

Single Cursedness: An Overview of LDS Authorities' Statements about Unmarried People

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BEING MARRIED IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT IDEAS within Mormon culture, emphasized almost to the exclusion of other states of being. Much like the moon that is visible only when reflecting the sun's light, mention of singleness occurs most frequently in articles and talks about marriage, most frequently coupled with exhortations to marry. Not only does this condition hold true in official statements but it also seems to be fact in personal lives. According to one single woman, "To be determined not to be determined by marriage is to be determined by marriage."¹

Our research focused only on never-married people. The numerous statements about divorced and widowed persons merit additional discussion on their own. We found no mention of separated, deserted, or prisoner-of-war spouses or out-of-wedlock parents. So, though we do not mention these categories, we are aware of them and suspect they experience many of the same conditions as never-married people within the Church.

Overall, statements about singleness in official LDS settings take the form of both blessings and cursing with little nonjudgmental material. We found the earliest statement about singleness recorded in 1831, the latest in 1982. The remarkable thing about this time-span is that the major message for singles developed very early and, except for an occasional variation, never changed. That message can be summarized briefly: (1) God's plan is marriage. Singleness violates that plan, and therefore has at least overtones of unrighteousness

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¹ Diane Higginson, "Single Voices," *DIALOGUE: A JOURNAL OF MORMON THOUGHT* 6 (Summer 1971): 79.

or abnormality. (2) If you marry outside the temple or outside the Church, unhappiness will follow.

These views began in 1831 when a revelation to Leman Copley, a former celibate Shaker and missionary to the same, announced that "whoso forbiddeth to marry is not ordained of God, for marriage is ordained of God and man." (D&C 49:15). After 1850 when polygamy was openly espoused, Apostle Orson Hyde warned reluctant bachelors that "better men would step forward to do the job" if they did not marry and he also denounced Paul's statement as "false doctrine": "It is better to remain unmarried even as I."²

Even after the cessation of plural marriage, the pressure on man was not relaxed. In 1914, Feramorz Y. Fox, president of LDS College, urged: "While counseling the women against marrying outside of the Church, we must use every means to overcome the tendency among Mormon men to delay marriage."³ In 1924, Apostle George F. Richards was "appalled" to learn that 27,104 members of the Church over twenty-one were single the previous year. "Why," he demanded, "when we believe in marriage? Forbidding to marry is the doctrine of devils."⁴

Even though singleness is equally "wrong" for men and women, there were clear gender differences in the attitude of authoritative statements: Women were gentle victims of man's selfishness. Thus, unmarried men needed to "repent" of singleness as they would any other sin, and the chief means of persuasion was threats. From the speeches, four reasons emerge for men's refusal to marry:

1. It is their nature to avoid marriage. Brigham Young believed that "not one man in a 1000 would have wife or children except for religious reasons."⁵ In years as widely separated as 1874, 1958, and 1981, a "growing indifference" to marriage throughout the nation is cited as a reason why increasingly large numbers of Mormon men choose not to marry.⁶

2. Single men are less righteous. Those who do not choose a wife are "unwilling to accept God's commands, don't "understand" gospel principles, and are "not living their religion."⁷

² Orson Hyde, 6 Oct. 1854, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855-86), 2:84.

³ Feramorz Y. Fox, "Comments on June Editorial," *Young Woman's Journal* 15 (Sept. 1914): 559.

⁴ George F. Richards, Conference Reports, 4 April 1924, pp. 30-31.

⁵ Brigham Young, 9 Aug. 1868, *Journal of Discourses*, 2:90.

⁶ "Better One than Two," *Juvenile Instructor* 9 (July 1874): 163; ElRay L. Christensen, "Whom and Where Will You Marry?" *Relief Society Magazine* 45 (Oct. 1958): 644-48; Jan Thompson, "Prepare for Life, Not Just Marriage" (interview with Susan Memmot), *Church News*, 18 July 1981, p. 7.

⁷ Samuel W. Richards, "The Duty of Marriage," *The Contributor* 13 (1892): 92; Hyrum M. Smith, *Conference Reports*, 4 April 1913, p. 115; Oscar W. McConkie, *She Shall Be Called Woman* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1979), p. 112; "An Everlasting Covenant," (Lesson Department), *Young Woman's Journal* 33 (Feb. 1922): 116.

3. As a result, single men are worldly and materialistic, “too niggardly to support a wife” because “a wife in this day is too expensive an article to keep.” It is “unfortunate when comfort, social position, desire to travel or professional or political ambitions stand in the way of rearing a family.”⁸

4. Single men are defective or disabled in some way. Perhaps out of false charity, most of the speculation about continuing singleness fell in this category. In chronological order, men are purported to suffer from: disability (1892), inability to support a wife (1913), incompetence (1974), “lacking in guts . . . [or] suffering a chemical imbalance” (1979), inadequate to meet the demands of personal involvement (1981), and “battered and scarred” (1981).⁹ A bishop in a singles ward explained this last statement:

Life is a test. Some who are especially battered and scarred inside have not been asked to face the Celestial challenge of marriage. It is enough for them to simply make it through, pointing to two ward members—a nymphomaniac and a homosexual—who fought their battles daily. Perhaps winning the *not* doing battle is just as important as winning the doing something battle. Those who may be mentally or severely physically handicapped are not compelled to marry during earth life.¹⁰

Only one article reflected single men’s perspective on singlehood and many of those interviewed mentioned their sensitivity to the labeling they felt occurred from other members of the Church: These labels included homosexuality, too “picky,” “immaturity,” “lack of self-knowledge, and “lack of interpersonal skills.”¹¹ None of the sources searched revealed any positive reasons or acceptable reasons why men do not marry.

The reasons why women do not marry are less stringently negative but still less than positive.

1. Men may not be available due to war, disability, or disinterest.¹²

2. Career or education decisions may preclude marriage. This reason is not, however, considered acceptable. Remarkd Helen Rowland in the 1917 *Relief Society Magazine*,

Don’t accept substitutes: don’t accept a career instead of marrying the right man. Art is thrilling but you can’t run your fingers through its hair. A career is absorbing, but

⁸ Hyde, *Journal of Discourses*, 2:84–85; Blanche Beechwood [Emmeline B. Wells], *Woman’s Exponent*, July 1876; “Marriage as a Religious and Moral Obligation” (Social Service Lesson), *Relief Society Magazine* 10 (May 1923): 155–58.

⁹ Richards, “The Duty of Marriage,” p. 90; Hyrum M. Smith, *Conference Reports*, pp. 114–15; Paul E. Dahl, “Some Factors Which Differ Between Married and Never Married L.D.S. Males and Females Who Attended 1969 Summer School at Brigham Young University in Relationship to Their Families of Orientation,” Ph.D. diss., Brigham Young University, 1971, p. 29; McConkie, *Woman*, p. 109; Thompson, “Prepare for Life,” p. 7; Kay Senzee, “Single Survival,” *Exponent II* 8 (Winter 1981): 11.

¹⁰ Senzee, “Single Survival,” p. 11.

¹¹ Lavina Fielding Anderson and Jeffrey O. Johnson, “Endangered Species: Single Men in the Church,” *Sunstone* 2 (Summer 1977): 4–5.

¹² Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 12:262; Henry Bowman, “Are Girls Become Pursuers?” *Improvement Era* 48 (July 1945): 7; Richards, “The Duty of Marriage,” p. 90.

you can't tie pink ribbons in the curls of your brain children. Work is beautiful and ennobling, but it never calls you sweetly foolish names, takes you out to dinner, admires your latest hat, or tells you how different you are from all the other women. In short, the most radical, self-ordained bachelor girl will admit that she is making no great human sacrifice when she wants to give up her freedom, her wild ways, and dances, in order to make herself worthy of a pure, sweet man.¹³

3. The woman may be undesirable marriage material. No Church discussions of singleness stated personal undesirability as a reason directly, but the implication is there. For example, when women are exhorted to stay sweet, well-groomed, skilled at homemaking, and of service to mankind to be "more ready" when marriage comes along,¹⁴ the implication is that one may be undesirable or unmarriageable without these qualities.

4. Other reasons include the fear that men cannot support them,¹⁵ while some women may be responsible for dependent members of their immediate families or be repelled by sex. These last two reasons are mentioned once only in *Alone but Not Lonely*, a 1973 book, by a Mormon who was not a General Authority. The author, Wayne J. Anderson, also provided the sole positive reasons for women remaining unmarried: wider career opportunity and greater service to all of mankind.¹⁶

Although these reasons lack the directly threatening tone common when addressing single men, they still assign blame in a quiet way. Staying "sweet" and being careful about too much career involvement are enjoinders to wait in an appropriate way to be available for marriage, with the implication that it will result. No advice was ever given on direct steps single women might take to get married.

Another frequent theme of official statements — again a form of negative persuasion — is warnings about the unhappy fate of the unmarried. First, a single child is a reproach to his/her parents who "will receive condemnation on their heads if their children do not learn the correct . . . principle of eternal marriage."¹⁷ Unmarried women are warned that they will be forced to work in the field or in the mines, and are left, in Brigham Young's phrase, as "female outcasts and marriageable outlaws."¹⁸ Without marriage women are "unprotected," and, in 1892 Samuel W. Richard, president of the European Mission, asserted, "by men remaining single, women are denied their right to marry — no wonder they are demanding the franchise so that they may protect their rights themselves."¹⁹

¹³ Helen Rowland, "Making a Husband out of a Man," *Relief Society Magazine* 4 (Nov. 1917): 612.

¹⁴ McConkie, *Woman*, p. 108.

¹⁵ Hyrum M. Smith, *Conference Reports*, p. 15.

¹⁶ Wayne J. Anderson, *Alone but Not Lonely* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973), p. 54.

¹⁷ Christiansen, "Whom and Where," p. 646.

¹⁸ Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 12:262.

¹⁹ Richards, "The Duty of Marriage," pp. 91–93.

The most important costs, however, are personal and spiritual. Single men "will not have a principality in the hereafter" and will have to face the Lord empty-handed when he asks "Where is your wife?"²⁰ Their presumed choice not to marry is "frustrating their own eternal progress," a theme President Spencer W. Kimball spoke to at least twice in the middle 1970s. Quoting George Gilder's not always reliable research, he warned that single men live shorter lives, have poorer health, are emotionally less stable, and get fewer important posts.²¹ Additionally, single people suffer openly admitted discrimination within the Church because they are often "viewed by other Church members as a failure or as incompetent" or as second-class citizens.²² Seventy ElRay L. Christiansen predicted disappointment, regret, and remorse if people remain single.²³

Furthermore, singleness also causes negative consequences for society. Orson Hyde warned that "men will gratify worldly desire out of wedlock, thereby increasing babies out of wedlock as well as prostitution." Consequently, God will send pestilence to lay waste to the cities and to "visit the guilty sensualist with dreadful punishment."²⁴ Later authorities maintained that the "bulwark" of society will be weakened because "all sorts of social problems are caused by singlehood, crime, immorality, divorce and poverty."²⁵

As these examples show, the difference in attitude between single men and single women is striking. General Authorities, all of whom are male, consistently perceive the single man as selfish, sinful, and possibly suffering from chemical imbalance. A man who stubbornly retains bachelorhood is not worthy of his priesthood. In 1974, President Harold B. Lee sternly admonished: "All women have a desire for companionship. They want to be wives and mothers, and when men refuse the responsibility of marriage, for no good reason, they [the women] are unable to consummate marriage. Brethren, we are not doing our duty as holders of the priesthood when we go beyond the marriageable age and withhold ourselves from an honorable marriage to these lovely women."²⁶

²⁰ Spencer W. Kimball, "Marriage," *Ensign* 6 (Feb. 1976): 4.

²¹ Spencer W. Kimball as quoted in Gerry Avant, "Marriage Ordained of God" (report of speech), *Church News*, 4 Jan. 1975, p. 4.

²² McConkie, *Woman*, p. 108; Bruce L. Campbell and Eugene E. Campbell, "The Mormon Family," in *Ethnic Families in America: Patterns and Variations*, eds. Charles H. Mindel and Robert W. Habenstein (New York: Elsevier North-Holland, Inc., 1977), p. 385; Ida Smith, "The Psychological Needs of Mormon Women," *Sunstone* 6 (March/April 1981): 62.

²³ Christiansen, "Whom and Where," p. 648. Others acknowledge that deprivation, social pressure, exclusion, and discouragement also afflict the single. See McConkie, *Woman*, p. 109; Orson Scott Card, "What They're Doing in Rochester, Orlando, Tempe . . . : A Report on Successful Programs for Single Adults," *Ensign* 8 (Feb. 1978): 10; Gerry Avant, "Single Adults: Activity in Ward Is Key to Success," *Church News*, 18 July 1981, p. 7.

²⁴ Hyde, *Journal of Discourses*, p. 84.

²⁵ Richards, "The Duty of Marriage," p. 92; David O. McKay, *Conference Reports*, 1953, p. 17.

²⁶ Harold B. Lee, "Understanding Who We Are Brings Self-Respect," October conference address 1973, *Ensign* 4 (Jan. 1974): 100.

This consistently negative labeling presumably creates a negative social environment for single men. The unanimity of negative tone is surprising. We found no positive statements about unmarried men, regardless of circumstance. As we might expect, at least one single male reported never having received any positive encouragement or understanding from Church sources about his single state.²⁷

In contrast, worthy single women are consoled that, should they not be chosen for the "most choice career," they will yet receive all the blessings of matrimony in the hereafter.²⁸ Meanwhile, they should devote themselves to service and spiritual growth.

How do single people view their own experience? Women have spoken most openly. In 1839 Elizabeth Haven, wrote to a friend: "Tell them [other women friends] not to be in a hurry about getting married, for I am not."²⁹ She married the next year. Later, Susa Young, a daughter of Brigham Young and divorced from Alma Dunford, her first husband, wrote to her mother, "Sometimes they tell me I must be saved by some good man. If that's all, I could be sealed to some one who has proved his integrity and has passed away. . . . I have no desire to be any man's wife. And doubt whether I ever shall."³⁰ She later married Jacob Gates and editorialized in the *Young Women's Journal* that a girl "really looks forward to marriage as the one desirable thing in her life."³¹ Whether this statement was autobiographical or only exhortatory we have no way of knowing.

Perhaps mirroring the social changes that have made singleness much more prevalent, personal writings of Latter-day Saints in the last decade sound less defensive. The "single condition is not a trial or affliction, rather an opportunity for growth," says Carol Clark, a single Relief Society General Board member.³² "Don't judge yourself, find satisfaction in present joys and prepare for life, not just marriage," said another. A third asserted, "There is not just *one* acceptable life pattern for every woman in the Church, i.e. 'all Mormon women are . . .', 'all single people feel . . .', 'all mothers will . . .,' etc."³⁴

²⁷ Donald L. Wight, interviewed by authors Feb. 1982, Salt Lake City, notes in possession of Marybeth Raynes.

²⁸ Neal A. Maxwell, "The Women of God," April 1978 conference address, *Ensign* 9 (May 1978): 11. Such assertions may emerge from a stereotyped view that women are "naturally" spiritual, kind, sweet, and nurturing while men are "naturally" rebellious and disobedient. Hence, they must bridle their urges and fight their basic natures to achieve spirituality.

²⁹ Elizabeth Haven Barlow to Elizabeth Howe Bullard, 24 Feb. 1839, in Kenneth W. Godfrey, Audrey M. Godfrey, and Jill Mulvay Derr, *Women's Voices: An Untold Story of the Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1982), p. 115.

³⁰ Susa Young Dunford [Gates] to Lucy Bigelow Young in *ibid.*, pp. 331, 334.

³¹ Susa Young Gates, "Editor's Notes," *Young Woman's Journal* 8 (Jan. 1897): 183.

³² Carol Clark, *A Singular Life: Perspectives for the Single Woman* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1974), p. 3.

³³ Thompson, "Prepare for Life," p. 7.

³⁴ Ida Smith, "Psychological Needs," p. 2.

At least one person lamented, "I am perfectly content to remain single right now, but my bishop . . . has only one word for me: marriage. No one in my ward can believe that someone 'so far over the marrying age' . . . can be satisfied with a career."³⁵ The tension implied between personal acceptance and negative pressures identifies yet another source of negative feelings. Diane Higginson, writing in *DIALOGUE* in 1971, identified the situation as "being in the right Church but in the wrong pew . . . neither a priesthood bearer nor a child bearer."³⁶ Other women specified some of their feelings. Feeling "branded with a scarlet 'S,'" depressed, impatient, feeling failure, lonely, discouraged, out of place, even though objectively things might be going well, unlovable with unattainable dreams, invisible and unrecognized by the Church, and waiting.³⁷ They also mention feeling a double bind about marriage and education/career. If single women "don't get educated or adopt a career they will have to settle for a less stimulating, rewarding existence if they never marry; if they do get a rewarding career, they intimidate the men they might want to marry." Succinctly put, one woman entering graduate school was told, "You'll be sorry if you go to law school; no self-respecting missionary will ever marry you."³⁸ The dilemma is genuine: either course of action could be the "wrong decision" that might bring on a permanent single status for which one is fully responsible.³⁹

Older single women mention their pain when "quips like 'I guess he died in the war in heaven' and 'someday my prince will come — in the millennium' are no longer laughable."⁴⁰ One single woman confessed to new attitudes about men: "My right man has changed a lot since high school, and the range is narrowing: not just because the number of available men is decreasing . . . but because I find *myself* gradually becoming less flexible. I am no longer willing to date, but I find an increasing longing to have the experiences be meaningful. I also find myself struggling to be patient; patient with the 'relationship process' which takes time to enact."⁴¹

Unfortunately, single men have been largely silent, and no similar body of personal writings documents their feelings. From the informal survey in the only article on the topic, single men seem to feel chastised, lonely, labelled, left out, and often sexually frustrated. Additionally, they feel pressure from everywhere: parents, friends, bishops, and single women. One branch president

³⁵ Clark, *Singular Life*, p. 2.

³⁶ Higginson, "Single Voices," p. 79.

³⁷ Maryruth Bracy, "Single Voices," *DIALOGUE: A JOURNAL OF MORMON THOUGHT* 6 (Autumn–Winter 1971): 78; Anonymous, *ibid.*, p. 77; Beth Vaughn, "Sisters Speak: The Single Woman in the Church," *Exponent II* 6 (Dec. 1975): 16; Thompson, "Prepare for Life," p. 7; Senzee, "Single Survival," p. 6; Louise Durham, "Profiles: Research Director Speaks Out," *Exponent II* 6 (Autumn–Winter 1971): 12.

³⁸ Janeen Jacobs Aggen, "Does a J.D. Rule Out a Mrs.?" *Exponent II* 7 (Fall 1980): 4.

³⁹ Bracy, "Single Voices," p. 78.

⁴⁰ Clark, *Singular Life*, p. 3.

⁴¹ Bracy, "Single Voices," p. 78.

expressed sympathy for a single counselor “literally backed against the wall after a fireside by five or six women — with no defense except a cookie and a glass of punch.” In addition to labels like immature, immoral, selfish, and unrighteous, they are not seen as worthy of Church callings that other men of commensurate age and activity are filling.⁴²

The Church, lagging ten years behind society, discovered single people as a group in the 1970s and implemented singles wards and Young Special Interest programs. It recognized the different types of singleness (never-married, divorced, and widowed), dispensed alternative advice for singles: good grooming, reading a lot, performing compassionate service and entertaining the neighborhood children.⁴³ This program brought relief and relative enthusiasm from many singles within the Church and seems to be partially successful in meeting some needs. Others point out that the labelling and stereotyping continues. “All that single saints have in common is that they’re single,” complains one.⁴⁴ Another “pointed out the irony of participating in a program ‘whose very existence advertises that you’re failing. The only qualification you have to have to belong is being single. The only thing you have to do to get out is to get married.’”⁴⁵

In an interview we conducted, one single man denied the “selfish single” label. Instead, he said, he and other men felt as trapped in their circumstances as women. No one seems available to point out patterns, give encouragement, or suggest positive changes that could lead to marriage.⁴⁶

The Church’s efforts to solve singleness may have also created additional problems because its message is almost exclusively negative and because it contains a surprising number of double messages. The process of communication, we feel, has an impact as significant as the content of the message. That process is primarily characterized by its negative tone. Whether the content is gentle or harsh, overt or covert, the attitude of the speaker nearly always communicates that there is something very wrong about being single. Two social scientists, William D. Payne and Merlin B. Brinkerhoff, pointed out in an insightful 1978 essay in *DIALOGUE* that labels create very powerful social expectations. Thus:

It is difficult for a negatively labelled Church member to maintain a picture of himself inconsistent with the way in which others in the Church view him. Negative social labels, with their accompanying expectations, may lead someone to self-deprecating deviant behavior. The unconventional behavior confirms and reinforces the negative label. Within the Church, the role of the label, and its accompanying expectations in making the behavior come true is seldom considered.⁴⁷

⁴² Anderson and Johnson, “Endangered Species,” pp. 2–3.

⁴³ Anne Osborn, “The Ecstasy of the Agony: How to Be Single and Sane at the Same Time,” *Ensign* 7 (March 1977): 48.

⁴⁴ Card, “What They’re Doing,” p. 7.

⁴⁵ Anderson and Johnson, “Endangered Species,” p. 4.

⁴⁶ Wright, interview.

⁴⁷ William D. Payne and Merlin B. Brinkerhoff, “Negative Social Labelling: Some Consequences and Implications,” *DIALOGUE: A JOURNAL OF MORMON THOUGHT* 11 (1978): 44.

In addition, they note that “the possessor of a single stigmatizing characteristic is often seen as possessing several other discrediting characteristics which some member relates to the original label.” The consequences of teaching Latter-day Saints that singleness is a “bad” state to be in undoubtedly has consequences for marriage, childraising, and larger issues of identity that deserve fuller exploration.

The double messages which coexist in talks, lessons, and general attitudes are:

1. Don't marry too young. Take your time. *But* don't marry too late or you will miss out. The “proper age” for marriage is definitely post-mission for men but otherwise remains undefined, although it is obviously a narrow slot. The most recent example of a new attempt to define this optimum age is seen in a 1982 statement telling mission presidents not to offer advice about how soon missionaries should marry after their return home, which reverses decades of advice to marry within six months of returning home or be “a failure as a missionary.”⁴⁸

2. You cannot reach exaltation on your own for you must be married, *but* your eternal exaltation is completely your own responsibility.

3. If you lead a good life even though not married you will reap all the blessings in the eternities, *but* those who are not married will be ministering angels, and remain “separately and singly, without exaltation . . . to all eternity.” (D&C 132:16–17). There are doctrinal provisions for those not married in this life to be married in the millennium;⁴⁹ however, not all Church members may understand that doctrine and those who do may not be particularly comforted.

4. If you live the commandments while still single, you will be rewarded by marriage; *but* those who don't marry are less righteous.⁵⁰

5. Single women should develop their talents through career and service, *but* they should be prepared at any minute to marry and confine their efforts to family and Church.

We also see a double message in the difference between the content and the form of the message: we care about you and you are important in the Lord's church, *but* we do not know how to talk positively to you or really recognize your existence in a positive way.

It is encouraging, however, to note that over half our sources about singleness have been printed since 1970, presumably because singleness has become more socially acceptable and because single people themselves have begun to make a place for themselves. Oscar McConkie, a former mission president, acknowledges that the single Mormon deserves a life as full and satisfying as a

⁴⁸ Lee, “Understanding Who We Are,” p. 120.

⁴⁹ Brigham Young, 9 Aug. 1868, *Journal of Discourses*, 12:262.

⁵⁰ Christiansen, “Whom and Where,” p. 646; Joseph Fielding Smith, “Marriage in Eternity,” *Improvement Era* 60 (Oct. 1957): 702; Campbell and Campbell, “Mormon Family,” p. 385.

married person, even though there seems to be a tacit implication that “fulfillment” is really a substitute for marriage.⁵¹

Furthermore, research about Church members is increasing. Statistics make people visible. When Church authorities become aware that a substantial minority — some guesses say 30 percent — of the adults in the Church are single, it is easier for them to address problems and programs. The recent emphasis in Church talks and manuals about the importance of self-esteem and the ability to love has also somewhat mitigated the negative pressure on singles. Eleanor Knowles, a single editor at the *Ensign*, observed in 1971: “From childhood women have been told that a woman’s fulfillment comes with marriage and a family. Lessons at Church are often prefaced with ‘when you marry.’ Few persons warn that you may not marry, and therefore preparation for a full life must be made, regardless if it is within or without marriage.”⁵² “You’re making a great contribution and the promises will be fulfilled in the eternities,”⁵³ President Kimball assured single *Ensign* readers in 1976. He also urged, “We should place emphasis on the person rather than the status. We should all be part of the mainstream . . . part of a big family in the Church. Part of the problem of the singles is that we are playing limits instead of realizing the limits of potential.”⁵⁴ And speaking about the Special Interest program to Church members in general, Elder James E. Faust, now an apostle, said: “What is proposed is a way to reach the singles and have each feel that someone cares and that each has a place in the Lord’s Church. Too often we are insensitive to the feelings of the singles.”⁵⁵

In addition to shedding a more positive light on being single, a practical focus for solving issues is urged. In the *Guidelines for Single Adults* issued to regional, stake and ward levels in 1980, policies and procedures are written in a positive, informative style. Unmarried persons are urged to participate in singles programs. Singles miniconferences and conferences have occasionally been reported in the *Ensign*. One single attendee at a conference commented on the pleasure of “learning you’re not alone. You can call on a fellow member of S.I. and get help. Someone who has been through your problem and survived shows you can too.”⁵⁶ Counseling for all singles to discover “hangups” has also been recommended in printing as an acceptable course of action, though not by a General Authority.⁵⁷ Service and spiritual growth are also

⁵¹ McConkie, *Woman*, p. 113.

⁵² Eleanor Knowles, “A Look at the Single Person,” *Ensign* 1 (Aug. 1971): 40.

⁵³ Kimball, “Marriage,” p. 4.

⁵⁴ Avant, “Single Adults,” p. 4.

⁵⁵ James E. Faust, “Reaching the One,” April 1973 conference address *Ensign* 3 (July 1973): 87.

⁵⁶ Card, “What They’re Doing,” p. 7.

⁵⁷ Knowles, “A Look at the Single Person,” p. 40. Since we cannot recall similar recommendations for married people who are not suffering from obvious difficulties, this statement may reflect the assumption that singleness in and of itself constitutes a personality defect or problem.

recommended.⁵⁸ In short, if you “feel deprived by being single, expand your sphere of usefulness.”⁵⁹

This broader vision of the last decade is still double vision, however. Although some General Authorities speak of singleness with sympathy and insight, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy reportedly said, during a singles conference at BYU in 1982 that a single person is not a whole person, and being single — particularly divorced singleness — was described as being unacceptable to the Lord in general conference.⁶⁰ The continuing themes have not been basically changed, but are simply supplemented with new positive statements backed up by programs tailored for single people.

⁵⁸ Osborn, “Ecstasy of the Agony,” p. 49.

⁵⁹ McConkie, *Woman*, p. 113.

⁶⁰ *Church News*, 2 April 1982, p. 6.