

and many Church activities should include both marrieds and singles.

A final note: These things can best be accomplished if priesthood lessons are developed that teach the necessary sensitivity to the issues mentioned.

To the single male in the Church not anticipating marriage, I can only say, "Endure to the end." Make the commitment to take the difficult path of activity rather than the easy path of inactivity. You and your families and associates will all be better for such a decision. Pray for strength and the Holy Spirit to help you understand the insensitivity you meet and to get you through the difficult times. Remember that for all the difficulties you face as a single in this life, should you die in that state, all is forgiven. Your eulogies will undoubtedly mention your opportunities in the second life; and perhaps there we will have the wisdom of more perfected beings, and none of us will make the same mistakes we make here.

Being Single, Mormon, and Male

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SINGLE MALE MEMBERS of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints face a number of difficult issues. With my impressions of President Ezra Taft Benson's address at the April 1988 priesthood session of general conference as a backdrop, I would like to address those issues, using both sociological observation and personal experience.

As I reread President Benson's address, I found that the first half focused on general priorities, which could apply to virtually any group within the Church, and the second half really focused on a group much narrower than single adult men. Although the address is entitled, "To the Single Adult Brethren of the Church," it is really directed to never-married men twenty-seven years old or older. Furthermore, embedded in the talk is an implied profile of these men: they are returned missionaries who are active, well-educated Church members and who have delayed marriage either because they lack sufficient faith to overcome

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genuine fears, because they are overly materialistic, or because they are looking for a perfect mate.

Few Church members could fault a prophetic call to well-educated, active never-married LDS men to confront their fears and values concerning marriage. I for one believe that President Benson spoke the truth when he said that "honorable marriage is more important than wealth, position, and status" (1988, 53). I respect those who have committed themselves to loving, caring marriages as well as to quality parenting.

With that backdrop, let me now raise some issues concerning the never-married males in the Church.

First, Kris Goodman and Tim Heaton, who co-directed an international demographic study of the Church, have collected detailed information about the composition of LDS households. According to their study, although 19 percent of U.S. and Canadian Church members age eighteen and over have never married, 97 percent of LDS males will marry at some point before the age of sixty—only 3 percent will remain in the never-married category for life (1986, 92-93). The same is true of the female never-married category. While many Church members may have to struggle with their social and spiritual identity as never-marrieds, most will marry some time in their lives. However, approximately one-third of U.S. and Canadian Latter-day Saints over the age of thirty will experience singleness through divorce before the age of sixty (Goodman and Heaton 1986, 93).

At any given time, only one in five LDS households will be temple married with children at home (Goodman and Heaton 1986, 96). This means that Church programs and activities must be very broad to incorporate the diversity of membership. It also suggests that meeting the needs of the never-marrieds is related to meeting the needs of the thirty-year-old wife in a part-member family, the forty-year-old divorcee, the fifty-year-old widower, and the sixty-year-old couple with no children at home. As Goodman and Heaton point out, "Overemphasis on a particular stage of the [life]course is bound to leave some group feeling more isolated or unattached" (1986, 97).

Meeting the needs of a diverse population is, of course, a challenge facing virtually all religious groups in the Western world. However, in some ways the emphasis on marriage and the family heightens that challenge within the LDS tradition. There is strong evidence that as a Church we are not meeting the needs of LDS single members, and particularly single men. A 1983 *Church News* article reported on a study of religious involvement among Church members:

The people surveyed were asked to answer questions on the strength of their personal religious beliefs, the frequency of personal prayers, Church attendance, whether they had a Church calling and tithing status. The survey concluded that women do better than men in each category. [While singles scored lower than married individuals,] [w]idowed individuals rank higher in religious involvement than the never-married, and the divorced scored lowest of all. (Van Leer 1983, 4)

It becomes clear that the institutional church must share responsibility for these lower rates among singles; the survey also notes that "singles score higher on the forms of religious involvement that are private, such as prayer and tithing, than on public involvement such as having a calling" (Van Leer 1983, 4). In other words, when Church leaders consider two equally devout individuals for a Church calling—one single, one married—they are more likely to extend the calling to the married individual. It is also likely that if we take into account the relative status of the calling, the difference between institutional opportunities would be even more dramatic—especially among men, since single men are traditionally excluded from leadership positions within wards and stakes.

The activity rates of single LDS men reflect the impact of this discrimination. For every five single women in church on any given Sunday, we can expect to see only one single man (Goodman and Heaton 1986, 91). We ought to reflect on the dramatic differences in those activity rates.

President Benson's talk will probably make more sense to us if we acknowledge this dramatic imbalance. If a goal of the Church hierarchy is to maximize member participation in the LDS marriage market, and if active single men are dramatically underrepresented in that market, then it is rational to try to induce the relatively few available active LDS men to participate more fully.

However, perhaps the key issue to be addressed here is the reason behind the low activity rate of single Mormon men. It seems significant that their institutional involvement is lower than their personal religious involvement would seem to predict. By increasing their public participation to a level at least equal with their private devotion and commitment, the Church could both increase the activity rate of single men and improve opportunities for temple marriages for single women.

However, the issue of single men and the LDS marriage market presents another challenge—the demographic mismatch between single men and single women. Remember that President Benson addressed a group of active and highly educated never-married men. Now note Goodman and Heaton's description of the demographic characteristics of U.S. and Canadian Latter-day Saints:

Single women over 30 have higher levels of education, occupation, and Church activity than single men. For example, never-married women over 30 are more likely to have four years of college (42% compared to 18% for never-married men) and professional occupations (70% compared to 38%). For all singles over 30 there are 19 active men (who attend Church weekly) for every 100 women.

Clearly, marriage to an active male is demographically impossible for many active single females over 30. And even when there are available males, they may possess other personal characteristics that rule them out as potential mates. Marriage is not a universal solution to singleness if the only acceptable marital option is marriage to an active LDS partner. (1986, 90-91)

Personal observation and discussions with students of Mormon demographics also lead me to expect never-married males to have more health problems and higher unemployment rates than never-married females. Clearly, these two populations—overachieving women and underachieving men—are not well matched. Furthermore, the typical never-married male looks quite different from the never-married male addressed in President Benson's sermon. If never-married men were to arise en masse from the dust and seek marriage, we can only wonder who they would go out to marry. Based on available studies of marital success, we would have to be very concerned about the quality and long-term stability of a marriage between the typical never-married LDS male over thirty and the typical never-married LDS female over thirty.

Let me move now to a few personal observations about my experience as an active, educated thirty-four-year-old who has never married.

First, the quality of my experience has varied widely from ward to ward. During my years in Madison, Wisconsin, where I was a graduate student during most of the 1980s, I participated fully in the Church community. My callings included Blazer Scout leader, scoutmaster, Young Men's president, and Sunday school teacher to the sixteen to eighteen-year-olds. Working with these young men and women has greatly enriched the quality of my life. And the continuing contact I maintain with many of these young men and women—as they share moments of transition such as college, mission, and marriage with me—also enriches my life. I would not be as happy nor would my sense of connectedness to the Latter-day Saint tradition be as strong if I had been denied those experiences. Furthermore, I believe I made a real contribution to the religious community in Madison; I think that community would have lost something if I had been excluded from the opportunity to serve.

When I moved to Provo to teach at Brigham Young University I encountered one of the most serious spiritual crises of my life. During my year in Provo I never received a calling—not even as a home

teacher. Home teachers never visited me either, and the only time the bishop talked with me was at tithing settlement. I clearly felt that my ward had no idea what to do with a professional, single adult male. I fled the ward because I feared for my spiritual well-being. But I wonder if it is really fair to expect all single men to be willing to do the same if they find themselves in a bad situation.

Today I am a member of a Salt Lake City residential ward where the bishop has called never-married ward members to be Relief Society president and first counselor in the bishopric. These callings act as a powerful symbol to me that I, as a single, belong. In addition, the bishop visited me shortly after I moved in and asked what kind of experience I wanted to have in the ward. He was genuinely interested in knowing me and understanding my needs. He did not presume to know all about me simply because I belonged to the category of single adult.

A second autobiographical note concerns my personal reaction to President Benson's address. While I honestly believe that President Benson has a clear sense of God's message for single men in the Church, I also have to acknowledge, if I am being completely candid, that I was wounded by his address. Recently I took a psychological profile exam. It indicated that I scored in the ninety-ninth percentile on guilt. I'm good at guilt. It's one of the things I do best. In fact, I'm so good at guilt that it occasionally gets in the way. For example, usually when I spend time with a single adult LDS woman, I feel personally responsible for her singleness. This happens within the first ten minutes of our first date. It has been pointed out to me that this sense of guilt and responsibility for single Mormon women is fundamentally sexist. It encourages an insulting and incorrect image of Mormon women as passive individuals who need to be saved by Mormon men. The guilt, as well as the underlying false image of Mormon male-female relationships, get in the way of establishing an authentic relationship, and I am sure our time spent together is not rewarding for either of us. I do not have the same experience with women who are not LDS. In my case, the last thing I need is more guilt.

I can find at least two other dimensions to the hurt I felt. First, in the past decade, I have given up two loving, caring relationships with non-LDS women. In both instances, the only reason I did not pursue a deeper level of intimacy and companionship was my commitment to the Church and its value system. I sometimes wonder if I made the correct decisions, and I genuinely feel my commitment to the Church has led me to make significant sacrifices. In addition, as I previously mentioned, when I found myself in a ward that had difficulty dealing with my singleness, I was willing to accept the costs of moving in

order to maintain my spiritual link to the Church. And yet, when I heard President Benson's talk, I felt that my life experience—the sacrifices I had made to hold myself to the tradition—were being discounted. I felt invalidated.

The second dimension of hurt grew out of being told why I wasn't married. None of the reasons given in the address seemed to conform to my own experiences. I suppose I felt something like blacks might feel being told that they are great dancers and like to eat watermelon. Some blacks are great dancers and like watermelon—but others are lousy dancers and hate watermelon. It is offensive to be treated as a category rather than as an individual. I suppose that when I heard the call to arise from the dust, I felt like a category. Most of us turn to our religious communities for a sense of acceptance and belonging. But on 2 April 1988, I felt neither understood nor that I belonged.

I really have no sense of the way other single men felt about President Benson's address—I haven't talked with any of them about it. All of my close friends are either non-LDS or married. I do know that I am just as committed to the importance of marriage and family today as I was before the address. I also see the demographic makeup of our church creating serious challenges to that institutional commitment to marriage and family. I hope that we have the inspiration and compassion to deal with those challenges in as positive a way as possible. At the same time, I hope that we will have the inspiration and compassion to establish in our local congregations a sense of understanding and belonging for all members of the community—regardless of race, social class, age, gender, or marital status.

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