ever be made right in God's sight by doing what his law commands,” We can't conjure up joy and delight in God, we have no power or ability to do so. We can live externally and morally good by exercising all of our willpower, but we have no way of changing our heart. We can fulfill most of

God's laws externally, but we always fall short of the first law - the Greatest commandment - to love God with all our heart. No amount of willpower on our part is able to change this - only the power of Christ can cause this change. Only by God's GRACE are we saved, and by His spirit is our heart changed. Only through Christ are we made righteous, regardless of the 'good' and 'moral' lives we try and live. Rom 9:16 "it does not depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy." (NIV)

All of this - Grace, faith - a gift from God

Paul came to this realisation in our Phil 3 scripture - Phil 3: 9 "I no longer count on my own goodness or my ability to obey God's law, but I trust Christ to save me. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith."

Paul must have realised that His own ability was futile - because God's WAY of making us right with himself depends on faith in *Christ* to save us. And this believing in Christ is a gift of God - "for by Grace you have been saved, through faith- and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast." (Eph 2: 8,9 - NIV)

The reason why I am bringing up these 'Gospel essentials' is because we can often forget exactly who saved us, and then often try and live out this Christian life in our own strength and goodness and willpower. The Bible tells us clearly that this is not the way to live out the Christian life. We are to put our faith in *Christ* and believe in *Him*, who fulfilled the law, to fulfill the law firstly IN us.

Rom 8: 3, "in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met IN us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit." (emphasis mine)

Christ's death means we are covered by Christ's righteousness and blood and now can come to the Father with boldness. Secondly, Christ now also fulfills the law THROUGH us, "For *God* is working in you, *giving* you the *desire* to obey him and the *power* to do what pleases him" Phil 2:13.

The bottom line is we will not find this joy and happiness in God that He promises us by our own attempts - and the good news is that we are not left helpless. The central theme and place of our Joy in God is this: the Cross. God has come to save us! *He* has come to change our hearts to seek and desire after Him. He promises us more happiness and joy than marriage could ever bring - as long as we believe in Him, trust in Him, and put our faith in Him. And he WILL give us 'everything we need for life and godliness,' (2 Peter 1:3) and give us the strength to put our faith and trust in Him. He will change our hearts and make us love Him more than anything else in this world. Oh, let us praise the Lord Most High for He indeed is a real, true, and wonderful saviour. He saves completely! He doesn't even leave our desires up to us in our sinful state to try and change - but rather comes in and changes our desires himself! Phil 2:13 says 'For God is working in you, giving you the desire to obey him and the power to do what pleases him.'

He promises us more joy and fulfillment than we can understand!

God promises us overflowing, unmatched, fulfilling, lasting happiness in Him alone

If I have done a good job, I've convinced you that God commands us to find happiness and joy in Him, and that he gives us the strength and the power to seek it from Him and not anywhere else. But, all this might still make you feel a little unconvinced that we will really find everything we want IN Him and Him alone. You might be convinced that He will provide your needs, but you might not be convinced that our need for joy and happiness is fulfilled through knowing God. You might still think that God's means of providing happiness and joy is by giving you a wonderful partner and a good life of wealth, health and prosperity. I am hoping to convince you otherwise in the rest of the book. God's ways are higher than our ways. His means of happiness and joy is through salvation, through His Spirit and through knowing Him - the God of the Universe. Everything else - marriage or celibacy, or even wealth or poverty, is His means of extending His Kingdom. Marriage can be a blessing, or a curse - it depends on where God is placed in the marriage. Money is the same, I believe. The bottom line is these things are the gifts - and the gifts are not what bring us true joy and happiness, it is the Giver that does. In part two I hope to

show you that singleness is a gift from God, and that we should approach it with gladness and joy - because we serve Him through it, and He uses it to build His Kingdom. And our principal joy and gladness is in Jesus himself - the Kingdom Reign of God which lives within us, and amongst us.

So, let us take these Gospel essentials and apply them to our lives as singles. We have no reason to feel dry, or unhappy. God has saved us from everlasting destruction! He will bring us into His presence innocent of sin and with great joy! (Jude 24) He promises to give us joy by His Spirit! And he promises that this joy will fulfill us more than any earthly treasure! He has brought us into his Kingdom of peace, joy and love. So let us seek to find this only lasting fulfilling and true Joy in our saviour, for He has commanded it. Yes, He Himself is our only desire. Only he can fulfill. He will not disappoint us. He will provide all our needs - in His way- and we will always be filled with joy and happiness, married or unmarried.

So if you doubt all this that I'm saying, please read on. I believe God has a freedom and joy for us singles, and we have a special place in His heart. After all, it is God who wrote these wonderful words to us in **Isaiah 56:3 (NIV)**

“And let not any Eunuch³ complain, 'I am only a dry tree.'

³ Eunuch – a Eunuch is a castrated man, which was usually ‘employed’ in a harem back in the ancient days (and I think perhaps still today in some countries.) Obviously, a Eunuch could not marry. I think this is a wonderful scripture because it points to God’s promises for those who will end up not marrying. I can make this link because Jesus does in Matt 19:12 saying ‘some have renounced marriage (some translations say ‘made themselves eunuchs’) because of the Kingdom of Heaven.’ Obviously, he is not saying that some have castrated themselves! What he said was particularly important because Isaiah 56 is God’s new covenant promises to the Gentiles and those outside of Israel (“my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.”) This promise and the covenant is found and sealed in Jesus. I think by Jesus making this link with the Eunuchs and the Kingdom of Heaven is a further sign of the prophecy of Isaiah 56 now being fulfilled in and through Him. He was showing the disciples and Jews that the Messiah had arrived. Castrated men were not allowed in the assembly of the Lord according to Jewish Law. This was outlined in Deut 23:1. God made this law to prevent this pagan practise (castrating and harems) from being established in Israel. His promise now, in Is 56, to include everyone in His assembly and presence is now fulfilled through and in Christ, which further shows God’s love for us all! This is, of course, perhaps a little off topic and an incredibly long footnote, but it’s always fantastic to see how God links everything together.

For this is what the Lord says :

'to the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant - to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will not be cut off.'“

And we 'do what pleases the Lord' by his grace and power! My prayer for you, and for me, is that we would truly find God's presence more pleasurable, desirable, and joyful than anything else in this world. That we would find God's love better than life, and seek for one thing only - to delight in His perfections, and meditate in His temple.(Ps 27) Let us believe God and His promises in Ps 16:11 “You will show me the way of life, granting me the *joy* of your *presence* and the *pleasures* of living with you forever.”
