



Single

IN A FAMILY- ORIENTED CHURCH

By Todd L. Goodsell

People sometimes wonder how I thrive in the Church. This is what I tell them.

Some time ago I was talking with a gentleman I had met at a civic event. I learned that he had been raised a Latter-day Saint but was no longer active in the Church. As we swapped stories about our lives, he shook his head and exclaimed that it was difficult to understand how I—someone in his mid-30s who had never been married—could remain active in the Church when some members are

insensitive toward singles and particularly toward single men. He told me that after finishing school, he purchased a home at age 30 and hoped to marry soon thereafter, but when that did not happen, some members of the Church stopped interacting with him. Some, he said, even started saying unkind things about him. He resolved the discomfort he felt by leaving the Church.

I am sorry for this brother. I tried to

explain how I felt about the Church, what I do in it, and what the gospel does for me. I hope he comes back someday soon.

The Church is *exactly* where single adults belong. It has had a profound influence in my life, but I understand that being a single adult in the Church—and especially a single man—can bring with it some difficulties. There are several things that have helped me get along in a Church that is decidedly (and rightfully) pro-family.

Don't Be Resentful

In my early 20s, I met some never-married singles in their 30s who were resentful or depressed about their situation. Although I earnestly did not want to be over 30 and single, I decided then that no matter what course my life took, I would not harbor negative feelings toward those who had family blessings I hoped to have myself. Instead, I choose to congratulate those I know when they marry or have children. As a sociologist I have studied young couples with children, and I now live in a ward with lots of recently married couples and young children. It can hurt to hear some married men complain that they do not want children since I have not had the opportunity to become a father. Still, I seek to learn from married people and remind myself that someday I will receive the blessings of marriage and parenthood too.

Fully Participate in the Ward to Which You Belong

Every time I move into a new ward, I schedule an appointment with the bishop. In that appointment, I introduce myself, telling him what I am doing in my life, explaining how I feel about the gospel, and placing myself at the Lord's service. This usually leads to my receiving some responsibility in the ward, at which I try to do my best.

I have occasionally heard some single men complain about not being able to hold certain callings because of their marital status. Although it's

true that there are some callings that a single brother cannot hold—he cannot be a bishop, for example—I have found that there are many more ways I *can* serve than ways I cannot. The way I see it is that this is Christ's church, not mine. I want to do everything I can to help His work succeed.

I also try to get to know the other members of the ward, married and single. For instance, when I have been new to a ward, I obtain a copy of the ward list. Then, either before or after church, I call someone I do not yet know and ask if I can

deliver some bread or other treats I have made. When I deliver them, I usually have an opportunity to talk with the ward members I'm visiting and get to know them a little bit. Later, after getting to know most members of the



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ward, I pay attention to new families who attend the ward, writing down their address and delivering treats to them during the upcoming week. Many have appreciated that someone noticed them and welcomed them into the ward. Doing this has helped me to get to know people in the ward and feel as though I can talk to and do things with them.



in a God of miracles.” He requires that we “go with all [our] might and with all [we] have” to do what He has commanded “*and cease not [our] diligence*” (D&C 124:49, emphasis added). I do not have to be perfect right now; I just have to do my very best—and not give up. Heavenly Father will take care of whatever I cannot do for reasons beyond my control. I cannot stop trying.

Instead of “giving up,” make big decisions with reference to the blessing you want to receive. I decided I would do things that would make me more marriageable in time, whenever that time came. So I went ahead with my schooling and started my career. I realized I do not have to wait until I am married to put myself in a position to support a family. However, I made sure that along the way I was still available to date and willing to marry. I like the way German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it: “We must be ready to allow ourselves to be interrupted by God.”¹ In addition, I have tried to make sure that I do not get so set in my ways that I would be unable to adjust to having a wife and children with me too. Finally, I try to give meaningful service and become a more interesting person than I would be if I just sat around watching television. In the course of doing so, I have met other people who are trying to accomplish something good.

Teach the Full Gospel

Some single adults get offended when the concept of family is discussed at church. I would be offended if we did *not* talk about families at church! Families are central to the gospel. Our purpose in being here is to create eternal families composed of exalted individuals. We are not perfect yet, but we can be made so through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. I personally welcome teachings about family in Sunday School and priesthood. On a practical level, I want to learn how to be a good husband and father before I get there. On a spiritual level, I want to feel the Spirit when we talk about the gospel of Jesus Christ—not the sense of emptiness that comes when we skip some portion of the gospel out of fear or distaste.

Don't “Give Up”

I put “give up” in quotation marks because that is what many single adults say they are doing when they

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stop hoping for promised blessings and instead do things that make the promised blessings less likely. For instance, when people “give up,” they might stop attending church meetings or singles activities, or they might date, cohabit with, or marry someone not of our faith. If I were to “give up,” even if it were only for a short time, that might be just the time when I could have met a wonderful woman. I do not want to miss the opportunity.

And the opportunity can still come. As one friend told me: “We believe

Respond to Rude Comments with Kindness

Sometimes members assume that the lack of a blessing is the result of a person's unrighteousness, and occasionally they can say things without considering others' feelings. At times all I can do is remind myself that the Church exists as a means of helping imperfect people become perfected through the Atonement of Christ. Other times I find that I can do more than this. Many married people do not know how to talk about singlehood. They do not have concepts or experiences that express what it is like.

Once, in a public setting, a local church leader made a remark about my marital status that left me embarrassed. Wanting to resolve the situation and also treat him with respect, I called him a week or two later. I told him that I was glad that he was concerned about my welfare, and I hoped he would feel comfortable talking with me about my marital status. It turned out that he was unsure how to bring up the subject. I suggested that in the future, instead of doing it the way he had, he could ask me—privately—“What have you been through?” “How do you feel about it?” and “Is there anything I can do to help?” In this manner, we established a means by which we could talk about this topic.

On another occasion, a different married brother made an unkind remark about unmarried men in

general. That created an awkward situation, but I understood it as an unfortunate mistake by a brother who was basically good. Later that day he caught me between meetings and apologized. He said that he had not realized that I was not married, but even if I were married, he said, his comment would have been inappropriate. I felt better. One evening a couple of days later, there was a knock on my door. I opened the door to find that same brother. I invited him in, and he again apologized for what he had said the previous Sunday. He said his comment was flippant, irresponsible, and wrong. I

STRIVE FOR EXCELLENCE

“Remember that we have all been single, are now single, or at some time may again be single; so being single in the Church is not extraordinary. . . .

“If you are striving for excellence—if you are trying your best day by day with the wisest use of your time and energy to reach realistic goals—you will be a success whether you are married or single.”

President James E. Faust (1920–2007), “Welcoming Every Single One,” *Ensign*, Aug. 2007, 5–6; *Liahona*, Aug. 2007, 2–6.

felt gratitude and love for this brother who was trying to repair any damage he had caused.

Live As Much of the Gospel As You Can

When my stake presidency asked stake members to obtain a home storage supply, I set about doing that. I laughed at my awkward attempts to be obedient and at how some foods come in containers so large that much of the food, when the container was opened, would spoil before an individual could eat it all. But I built my home storage anyway, in containers that made sense for a single person who lives alone.

Likewise, I do not yet have a wife I can take to the temple, but because I plan to attend regularly with my wife when I am married, there is no reason I cannot establish the habit of regular temple service while I am single. For now, I can invite the Spirit to attend me in my daily scripture study. Someday my wife will be able to add her insights too as we study the gospel together.

These practices and attitudes have helped me as a single member in the Church. As I explained to the gentleman I met at the civic event, even though some promised blessings have not come yet, that does not mean they will never come. What matters is that we do things now to keep ourselves available to receive the blessing. ■

NOTE

1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community* (1954), 99.