Single Parent Ministry
In the Local Church

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ABSTRACT

SINGLE PARENT MINISTRY IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

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This project in ministry titled, “Single Parent Ministry in the Local Church,” is the result of the author’s concern for the unique issues faced by today’s ever increasing single parent households. This relatively new phenomenon is discussed in light of the historical roots of singleness in general. It is then shown that this “new phenomenon” is really not new at all. Single Parenting is virtually as old as creation itself, going back to the first single parent described in the Bible, Hagar. Much instruction regarding the circumstances of the single parent is discussed. The paper then examines the various, specific and most common issues facing single parents and their children. The effects to the single parent child are discussed and a chronological view is suggested with particular effects shown at various stages of development offered for consideration. The Biblical mandate to care for the widows and orphans contextualized to our society is set forth. Suggestions are offered for the implementation of a ministry to single parents within the context of the local church. The purpose of this thesis is to give Biblical and
theological foundation for single parent ministry as well as understanding to the single parent and those who would minister to the single parent of the unique challenges facing them as they embark in this much needed ministry.

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CHAPTER 1
THE SINGLE PARENTING SITUATION

The purpose of this paper is to develop an understanding of the situations and circumstances as well as some needs and concerns of single parents in our contemporary society. Beyond an intellectual understanding it is to be a specific vehicle to offer tangible assistance to the parent who finds himself single or single again as well as to the child who finds himself in the single parent home. It will further offer suggestions as to how a local church might offer specific ministry to the single parent.

Statement of the Problem

This project will provide a biblical look at the single parent and provide a church-based model for ministry to the single parent. The focus will be on singles, describing the plight of the single parent and the effective meeting of those needs discovered. To accomplish this undertaking the following questions will be considered:

1. Do the demographics of our society show an increase in single parenting and if so due to what causes?
2. Does the Bible have anything to say about the situation of single parents?
3. What are the specific needs of single parents?
4. What are some specific needs that children of single parent homes have?
5. Should the church have a ministry to single parents and if so specifically how and in what way?

**Development of the Thesis Project**

The previous questions will serve as the parameters for this thesis project. When each of these questions are adequately answered, the paper will set forth at least a basic understanding of single parenting and will offer some specific suggestions as to how the church can offer ministry to single parents and their children.

The first question will establish the new phenomena taking place within our changing society, namely that single parent households are on a dramatic increase. It will also show the reasons behind this increase, including divorce, death and more people choosing to have children out of wedlock. This will be accomplished primarily through research of national, state and local statistics that may be provided through governmental institutions such as the national census. Other source material will include professional publications that also conduct research in the area of single parenting.

The second question will show that the entire single parenting phenomenon within our society has not taken God by surprise and, that as one who holds to a high view of Scripture would expect, He has spoken to the issue in the Bible. Much of what the author has to say regarding single
parenting will be directly related to what God has already said about it and truth gleaned from the examples He has given. The Bible will be the primary source in establishing this question.

The third and fourth questions will identify many of the specific and unique needs of the single parent. We will establish some of the specific needs of the children of single parent households as they pertain to the various stages and needs of their early childhood and adolescent development. This section will be established by current psychological as well as longstanding psychological and educational research concerning the needs of children at specific developmental stages and then show how single parenting might well affect the development at various stages.

These findings will also be verified by contacting single parent members of our local congregation. This will be conducted through a survey to ascertain the specific needs of the single parents within this local congregation. From this will come the development of specific areas of needs, both felt and real, that are to be addressed by the church as it seeks to minister to the single parent. This will be more fully addressed in section five.
The fifth and final question when answered will show the practical application of Biblical principles to single parenting. It will be shown that the church must become involved if we are to relevantly proclaim and practice the gospel in our world today. Suggestions will also be offered as to how the church can become involved. The sources here will again be primarily the Bible itself as well as a compilation of research and writings of others actively involved in single parent ministry as mentioned in section three of this paper.

Limitations of the Thesis Project

Our culture and society are rapidly changing and affecting all of the components of our world. Change is inevitable, yet welcomed by very few. If we are to fulfill the Great Commission of our Lord, we must begin to understand what changes are occurring. As understanding changes, we can begin to develop strategies to reach and minister to our changing world. It will allow us, as the church, to act upon society rather than react to society. The single parenting phenomenon is just one small part of our changing society. Yet it is a significant part because God has from the beginning of time had the family as the basic building block of society. Thus we must understand the changes taking place here and how to best minister in this area.
This paper is not a paper about sociology but will simply attempt to view one section of our changing society, the single parent household. Thus, it will not attempt to address every sociological aspect of our changing culture and society.

Secondly, as each and every person is as different and unique as snowflakes, so each and every single parenting situation is unique as well. There are no set or pat answers. No one formula will meet each and every need of all single parent households. This paper does not attempt to do that, but rather to identify some of the more common and similar needs of single parents and their children and to identify how the church might minister to these needs.

This will not be a paper primarily about early childhood and adolescent development and behavior, but will set forth some of the more common and identifiable needs of the children, how they are affected by the single parent household and how the church can assist in meeting some of those needs.

The Bible is amazingly practical and relevant to life in each and every generation, and each and every culture and society. Thus this paper will look at some of the examples given us in scripture of the single parent. Though not an exposition of scripture, it will glean truths primarily from the life of Hagar as well as other Biblical examples. It
will not be a grammatical study or an expository study from the Hebrew or Greek, but will from the English text identify some basic needs of single parents and how they were met.

It is not the intent of this paper to identify every possible ministry that a church could have to the single parent because new methods and creative programs are constantly being developed. It is an attempt to add to the growing number of tools to help heal the hurt and bind up the broken and equip the single parent household to begin experiencing the abundant life offered by Jesus Christ.

Experience and Background of the Author

The author chose this topic because of its need in our churches and our society as well as the needs that exist among single parents. Having served as a pastor to Single Adults for eight years and currently as a senior pastor, the author sees the needs in the lives of so many single parents. The author’s personal commitment to reach out and to help the church to reach out and minister more effectively in this area serves as the motivation for this project to the building up of Christ's body, the church and to the ultimate glory of God.
CHAPTER 2
THE SINGLE PARENT PHENOMENA

A Brief History of Singleness

American culture is facing a rapidly changing make up from what it has traditionally known. This change is occurring in virtually every socioeconomic, political, moral, psychological and spiritual area one could imagine. There is no example more dramatic than the change in the make up of a "traditional family." Within the last thirty years the number of divorces in America has increased nearly 200 percent. The percentage of people marrying today is at an all-time low because people are choosing to marry later in life or not marrying at all. In 1960 there were 73.5 marriages per 1,000 unmarried females and 9.2 divorces for every 1,000 married females. In 1987 there were only 55.7 marriages per 1,000 unmarried women and 21 divorces per 1,000 married women. By 1996, the provisional statistics show that there were 49.7 marriages per 1,000 unmarried females and 19.5 divorces per 1,000 married women.¹ In 1960, 70 percent of all marriages were first marriages. Today, only 50 percent of all marriages are first marriages.

The divorce rate hit its peak in the early 1980's and has been gradually going down ever since. By 1991 the divorce rate dropped to its lowest point since 1979. And today it continues to drop slightly to 19.5 per 1,000 married women.

The change in the nuclear or "traditional family" make up, due to the escalating divorce rate and disintegration of the family, can be seen in the increased number of children directly affected by divorce. According to the most recent United States census poll, less than 60 percent of American children are living with both biological parents. Despite the small decline in the divorce rate in the mid-1980's, the percentage of children living with a divorced parent had increased from 2.1 percent in 1960 to 9.5 percent in 1990, the latest statistics available from the U.S. Census Bureau. Presently, only 73 percent of American children live in a two-parent household and only 57 percent of these live with both biological parents. The remaining 27 percent live with their mother or father. This seemingly small percentage actually contains over 17 million American children. Urie Bronfenbrenner of Cornell University speaks

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on how living in a single parent household impacts our children:

Controlling for factors such as low income, children growing up in (single-parent) households are at a greater risk for experiencing a variety of behavioral and educational problems, including extremes of hyper-activity and withdrawal; lack of attentiveness in the classroom; difficulty in deferring gratification; impaired academic achievement; school misbehavior, absenteeism; dropping out; involvement in socially alienated peer groups, and the so-called "teenage syndrome" of behaviors that tend to hang together -- smoking, drinking, early and frequent sexual experience, and in the more extreme cases, drugs, suicide, vandalism, violence, and criminal acts.\(^5\)

The effects of the figures given above can be seen again as Daniel Ellwood, Assistant Secretary of Planning and Evaluation for the United States Department of Health and Human Services cites, 73 percent of children from single parent families will be in poverty at some point during their childhood while only 20 percent of children in two parent families will experience poverty. Also, 22 percent of children from single parent families will be in poverty seven years or more, compared with two percent from two parent families.\(^6\) William Galston and Elaine Kamarek describe some of the repercussions of these phenomena;

The economic consequences of a parent's absence are often accompanied by psychological consequences, which include higher than average


\(^6\) David T. Ellwood, Poor Support: Poverty in the American Family (Basic Books, 1988).
levels of youth suicide, low intellectual and educational performance, and higher than average rates of mental illness, violence and drug use.⁷

Carolyn Koons and Michael Anthony give a brief historical review of where the singles population has been, where it is today and where it might be headed in the future. We see from the colonial era of America history that there was great religious, economic and social pressure to marry. Marrying young was virtually a means of "survival of the species." During this time frame the average age for a woman's first marriage was about thirteen; however, it should be noted that life expectancy was considerably lower than it is today. The male population outnumbered the female population as well, making it a near certainty that each woman would marry.⁸

American culture continued to endorse marriage until the early nineteenth century. The nuclear or traditional family was a mother, father and children. Those women that were unable to find a mate were referred to in a derogatory fashion as spinsters or old maids. Due to economic constraints these "old maids" remained in the home. At the wake of the Industrial Revolution in the late nineteenth century, more and more women broke free from their


traditional roles and took jobs outside the home. This provided them with some economic security and independence. Throughout this time period only three to four percent of the population was single.

Beginning with the twentieth century and the cataclysmic events which took place, American culture began to see changes taking place that would eventually grow and expand to transform society forever. World War I was the first great event of the century that initiated and even forced society to change. The war caused women to take on new responsibilities both inside and outside the home. With fewer men returning from the war, the male population was decreased, and thus the female population became greater than the male. In the 1920's, more job opportunities became available for women outside the home. For the first time in history, some of the women were postponing marriage; however, most did marry and return to the home within a few years.\(^9\) During the Great Depression of the 1930's and the economic uncertainty of the times, older children remained single and in the home longer to help provide for their family's needs. There was also a decline in the number of births because approximately one-third of the population was single.\(^10\)

\(^9\) Ibid., 48.

\(^10\) Ibid., 49.
By the time World War II began, men and women were allowed and even encouraged to remain single. As with World War I, the men went off to fight and the women were needed in the work force. Again, marriage and birth rates dropped very low between 1941 to 1945 as would be expected.

When "Johnny" came marching home from the war in 1945, a very interesting cultural phenomenon occurred. The number of marriages escalated and is unparalleled to this day. By the mid-1950's people were marrying at the youngest ages ever recorded. Again, the women returned to the home and the men became the primary breadwinners. The nuclear family ruled again. In the wake of the record number of marriages, beginning in 1946 more babies were born than ever before, thus the Baby Boom era had begun. During this particular period of time only four percent of the adult population remained unmarried, very similar to the colonial days of American history.

In the late 1950's and on through to our present day, the divorce rates continued to climb, thus changing the demographics of the population make up. With the introduction of the "pill" and the rise of the women's liberation movement, we saw in the late 1960's and 1970's an increased single population with more sexual promiscuity.

The 1970's saw the "Baby Boom" generation grow up. With "Baby Boomers" enjoying the relative affluence of their
parents, having few responsibilities, and with greater sexual involvement apart from marriage, the term "single" became a familiar and exciting term. It was during this time that some of the more resourceful churches began to reach out to this segment of the population which was enhanced by the Jesus movement of the mid 70's. By the late 70's, we see the rate of America's single population approach that of the Great Depression Era (nearly one-third). With the number of failed marriages increasing and more people living together, the number of marriages was sure to decrease. Today, demographers tell us that the single population (18 years and up) will approach 50 percent of the population as we enter the twenty first century.

Some Reasons for Singleness

Why is there a new phenomenon of singleness in American culture? Why are there more divorces today than ever before? In one sense, from an intellectual or socioeconomic perspective, the answers vary, yet from a Biblical and or spiritual perspective the basic reasons are rather plain and simple. What issues or changes in our society have occurred that would have led to this increase in the number of American single adults? Social scientists have said, and this writer has to agree, that it is not just one thing. There are several answers to that question; nonetheless, several specific theories do come to mind. One of the
better known theories is that of the growing economic independence of women. With better education and more job opportunities available, women are concentrating on their careers rather than on a family. The high divorce rates, along with the extended longevity of many senior adults, and the increased "sexual freedom" with the introduction of various birth control methods has discouraged people from marrying and encouraged them to live together outside of marriage.

Koons and Anthony point out several different theories behind the increased single population in our society. Elaine Tyler May attributed the growth primarily to the feminist movement. Warren Ferrell states, "From a man's perspective they are staying single longer because of the inequalities of modern marriage, with women having all the options available to them and man's only option would be to work full-time."

Paul Glich, a demographic scientist, attributes this growth phenomenon to all the choices available today in a society, including the increased social acceptance of cohabitation before or instead of a legal marriage.

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commitment. Larry Bumpass, a University of Wisconsin demographer states, in almost one-half of all marriages, people have lived together with someone outside of marriage. Bumpass also revealed through his research that only about 60 percent of those who cohabit with the intent of marrying at some point ever followed through. The actual number whose intent it was to ever marry following their cohabitation was not revealed, perhaps significantly reducing the percentage of those who cohabited concluding with marriage.  

Peter Stein, a professor of sociology and considered an eminent researcher in the area of single adult development, believes many postpone marriage with a single individual as their companion in every area of life substituting a significant individual in each area of their life’s involvement. 

Perhaps an additional reason for the increase in singleness in America is due to what has been defined as "relationship burnout". Having gone through a number of relationship breakups they begin to mistrust the idea of a permanent relationship. The capacity to develop healthy,

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14 Ibid., 53, quoting Larry Bumpass, demographer for the University of Wisconsin.

mature relationships must be learned by single adults with
or without the fear of potential failure of the relationship
and should a relationship fail it must be taken as an
opportunity to grow and further mature from it.

Among the increasing single population is a significant
sub-group of single parents. The sub-groupings
of single parents are even further defined as the divorced
single parent, the separated single parent, the widowed
single parent and the never married single parent.

Today one-half of women who are currently single have
been previously married. The 1987 demographics showed that
one-half of first marriages would fail within about seven
years. In 1989 14.5 million singles had been divorced
comprising almost 21% of the single adult population. Of
this total there are approximately 12 million single parents
in the U.S. with 36.8 percent of these being as a result of
divorce.16

The separated single adult is one legally married but
perhaps emotionally divorced. Of the approximate twelve
million single parents, approximately 20 percent are single
parents due to separation with 18.5 percent of these being
women.

The widowed single adult is comprised of over five
times as many women as men. According to 1987 Census Bureau

16 Ibid, 118.
statistics, there were 11 million widowed women and over two million widowers, a total that represented approximately five percent of the U.S. population and about 20 percent of the entire single adult population. Again, of the approximate twelve million single parents in America, almost eight percent are so by virtue of being widowed.

The never married single adults totaled 68,310,000 (18 years and up) according to 1989 U.S. Census Bureau statistics. Of that number, 39.9 million have never been married. Again, of the approximate twelve million single parents in America, approximately 26 percent have never married with 24.4 percent being never-married mothers.

Additional notable statistics regarding single parents include:

- From 1970-1983 the number of one parent families with children increased 107 percent while two-parent families decreased by 5 percent (U.S. Dept. of Commerce 1983).
- One of every five families with children under eighteen years of age in 1984 was a one-parent family, up from one of every ten in 1970 (Family Relations, January 1986).
- A total of 54 percent of all black children under the age of eighteen live in a single parent home. (The Washington Post, February 16, 1989).
- Seventy percent of all children born in 1980 can expect to live with only one parent at some point before they reach age eighteen (Journal of Marriage and the Family 47 [1] February 1983).
- The number of married-couple households with children will continue to decrease through 1982, while the number of one parent households will continue to increase by approximately 33 percent (American Demographics 6[1] 1990).
• Thirty-seven percent of women (who were) in their late twenties in 1984 can expect to maintain a one-parent family with children under 18 (Family Relations, January 1986).

• A 1987 study reported that only 64 percent of children aged eight to seventeen live with both natural parents (USA Today, November 1987).¹⁷

Thus we see this new phenomena of the "singling-of-America" in conjunction with ever increasing single parent families resulting from the highest divorce rate ever in the United States along with widowhood and more children being born to those never married. With this segment of our society there comes the ever increasing need for the church to penetrate this group and reach them with the good news that God loves them. Built into the single parent phenomena are many needs that the church can begin to meet in an effort to show God’s love and win singles to a redeeming knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

¹⁷ Ibid., 118-120.
CHAPTER 3
THE WORLD’S FIRST SINGLE PARENT

Were a novice to read the entire Bible, they would not get far before realizing that God’s design for Adam and Eve in the garden had not been very successful. On coming to the New Testament, one might further conclude that the Lord Jesus Christ was God's "Plan B", after Adam and Eve failed. One might also conclude that God's plan had been frustrated, and that He was caught unaware and surprised by the failure of Adam and Eve. However, as this novice became better acquainted with the entire Bible, he would learn that God had never been taken off-guard and that Jesus was always "Plan A" for the salvation of man.

We also learn from the "book of beginnings" that God created Eve for Adam and joined them in a covenant of companionship that was to last a lifetime in which they were to multiply and fill the earth and rule over it. Yet we see the original intent was disregarded by man again and because of his own stubborn self-will chose to go his own independent way. Again, though, we see that God was not caught unaware as man continued to break God's original plan for marriage and parenting.
In the book of Genesis we see many things introduced for the first time to man. God, light, water, animals, man, woman, marriage, Satan and sin are all introduced for the first time in Genesis. Among these "firsts" are the first divorce and the first single parent and the first child of a single parent household. From applying the "law-of-first mention" we can derive many truths that God teaches about divorce and single parenting. Some of the truths we learn are the circumstances one might find being themselves in the situation of single parenting, the many needs of not only the single parent but also of the single parent child, and how God meets these needs. We shall also note that the needs faced by the first single parent and child have not changed over the millennium as single parents today face similar circumstances. As we look at this Biblical story of the first single parenting situation we shall seek to discover what led to her situation and the needs faced by this single mom and her son.

Creation of Single Parenthood

As we begin in Chapter 16 of the book of Genesis we read the story of Hagar, maid to Abram's wife Sarai. (This portion of the story occurs prior to God changing their names to Abraham and Sarah. The second part of the story is told in Chapter 21, following their name changes. For the
sake of consistency they shall be referred to as Abraham and Sarah).

Abraham and Sarah had come originally from the land of Ur of the Chaldees, where they apparently also had been married. They were originally worshippers of the Moon Goddess Nana. God had chosen Abraham to be the beginning of the Hebrew nation and had promised that his sons would be so numerous that they could not be counted. The only problem with that was that Sarah was unable to have children. Timing was becoming critical as both were well advanced in years. Here the story takes up in Chapter 16 of Genesis.

In the first three verses we see a custom that is very strange to us and foreign to overall Biblical teaching. Because the Scriptures had not been given, not even the law, this apparently was an accepted social custom. Due to Sarah's bareness, she felt cursed by God. Bareness in their time as compared to our contemporary time would be much worse. In the setting of this particular time in history children were seen as a blessing and families sought many children. In our day people seek the perfect ratio of 2.3 children. Nevertheless, her bareness was very shameful to Sarah.

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The only apparent alternative for Abraham and Sarah to have children was to have them through what one might today call a surrogate mother. Though in those days artificial insemination was unknown, therefore the insemination had to come directly through the father. Abraham was apparently more than willing to participate.

The apparent custom in regard to bareness was that Hagar, the Egyptian slave and maid to Sarah, was Sarah's personal property. She was considered "living chattel," and any child born to the slave would belong to the mistress, not the mother.

Sarah apparently believed that Abraham was to be the father of a great nation. From verse two we also note that Sarah saw her bareness as being from God, "So Sari said to Abram, now behold, the Lord has prevented me from having children". From today's perspective, hindsight always being 20/20, we would greatly object to this practice. However, one could see Sarah's motive as being good, genuine and involving self sacrifice while conforming to the custom of the day. The Preacher's Homiletic Commentary says,

They were conforming to the custom of the country. In the East, such expedience was resorted to for perpetuating the household when all other hope seemed gone. It was a method of raising a family by proxy, and it was a virtual adoption of the vicarious posterity—the concubine was said to bear the child 'upon the knees' of the wife. They were only adopting methods which they never heard
spoken of with censure, and which seemed to be justified by the case.\textsuperscript{19}

Thus Sarah is seen as a godly woman seeking to have God's will fulfilled even though it was not in the way the Lord God intended. She is commended as an example to Christian women. The Bible says she "obeyed Abraham, calling him Lord." Thus Hagar, from the cultural practice of the day, becomes a secondary wife to Abraham, bearing him a son.

Shortly following Sarah's great, self sacrificing step of faith there appears to be a fly in the ointment. The old adage of "if mama ain't happy-ain't nobody happy" seems to be coming true again. We see in verses 4 through 6 that Sarah's act of faith backfires on her and Hagar begins to "despise" Sarah. Hagar began treating Sarah with great contempt reminding her of her shameful bareness, which brought a reaction of anger from Sarah. Anytime a third party is brought into a situation such as this the complications are immense.

We note several things from this portion of Scripture. Hagar became very insolent toward Sarah, perhaps thinking she might displace Sarah from her place of prominence due to God's apparent favor upon her and His apparent disfavor on Sarah shown through her bareness.

\textsuperscript{19} The Preacher's Homiletical Commentary on Genesis, (New York: Funk and Wagnalls), 324-25.
In the forming of a single parent situation there is often the break up of a family and often a third party involved. We see several results, if not also causal effects, in this portion of the story. In verse 4 we see Hagar exhibiting pride displayed through her insolence toward Sarah. This pride came from her apparent superiority over Sarah in her ability to bear Abraham a child.

Sarah's response to the insolent pride of Hagar was to resort in anger, hurt, jealousy and desire for revenge. Sarah began to blame Abraham for these feelings she was experiencing, not taking responsibility for her own part in the situation. These accusations resulted in the anguish of Abraham and the guilt he felt from Sarah being so upset. Thus, in an effort to placate Sarah, he permits injustices to be done to Hagar by allowing Sarah to deal harshly with Hagar. The "harsh" treatment was very, very harsh, including physical abuse. This would seem clear as Hagar being a slave to begin with was acquainted with harsh treatment, yet Sarah's treatment of her was so harsh that she fled from it. Certainly we find a number of single parenting situations created through separation or divorce because of violence and abuse. Hagar had come to see that she would never displace the beautiful Sarah and that she would always be a slave, a means of bearing children for Abraham and no more. She would constantly be subject to the
abusive ways of Sarah, which she in part had brought on herself by her attitude toward Sarah.

Current Continuation of Single Parenthood

Today the single parenting situation is created in several ways, some similar to Hagar's circumstances. The overwhelming majority of single parenting situations in today's culture are created via divorce. Though there are many reasons for divorce, Jim Smoke, in his book, Growing through Divorce, identifies seven of the most common, including:

1. The Victim Divorce. This is where one person leaves the marriage for another person.
2. The Problem Divorce. One or both of the mates may have a problem with alcohol, drug abuse or addiction, gambling, money, sex, etc.
3. The "Little Boy" "Little Girl" Divorce. One of the spouses refused the responsibilities of the marriage and/or parenting situation. Personal immaturity and lack of responsibility bring on this type of divorce.
4. The "I Was Conned" Divorce. This results from a spouse not being honest before the marriage and the other spouse not getting what they had expected.
5. The "Shotgun" Divorce. One or the other spouse has been coerced into the wedding.
6. The "Menopause" Divorce. This occurs in both men and women, sometimes called mid-life crisis, which brings about changes in one's personality and behavior which are intolerable to the other spouse.
7. The "No Fault" Divorce. This is the marriage that both parties decide to go their separate ways with no one at fault.²⁰

An eighth cause for divorce, which is prevalent in our society, is identified by Bill Flanningan in his Divorce Recovery Workshop.

8. The "Rat Race" Divorce. This is brought on by the work-alcoholic that does not devote the time necessary to the marriage's survival.\textsuperscript{21}

No matter the cause for the divorce, God is clear in his hatred of divorce as he states in Malachi 2:16, "I hate divorce". Yet God is just as clear in his love for the divorcee as seen in his treatment of the woman at the well in John 4 and as we shall further see in his dealing with Hagar.

Other single parenting situations arise from never married parents, perhaps through bearing a child out of wedlock or, as we see occurring more and more in our society, single adults adopting children. There are also those who are separated but not divorced and those who have been thrust into single parenting by the death of a spouse.

In whatever fashion one finds themselves placed in the single parenting role, we see beginning with verse 7 of Genesis Chapter 16 God's intervention into the situation. After Hagar had left the abusive situation being pregnant with Abraham's child we see that the "angel of the Lord" came to Hagar. This "angel of the Lord" is regarded by many as a theophany, an Old Testament, pre-incarnate appearance.

\textsuperscript{21} Bill Flannigan, Rebuilding The Castle That Has Come Down, (Muskegon: Gospel Films), video.
of Jesus. This stresses the love and care of God for the single parent.

It is more than a little noteworthy that the angel sought out Hagar. Verse 7 states that he "found" her suggesting he was actively searching for her. By this God shows His desire is to intervene in the lives of the single parents. He speaks to her with her best in mind. The words to Jeremiah in 29:11 could also have been spoken to Hagar, "For I know the plans that I have for you declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope."

It is interesting to note that the Lord's approach to Hagar after her running away from her master is similar to the approach God used to Adam and Eve in the garden after their fall. He begins with a question. A question that demands a "reality check" on the part of the inquisitor. He asks, "Hagar, Sarah's maid, where have you come from and where are you going?" These two questions are ones that must be addressed by the single parent. Along with the asking of the question several other things are noteworthy that no single parent should ignore.

Not only did the Lord seek her out, but He also called her by name. We have not been forgotten. We are not alone. He knows us to the minutest detail, even to having the hairs on our heads numbered.
The person entering the arena of single parenting often feels rejection, guilt, unworthiness and despair. If allowed to fester it can become anger with a desire for revenge. By the Lord Himself coming to Hagar, He reassures her of His acceptance of her, gives her a way to deal with the guilt she is experiencing as we shall see more fully in a moment through His instructions to her. He further assures her, especially in the promise that He gives her of her son to be born, that he will become a great nation, that she is a person of worth, though a slave, and gives her great reason for hope--the most important ingredient in facing a crisis. By doing all of this for her He is able to head off the self-destructive cancer of the soul and spirit which is anger and the desire for revenge.

In the Lord's original question of "where have you come from and where are you going?" not only did the Lord acknowledge that He knew her and that she was truly significant but also wanted her to consider her past actions and where they might lead her. Above all He gave her an opportunity to express all that she was feeling. Obviously, she could not reveal to God anything He was not already aware of but He wanted her to realize that her running away was wrong. When we do wrong we must deal with the guilt of it by seeking forgiveness. Also, in His graciousness He knew the consequences would be significantly worse should
she as a runaway slave be captured and returned. By her bearing Abraham's child it is almost without question that she would have been pursued, caught and severely punished. If by chance she had gotten away, her and her child's future was certainly bleak, destined to slavery. Though not verified in the Scripture it is very possible that having had this experience helped both her and Sarah in the situation.

It may well have helped Hagar by realizing her wrong attitude toward Sarah, and perhaps helped Sarah recognize and alter her harsh treatment of Hagar, and thus made the living situation more tolerable for both though never again as it was before Hagar became Abraham's secondary wife.

Having given the expectant mother all the time she needed to express herself, which in itself was therapeutic, and Hagar coming to understand the acceptance and knowledge God had for her, she was now better prepared to accept the instruction and direction of the Lord. The instruction and direction from the Lord also came only after Hagar failed to answer the second part of the Lord's question as to where she was going. This is often the case of the recently divorced and single parent. With a genuine lack of direction, by the divorced single parent or anyone else who has lost direction, the Lord here shows us that He has a
direction for our lives intended for our good and His glory if we would but heed it.

In dealing with her confession of running away, the Lord does not condemn her, nor does He condone her actions, but rather offers her corrective steps which will bring her back in line with God's plan for her life. This confirms His love, forgiveness and acceptance of her. As previously stated, this is important in the life of any single parent, especially those who have experienced divorce or out-of-wedlock pregnancy, because of the guilt associated with such acts and the forgiveness which needs to be applied. Particularly in regard to those who are single parents because of divorce or out-of-wedlock births, there is some fault, guilt or sin that must be dealt with. In the case of the unwed mother, there is the obvious sin of sexual relationships outside the bounds of marriage that must be dealt with if the parent is going to experience wholeness in her parenting role.

Perhaps less obvious is the single parent who is so because of divorce, particularly if she is perceived as the victim of the divorce. That person may perceive herself as having been totally wronged in the situation, but as Dr. Bill Flanningan states in his divorce recovery workshop
notes, he has never seen the case that was one-hundred percent one person's fault. It may well have been 99.44 percent one person's fault, but there is some wrong on each side to deal with no matter how minute.

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Abraham Maslow has developed, and modern psychology has popularized, a "hierarchy of needs" that every individual supposedly experiences. These needs are ranked by priority from most to least important. The most important of these needs is survival, which includes food, clothing, shelter, etc. Second is our need for security/personal safety. Third is our social or "belonging" need we have. Fourth is our esteem need. The least important is our self-actualization need, such as work, advancement in that work and personal growth. Scripture also speaks of man's basic needs.

Dr. Luke, the beloved physician of the New Testament, summarizes adequately the needs that we as mankind have and those areas in which we need growth. These areas of life include the mental, the physical, the spiritual and the social. Luke 2:52 says, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man."

Mankind has some specific needs that are common to all. As life progresses these needs may vary according to the situation we find ourselves in. And so it is with the single parent. The writer of Ecclesiastes reminds us in
chapter one and verse nine that there is nothing new under the sun, even the needs that we experience. It should be noted that these needs could be intensified under certain circumstances. The single parent family finds itself experiencing the same needs as a dual parent family; however, these needs are heightened and intensified because there is no partner to help "share the load." Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 states, "Two are better than one...for if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow." There is often no one else to help carry the burdens facing the single parent.

Although the needs of a particular single parent or single parent family can be multitudinous and specialized to that particular family, there are some needs common to most, if not all, single parent families. In this chapter we will identify some common needs of single parent families. It should be noted that the unique intensity of these needs is felt less often, if at all, by the non-custodial parent. It should also be noted that in nine out of ten cases, the custodial parent is the mother; therefore, most of what will be referred to as the "single parent family" is a family headed by the mother.

**Finances**

The most common concern of the single parent family, especially when the mother is the head of the household, is in the area of finances. In a survey conducted by the
author among single adults, in an attempt to discern their greatest concerns, 86 percent noted finances as being in their top five areas of concern. Of those which placed finances within the top five concerns, 72 percent indicated finances as being the number one concern as a single parent.

Six percent of the respondents made less than $10,000 per year. (Both, by the way, were females.) Eleven percent made less than $15,000 per year and 30 percent, almost a third, made less than $20,000 per year, placing them at or below the poverty level of existence. Amazingly though, 43 percent of those responding made between $30,000 - $50,000, and 5 percent between $50,000 - $80,000. No one surveyed made over $80,000 per year. [See Appendix I]

As seen in chapter one, the abundant number of opportunities available for women to increase their financial standing and be more self-supporting is a major cause of divorce and is also a factor in more women choosing to marry later or not at all. This fact along with the liberalization of divorce laws in America, including the "no-fault" divorce, has proven to be a two-edged sword that has cut both ways.

Early feminists of the 1960's fought for the liberalization of divorce laws and won. Their thinking was that it would liberate the woman from the domination of the
male species and the burdensome responsibilities of fulfilling their traditional role as wife and mother.

The feminists of the 1980’s and 1990’s saw the other side of the sword. They saw that the easy divorce was responsible for a tremendous imbalance of wealth and social power. As the divorce rates climbed and the majority of women gained custody of the children, men grew in wealth and social stature while women stayed at home with the children.

Lenore Weitzman makes this point in his book, The Divorce Revolution. He states: "In the first year, divorced men experience an average rise of 42 percent in their standard of living, while divorced women (and their children) experience a 73 percent decline." Much of this decline is due to women spending their economically productive years in the home, and following a divorce in their later years, having to re-enter the job market. The most recent Census Bureau study indicates that 42 percent of single parent households headed by women were awarded child support; however, only 50 percent received the full amount awarded to them from their former spouse. The other 50 percent were divided equally between those who received only a small portion of the amount awarded and those who received none. Studies indicate that just a few years after the

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court ordered child support, only 13 percent of the fathers were in full compliance, and 70 percent were in total non-compliance.

Single divorced moms almost immediately find themselves living below the poverty level. They often have to apply for government assistance in every available area, including food stamps and government housing. The projects or government-assisted housing are in less than desirable locations; and the facilities are far from being considered comfortable and safe.

Gary Richmond, in his book Successful Single Parenting, states: "As a single parent family, you cannot maintain the same standard of living you once enjoyed as a complete family. 24 These are difficult words to assimilate, especially in our society that tells us we can have everything; nonetheless, they must be understood and heeded by the single parent family.

Jesus, in speaking of material things, told us to be content with the necessities of life, which are food, clothing and shelter. Though He Himself had no place of His own to lay His head, He was telling us to be content with the things we have. The Apostle Paul spoke of learning to be content in whatever circumstance you find yourself and with what you have. Today, most could be happy with much

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24 Richmond, 98.
less than they actually have. For the single parent, life is not a matter of simply being happy, but of mere survival.

A single parent must be concerned with several areas of budgeting, such as taxes, tithe, mortgage/rent, utilities, food, child-care, transportation, clothing, insurance, entertainment and savings. Many would consider these items to be the "bare-necessities", if not the "bear" of necessities, of a family budget.

There are several Christian financial ministries that are available to assist the single parent in managing their budget. The church and its membership are also available to the single parent. Larry Burkett, in his book The Complete Financial Guide for Single Parents, states: "There are specific responsibilities for the single parent prior to asking for help, but without outside help, the long-term prospects can get pretty grim".25 "Ultimately," as Burkett states, "single parents don't need welfare; they need friends who care".26

Housing

One of the necessities of a healthy, productive life is that of housing. Most of us do not realize just how severe the problem of homelessness is. All across America shelters


26 Ibid., 33.
for the homeless are never vacant. For a single parent with children, it is extremely frightening to know that more income is necessary to continue living in the same arrangements as a dual parent family. In this author’s survey, 43 percent indicated housing was an issue of concern for them, with 29 percent ranking it in their top five concerns. Housing was also listed as one of the fears their children experienced when thrust into a single parenting situation. [See Appendix I.]

Housing is perhaps the most expensive item in a family’s budget. Financial counselors recognize and recommend that the maximum percentage of one’s budget that should be allowed for housing is 35-40 percent of one’s income after taxes and tithe. This amount includes mortgage payment (or rent), taxes, insurance, utilities, telephone, maintenance and any other costs associated with housing. A single parent usually has no choice but to migrate toward the lower cost housing market, perhaps government subsidized housing; however, there are some alternatives.

One option, which many have opted for, is for the single parent, moms especially, to compromise their moral standards and live with a man in an immoral situation. This is an unhealthy choice for both the parent and the child. Such arrangements virtually always end in disaster and the single parent is often left in a worse condition than they
began. Another option would be for two single parent families to rent a house or apartment and share the expenses. With both families willing to work out the problems, this is the best option for everyone involved. Other options might include staying with elderly people and caring for them in exchange for housing or perhaps bartering for your housing. Bartering could include offering your services to maintain a facility or yard or some other job which the owner needed done and was willing to provide you housing in exchange for your services.

Perhaps a better alternative to all of these would be for the single parent to move back in with his/her parents, if this were acceptable and suitable for all concerned. Extended families living in the same household can work. History demonstrates it and many cultures practice and have practiced it for centuries.

**Clothing**

Along with the basic necessity of housing is that of clothing. Though 38 percent of the respondents in this author’s survey listed it as a concern, only 6 percent listed it as their third or fourth top concern. [See Appendix I.] Many neglect to budget for this area of need. Those who do set aside money for this need find it to be woefully inadequate to clothe the family in the latest fashions and name brand labels. There are alternatives for
those who are willing to expend the extra energy and effort it will take to accomplish the task. Yard sale clothing, which is almost always a bargain, is one option. Many churches have clothes closets that are available to those who are in need.

**Transportation**

Another expensive item for the single parent is transportation. In this author’s survey, transportation also had a 38 percent response as a concern among the single parents surveyed. None listed it as their top concern, but 14 percent saw it as their second or third greatest concern and need. In today's mobile society one must have some type of dependable transportation. In the past it may have been considered a luxury, but today it is a necessity. For the single parent family the question of purchasing a new automobile is usually not an option. Many times a single parent family will have to sell their expensive car and buy a cheaper dependable used car. When car shopping, most single moms should ask for help from someone who is knowledgeable about cars. The regular maintenance of the single parent's automobile is a great opportunity for ministry from the church as well as outreach to the community for Christ.
Childcare

Childcare that is affordable and dependable is a major concern to the 40 percent of single parents who pay for child-care of some type. Childcare costs between 15 and 22 percent of a single parent’s disposable income. Due to the fact that most families do not make an allowance for childcare, the cost of childcare must be taken from other items that are within the existing budget.\footnote{Ibid., 81.} Childcare is, of course, more a concern for the custodial parent. Forty-three percent of those responding to the survey indicated it to be a need and concern since becoming a single parent. This is interesting in light of the fact that 57 percent of our respondents have exclusive custody and a total of 71 percent had primary or exclusive custodial care. [See Appendix I.] The issue of childcare is another instance where the church can provide assistance. Using church facilities and volunteers to care for the children, it would be possible for a church to minister to single parents on a "can pay" basis. This concept could be extended beyond the preschool childcare into elementary and perhaps secondary educational levels as well. This would provide Christian education, which in all probability would be superior to what our current public system offers.
Emotional Needs

God has created us as emotional creatures. Emotions are neither good nor bad. Each of us has emotional needs as well. Some of the emotions we experience can be unhealthy and produce a poor quality of life, but only if we allow them to rule and reign in our lives. As with the other needs faced by the single parent, emotions are faced by every individual upon the face of the earth. Therefore, whether a dual family or single parent through divorce, death, separation, desertion, unwed mother or adoptive parent we all face the reality of emotions.

Though this author's survey did not identify specific emotional needs, 76 percent of the respondents, the second highest response of all needs, indicated need in the emotional area. Of those responding to this being a concern or need they experienced following their becoming a single parent, 75 percent indicated it to be within the top five needs and concerns. [See Appendix I.]

The total emotions one experiences are too numerous to chronicle but will include shock, anger, bitterness, loneliness, rejection, confusion, guilt and grief. One might even think himself going insane because of the overload on their emotional system. The truth of the matter is that unless these emotions are handled in a healthy and Biblical fashion they could well lead to an overload of
one's emotional system. It could bring about an emotional shutdown much like in an electrical system when a breaker will flip off to prevent the overload from doing further damage.

Generally speaking the single parent will follow a similar process of grief that a person faces in death or divorce. Particularly if your single parenting status is brought on by death, separation or divorce. The first general reaction is to deny the reality of what is happening. This is primarily a defense mechanism to protect yourself emotionally.

As one begins to get beyond denial, anger often follows. There can be anger toward the other spouse, others that might be involved, and even anger toward God for allowing such a thing to occur. In reality anger toward aspects of the process are to be expected, but as Ephesians 4:26 reminds us, "Be angry, and yet do not sin". We are to be angry toward sin and unrighteousness, but we are not to allow it to make us vindictive or seek to meet out the punishment that God says is His.

Many not wanting to face the change to the single parenting status and the breakdown or loss of a relationship will begin to bargain with God, with the former spouse or anyone else that they feel can restore the original relationship. The person who continues to bargain is in
essence still living in denial of reality. It is not until one begins to come to grips with reality that they will progress in emotional healing. Once they begin to get beyond denial and headed toward reality, typically the next emotional hurdle in that of depression.

The degrees and extent of the depression one faces will be determined by a number of factors including one’s temperament, personality, relationship with the Lord and the support system one has, as well as to the extent they call upon that support system. In the midst of this depression you can withdraw from everyone or you can take the opposite approach and go one hundred miles per hour through life. If the depression is severe and becomes prolonged one may need to seek out professional help. Seeking professional help is not a sign of weakness and should not be perceived as such. Rather it is and should be seen as a sign of health, strength and wisdom in knowing when to seek counsel.

On the road to acceptance, in the final stage of the emotional grieving process the single parent will have to cross the bridges of their fears and forgiveness. Fears are to a certain extent a part of life itself, however in facing the new challenges and unknowns of single parenting those fears are intensified. Dr. Adrian Rogers, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church, Memphis, Tennessee, has described fear with an acrostic of the word "F.E.A.R." itself.
According to Dr. Rogers, fear is "False Evidence Appearing Real." One lady refused to follow the Biblical admonition not to worry about her fears because she said that 95 percent of the fears she worried about never came true, so she concluded that her worrying kept the fears from becoming a reality. The single parent must face their fears, deal with the reality of those which they can and commit the rest to God knowing that you have absolutely no control over their outcome but God does and we can trust Him.

One of the final, major emotional bridges to cross before entering into acceptance of one’s single parenthood is that of forgiveness. Coming to the point of forgiveness in no way condones the actions of a spouse who left the marriage for another person or in any other way wronged you. Forgiveness needs to be experienced from at least three perspectives. First the individual must be willing to forgive themselves of any genuine wrongs they perpetrated in the relationship. They may have been minuscule in comparison to the former spouse, but even so there are none of us without sin and thus in need of forgiveness.

Believers must understand that God has already forgiven them by Christ's death on the cross. The reception of this personal forgiveness is through confession of the specific sin or sins and repentance from them. The repentance is a change of mind, which leads ultimately to a change of
attitude and actions. Thus we come to understand that not only does God forgive, but that individuals can forgive themselves. One can certainly have no higher standard imposed on them and by themselves that God has on them, and if He has forgiven the individual then they too can forgive themselves.

Finally in the emotional area of forgiveness, one must come to the point of forgiving the one who has so deeply wounded them. Forgiveness of the former spouse is both instantaneous and progressive. In following God's admonition to forgive, you make that decision in a point of time, space, history and at that moment positional forgiveness has taken place. However, practically, one's emotions of having forgiven a person may take some time to catch up with the fact of the forgiveness. When emotions of unforgiveness, anger and the desire to hurt back reappear, one must simply remind their emotions that one has (past tense) forgiven that person. It may take a long time for the emotions to catch up with the reality, in some cases even years. But that does not change the fact that one has forgiven the person.

When one gets to this point they are ready to enter into the acceptance of their station in life and all that comes with it and begin to forge ahead to the future. One knows that this is occurring when one begins to make plans
for the future—their own future and the things of the past become less and less prevalent in your life.

**Loneliness**

As with other emotions, everyone faces loneliness to one degree or another at some point in their life. In fact it has been said that loneliness is, "the world's most common mental health problem."28 The single parent may feel this more intensely having lost a mate they once shared intimacy with, which was a help to combat loneliness. Of those surveyed, 67 percent indicated loneliness to be a significant issue with which they have had to deal since becoming a single parent. Of those responding to this issue, 64 percent placed it within the top five of their concerns. [See Appendix I.]

Loneliness develops when we lack close, intimate and meaningful contact with others. The subject of loneliness is very scantily addressed in most books pertaining to single parents, but it can be an overwhelming monster at times. Dr. Gary Collins addresses the issue of loneliness in his book *Christian Counseling - A Comprehensive Guide*. He suggests five major causes of loneliness. The first are social causes which include the fact that the world around us is becoming more and more impersonal with the rapid

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technological advances causing one to feel more like an inanimate object than a real flesh and blood cared about person. The mobility of our society, with many people moving several times in a lifetime and some every few years, make it increasingly more difficult to develop meaningful relationships. Along with mobility and technology, the urbanization of our society has caused many to withdraw from those around them by "cocooning" in their own personal space and not reaching out to those in close proximity to them. Many become couch potatoes before their television in their cocoon and few even know their next door neighbors very well. To help avoid loneliness one must develop skills such as being able to bond with other humans, display and receive acceptance, as well as acquire social skills that one may be deficient in.

Contributing to one's loneliness could be a low esteeming of one's self along with an inability to communicate about interpersonal relationship skills. One's inflexible attitude toward these issues may also be a self-inflicted cause of one's loneliness. Certainly the loss of one's spouse would be a real and pervading reason for loneliness.²⁹

There are a multitude of other reasons for loneliness, but one, which is sometimes overlooked, is in the spiritual

²⁹ Ibid., 97-98.
realm. Augustine once stated our need for God as he said, "Thou has formed us for Thyself and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in Thee." Because of sin we are alienated from God and there is that God shaped vacuum within man that can only be filled with the presence of God. Though all else may be in order in one’s life, one’s spiritual relationship with God through Christ may be in disharmony, and deep spiritual longing or loneliness can overtake one.\(^\text{30}\)

Some have suggested that we will never completely do away with loneliness. Perhaps God has placed it there to constantly leave us a bit discontent with the world and longing for the completeness that awaits us in the hereafter where there will be no more crying or tears or loneliness.\(^\text{31}\) Therefore, from a spiritual perspective, we need to recognize these facts and let God do His work in preparing us for heaven.

Recognizing the causes of loneliness is only half of the issue. The other half is to offer some solutions. Like any other issue of life, for it to be dealt with it must first be acknowledged. Many would seek to deny it or think of it in a negative fashion rather than deal with it. As one acknowledges it remember that it can have a positive

\(^{30}\text{Ibid., 98.}\)

\(^{31}\text{Tom Varney, Loneliness, (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1992), 18-19.}\)
aspect to it in regards to our spiritual and emotional health. Spiritually it can remind one of the eternity that God has placed in their heart and one can look forward to that time which will be spent in eternity with God. Emotionally we can consider loneliness from a positive perspective as one would when a red warning light flashes on an automobile to warn you things are not as they should be. Loneliness can be one of our warning lights to indicate that something in our life is out of balance and we can allow it to drive us toward those relationships we so desperately need in our lives for emotional health. Thus, to help in the battle against loneliness, one must establish some interaction with adults and engage in adult conservation. A local support group or Bible study class would be helpful in this area.

One may also need to consider more specifically the causes for the loneliness from those previously listed and others. Once one has identified the surface cause or presenting issues, they can more easily deal with the root cause to eliminate it, and not just try to turn the warning light off and ignore the real issues.

Gary Richmond, when asked how single parents could deal with loneliness responds, "Isolation is devastation. Involvement is the answer."32 God created us as social

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32 Richmond, 192.
creatures and stated that it was not good that we be alone. Thus one needs to take opportunities and make opportunities to develop genuine friendship at all levels, from casual to intimate, to help beat loneliness. The best place to start is a local New Testament, Bible teaching and preaching church that genuinely cares for the divorced and single parents of the community. One of the best ways to discern this is through a vitally active Sunday School program for Single Parents.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly in overcoming loneliness, Gary Richmond suggests we develop what he calls "God Consciousness." "God Consciousness" is a genuine awareness that God is there. That He really is with you always and forever having promised never to leave nor forsake you. The more one practices the presence of Jesus, the more conscious one becomes that He really is there.

**Trust**

Somewhat related to the issue of loneliness is the issue of trust. Trust is especially an issue to the single parent who is divorced, deserted or who became a single parent by any means that their trust in another party was breached. Almost all such single parents have developed a great distrust and general skepticism toward all relationships. They are therefore less likely to develop

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33 Ibid., 194.
the relationships that would help overcome loneliness and even more so in regards to developing new relationships that might eventually lead to remarriage. In some sense they have lost the ability to truly trust and express the intimacy they once experienced in their first relationship. This too can be a positive to the extent that it makes one more realistic in assessing their potential relationship and not enter into it in a naive fashion. Trusting requires risk. But the truth of the matter is that all of life is a risk. The greater the risk the greater the payoff. Success in marriage and remarriage will require genuine trust and the ability to be completely open and honest with another.

In the survey it was discovered that trust drew the third largest response of need following Finances and Emotional needs. Seventy-one percent of those responding to the survey indicated trust to be a significant factor to them. Eighty percent of those responding to trust placed it within their top five concerns. Not only is trust a factor with the adults, but many of the parents indicated in their comments that it was an issue that their children were also having to deal with. [See Appendix I.]

To begin to rebuild one's trust in others, one must take the risk of being hurt, but knowing that with God's help one can and will learn to trust, to open themselves and commit themselves to others. With God's help one will be
able to build true intimacy again. The primary way that one will be able to rebuild their trust is through spending time with others and by having shared experiences over that period of time. Through this time spent together and the experiences one shares one will slowly begin to determine the trustworthiness of the other individual and slowly will build the intimate, trusting relationship needed for a wholesome, healthy life. The key to remember is to take adequate time in as many varied experiences as possible in getting to know someone.

**Sexuality**

Sexuality is like a powerful raging river that out of its banks can be utterly devastating but properly channeled and managed can provide a great deal of benefit. Contemporary culture is inundated by a deluge of sexual promiscuity, which has come through the denial of Biblical absolutes in regard to sexual morality. It has been replaced by the subjectivity of moral relativity and situational ethics. Of all the issues thus far discussed, this area of sexuality is perhaps the most pervasive and difficult of all. This is especially true for the single parent who has known the pleasures of true physical/emotional intimacy, which comes from a healthy sexual orientation and participation. The data currently available to us regarding the sexuality of the previously married,
which would include the majority of single parents both
custodial and non custodial, would indicate the
persuasiveness of this issue of sexuality.

In a survey conducted by Carolyn Koons and Michael
Anthony and discussed in their book Single Adult Passages,
they found that the overwhelming majority of divorced,
single adults had been involved in sexual relations on a
fairly regular basis following their becoming single again.
Almost 82 percent had had intercourse while single, and 10
percent of those responding to the survey had had sexual
intercourse with more than 20 partners since entering the
single again category. Only 18 percent had remained
abstinent following their divorce as compared to 80 percent
of the total group of singles surveyed. Thus the indication
is that the previously married are much more likely to have
been involved sexually after their becoming single again
than those not having been previously married.34

John Gagnon in his book, Human Sexualities, estimates
that as high as 90 percent of those previously married
have had sexual intercourse since their divorce or
widowhood.35 In The Divorce Experience, Morton Hunt states
that only one in 20 men and one in 14 women who have been
single for one year are celibate. He further

34 Koons and Anthony, 113-114.
estimates that two-thirds of the men and over one-half of the women are as sexually active now as when they were married. 36

This author's survey did not indicate so nearly as high a percentage of concern or involvement sexually as did the previously cited figures. The survey did not ask individual and specific questions concerning sexual intercourse, but dealt with it in a rather general way. [See Appendix I.]

Experiencing the deep feelings of rejection, mistreatment and general devaluing of their personhood through the failure of this former relationship, can often cause individuals to react in ways totally foreign to them and shocking to those who have known them to be very moral people in the past. Because of the "new morality" our generation has faced the sexual freedom and general lack of moral absolutes our culture portrays and the situational ethics espoused by so many in addition to the mixed message of the religious world, especially the more liberal portion of the church in America. It is no wonder the newly single Christians find themselves in a quagmire of reevaluating their own moral standards and questioning the Biblical absolutes they have grown up with.

Dr. Jim Talley, speaking in the video series Divorce Care, offers some suggestions as to why a relatively solid Christian not normally given to moral indiscretions would do

so following the failure of a previous relationship. He equates it to a person who has been seriously injured physically with a broken leg. Because the person may be in shock he might not realize the extent of his injury and not respond to the injury. Also if the injury was anesthetized the person would not be aware of the seriousness of his injury and not seek the necessary help to recover from the injury. So it is with the recently single parent partner who immediately enters into another relationship, to anesthetize the pain of the first injury or broken relationship. It works for a while, but just as when the anesthesia wears off the pain returns and the injury is in worse condition than immediately following the original injury. This type of pain control can go on through many relationships, but the truth of the matter is that the real issue of dealing with one’s true sexuality has not been adequately dealt with.³⁷ There are many whose moral compasses are being pulled off course because of the strong magnetic pull of the physical aspect and attachments of the sexual experience. They are confused, as they have drifted off course of God’s standard, which is the only true-north or standard by which to set our moral compasses. Many allow the false magnetism to direct them into what they hope to be a safe harbor in which they can dock their lives from the turbulent rough seas they have just come through. In actual

fact, this safe harbor they think they have entered into is an unsanitary tributary with no proper means to motivate themselves away from the rapids at which they eventually find themselves, leading to a waterfall and further destruction of their lives.

Why do so many single parents end up here after one bad experience? Because they have no real understanding of what true sexuality is and how to genuinely experience it. Many have confused sexuality with sexual intercourse itself. They have further defined sexual intercourse as love, and love is ultimately what they are looking for. Mary Ann Mayo in her book, *A Christian Guide to Sexual Counseling*, states,

> Casual sex is like candy: it seems good while one is eating it, but it is nutritionally unhealthy...scarcely does the person seeking intimacy through sex relate their emptiness, complications and health problems back to their source: sex with no commitment. 38

That which a person is truly searching for in their expression of sexuality, as they understand it, is true intimacy. True intimacy is that completing of themselves or finding wholeness. Perhaps Thomas Jones has offered one of the best definitions of sexuality in his book, *The Single Again Handbook*. He defines sexuality as, "the human potential for the complete sharing of one's whole life with a person of the opposite sex." He goes on,

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As creatures in God's image, we possess the ability and the need to share ourselves with the opposite sex. The difference in our spirits and our bodies call us toward each other. There can be different degrees of this sharing, but if we chose, we possess the potential to share ourselves in a total union with one other human being. The total union can be expressed physically by the joining of our bodies in physical sexual union. The Bible calls this union 'one flesh,' a term implying both physical and spiritual oneness. 39

The single parent who is looking for this type of fulfillment and intimacy, of experiencing their true sexuality must first come to an understanding of what their sexuality is and what it will take to truly complete or satisfy this aspect of their life. Then and only then will they understand and find contentment in their sexuality and be able to express and share their true sexuality with that one person in their lives. It will take a genuine understanding that true sexual satisfaction comes only in that one man, one woman relationship for life and that it is not simply the physical aspect of sexual intercourse that will satisfy. In fact such encounters will only seek to complicate and make more difficult a true and genuine experience of one's sexuality. Only as one comes to understand that sexual intercourse is the culmination of the true sharing of one completely with the other, the true intimacy that is so desperately sought for, will the single

parent be able to truly put sex in its proper place in their life.

So with a proper understanding of one's sexuality the single parent can move on with actually dealing with their sexuality. The experiencing of their sexuality will not be in the physical sex act itself, but rather in the developing of the intimate relationships with individuals until in God's timing they can share themselves completely with that one person in a life long commitment. The single parent should seek to develop friendships and allow them to develop toward intimacy in every area of their life including socially, recreationally, intellectually and spiritually.

The bottom line for the single parent in regard to their sexuality is that it is possible to have sexual fulfillment and intimacy outside of being married and not succumb to the fallacy of having to have physical sex to achieve it. As one submits to the Lordship of Christ through the surrender of their bodies to Christ (Romans 12:1-2), realizing that their bodies are not their own but belong to the Lord (I Corinthians 6:13), and as they flee from all immorality they will experience the rewards that obedience to God brings and avoid the pitfalls that disobedience likewise brings.

The beautiful rewards include avoiding unwanted pregnancies, possible abortions, post abortion trauma, the
likely possibility of contracting a sexuality transmitted disease and perhaps even avoiding death through contracting AIDS. From an emotional perspective, by obeying God’s plan one will avoid the guilt, jealousy, fear, anger, depression and many other emotional side effects of sexual promiscuity. The church should be a safe place for the single parent to begin to develop the relationship that would lead to the fulfillment of one’s sexuality to the extent that is possible without the physical aspects. The general membership and pastors as well as other leadership should be the ones to foster such an atmosphere.

As the single parent comes to understand their sexuality in this fashion, they can be content in trusting God for remarriage, if this is His plan for them. They can be equally content in developing those intimate friendships should they not remarry.

Self Esteem

As we conclude an examination of some of the more outstanding and common emotional needs of the single parent we turn to an emotional need that stands alone by itself, while at the same time serves as a thread that runs through all of our emotional needs and has the power to affect them all for good or for bad. For this reason the health and the self-esteem of the single parent is rather detrimental on many other aspects of their life.
Among those questioned in this author's survey, 43 percent thought self-esteem a significant issue for them to deal with. Of this number, only 44 percent evaluated it within their top five concerns. However, that number when viewed in light of all those responding equaled approximately one percent. Interestingly enough, the parents also listed self esteem with an equal percentage of concern, 43 percent, for their children as well. The difference seen here is that of this 43 percent, 89 percent listed it within their top five concerns. [See Appendix I.]

The author is aware that the entire issue of self-esteem is a controversial one within Christian circles with very good people on both sides of the issue. For example, Jay Adams, a popular Christian Counselor, is very critical of any term exalting the "self." He describes terms like "self-esteem," "self-love," and "self-image" with words like "paganism" and "plague." He stresses Scripture's focus on man's sinful nature and it's teaching on self-denial.¹⁰

Gary Richmond, former pastor to single parents at the Evangelical Free Church in Fullerton, California, would be in the same vein as Adams. When discussing his thoughts on self-esteem he states self-esteem is not only unimportant, it is dangerous. He goes on to state that it took God forty years to get the self-esteem out of Moses so He could use

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him. However, he does concede that though the Bible does not directly teach self-love, it does assume it.\(^{41}\)

This concept of loving ourselves is certainly implied with the command to love others as we love ourselves. Also, that which gives us intrinsic worth as human beings is the fact that we were created in the image of God, though certainly that has been tainted by the fall of man. In essence, the issue may be more a matter of semantics than actual concepts. It appears rather clear that the single parents experience loss of self worth and value as they go through the loss and rejection of a failed relationship. In fact, researchers tell us that ninety percent of American adults struggle with issues related to self-image. Single parent families are no exception.\(^{42}\)

Judith Wallerstein, in the book \textit{Second Chances}, did a ten year longitudinal study of six middle class families in the midst of divorce. It was the first comprehensive account of the long-term emotional, economic, and psychological effects of divorce on adults and children. Her findings were compelling.

In an effort to explain the issue of self-esteem she writes,

\begin{quote}
Self-esteem is based upon one’s inner standards and the partner’s standards plus standards created
\end{quote}

\(^{41}\) Richmond, 196-197.

within the identity of the marriage—each person wants the other to be proud of his or her achievements, and each is eager to win approval and praise along with love. As the years go by the identification strengthens and a new marital identity is formed. As it becomes difficult for one or both partners to think of themselves outside the context of marriage a subordinate identity is created. 43

The analysis continues as it explained that sometimes when one is absorbed into the identity of the other, such as becoming known as the "doctor's wife," the loss due to divorce becomes very serious and confused for the subordinated one. It becomes very difficult to reestablish an identity separate from the marriage. An illustration would be someone referring to themselves as Mrs. Jones, three years after the marriage had dissolved. Their report goes on to state that women who did not remarry also reported a sense of deteriorating physical well being as they cope with the many problems that arise in the decades after the divorce. 44

This sense of poor self-esteem seems elaborated as many women must enter into the job market and receive low paying jobs. Even those who succeed master a whole new way of life, achieving higher levels of self confidence than they had in their marriages. Despite their greater self esteem,


44 Ibid., 52-53.
most have a chronic, gnawing sense that they are not available enough for their children.45

Dr. Bobbie Reed defines self-image as what we tell ourselves about ourselves, and is convinced that one's self image influences all of life's decisions. She buttresses her understanding of self-esteem from the explanation given by Maurice Wagner in The Sensation of Being Somebody. He states that self-esteem has two foundations - first is the functional aspect and second is the feeling aspect.

The functional aspect of self-esteem involves three aspects: Appearance, how we look or appear to others; Performance, how well we do things, our level of skills, knowledge and abilities; and Status, the level of respect we have from our friends, family, job etc.

The "feeling" foundation of self-esteem includes three aspects also. First, is Belongingness - a sense of being wanted, accepted and cared for. Secondly, is Feelings of Worthiness - which comes from doing what we know to be right in the eyes of others. Thirdly, is Competence - feeling adequate in a given situation because of a proven ability in similar instances.

The two foundations of function and feeling as well as the aspects of each; appearance, performance, status, belongingness, feelings of worthiness, and competence are all greatly damaged and in some cases virtually destroyed as one

45 Ibid., 137.
enters into single parenting, and depending on the ongoing circumstances of the single parent, may continue to deteriorate over time.\textsuperscript{46}

Certainly all truth is God's truth whether presented in a secular or sacred context. Robert McGee in his work, \textit{The Search For Significance}, takes a Biblical perspective as he addresses one's self-esteem needs, or as he calls it, one's "Search for Significance". In his work he addresses four false beliefs which he believes ultimately result from Satan's deception of mankind, even as Satan deceived Eve in the garden, and the consequences that occur from buying into these four false postulates. McGee concludes with God's solution and a proper Biblical view of where our significance is to be found.

The first false belief that Satan has deceived us with is what he calls the "Performance Trap". The false belief is that one must meet certain standards to feel good about one's self. This carries over to the single parent in that it as if they have failed in their previous relationship and in their dual parenting role. This inability to perform adequately has brought about their situation.

McGee states that Scripture's answer to this false belief is to know that we have and will fail, we will not be

perfect, but nonetheless my acceptance should only be based on my pleasing the Father and having been justified because of Christ’s death on the cross for me. My standard is no longer to meet certain standards of others and to be approved by others or myself.

The second false belief that leads to low self-esteem is what is called "Approval Addict". It states that to truly be esteemed and feel good about ones self they must be approved and accepted by others. The consequence here is the fear of rejection. Again the single parent has experienced this rejection from their former spouse, usually, and is thus a candidate for low to no self-esteem.

We find the Biblical answer to this false notion in Colossians 1:21-22, which states that though we were once enemies to God, we have now been reconciled and brought into relationship with Him. Therefore, as I am fully accepted by God I can fully accept myself.

A third false notion that single parents experience is in the area of personal failure. Perhaps they did contribute to the failure of their marriage, thus when it failed they can again be overwhelmed with low self-esteem due to the personal failure. I John 4:9-11 speaks of Christ’s satisfaction of God's wrath by His death on the cross for our sins and failures. When we confess these and
are repentant we can experience complete cleaning and no longer carry the blame of the past failures.

The fourth and final false belief that so many single parents operate and live life under is the feeling of shame, hopelessness, and inferiority. The fact is that once one experiences the new birth of salvation and the Holy Spirit of God comes to live in them they are new creations with new supernatural power to walk with God and find self-worth in the truth of His Word.\footnote{Robert S. McGee, \textit{The Search for Significance}, (Houston: Rapha, 1990), 43-62.}

To summarize, the false beliefs that Satan seeks to deceive us with are seen in the following equation:

\[
\text{False Belief System} \quad \text{SELF-WORTH} = \text{PERFORMANCE} + \text{OTHERS' OPINIONS}\footnote{Ibid., 29.}
\]

Dr. Bobbie Reed summarizes the basis of a positive self-image, or positive self-esteem by stating it to be a spiritual one. We feel good about ourselves when we come to recognize that we belong to God who has accepted us according to Ephesians 1:6. We can consider ourselves worthy because Jesus Christ came to teach us about love and to pay the price for our shortcomings as the scripture teaches us in I Peter 1:18-19. Finally, she states we can feel competent because God gives us the strength for any task according to Philippians 4:13. This, along with the
fact that each of us as believers have unique gifts and abilities that make us special and have been given us by and is energized through the Holy Spirit of God as I Corinthians 12:1 teaches.\textsuperscript{49}

In their book \textit{Single Parenting with Dick and Jane}, Jane Hanna and Dick Stafford, two single parents, offer some practical ways of working toward a healthy self esteem and implementing what has just been discussed.

First a definite regular quiet time of personal Bible study is needed to help in replacing any false beliefs with the truth of God's Word. Prayer is the second activity to help single parents establish a positive self-image by being able to go to God and speak openly and honestly with Him about the deepest needs of their soul.

Third is the development of strategies as to how you will cope with the stresses you will encounter. Journalizing, painting or redecorating are just three suggested coping means. Replace some former traditions or at least begin some new family traditions that will hold special meaning and make meaningful memories.

Next be sure you get proper diets and plenty of exercise. You could enter into this phase with an accountability partner to keep you honest. In addition to the diet and exercise and perhaps even more importantly is

\textsuperscript{49} Reed, \textit{Single Mothers Raising Sons}, 89.
an adequate amount of rest. Without the needed rest the single parent will always be running at a deficit.

In order to break some old learned psychological habits you may want to consider trying some new and different hobbies and activities that you may have never done before but have at least an interest or curiosity. Finally, you will want to establish and develop some new relationships at work, church or recreation.50

The single parent, for their own mental and emotional health, must develop a positive self image for their own survival and quality of life. Even more importantly than that is the fact that the parents' self image or esteem, whether positive or negative, will set the tone for the development of the self image their children will carry with them.

Odd Jobs

Some of the needs of single parents, either male or female, often include accomplishing tasks that are a breeze for one of the opposite sex yet for the other sex it is almost insurmountable.

In the survey, the issue of odd jobs did not score significantly in the tally. However, the comments indicated

that this type of need is there, though perhaps not to a significant degree. [See Appendix I.]

Most men would never give a second thought about where oil goes in the car and when we need to add or change it; basic maintenance around the house such as the changing of a washer in a faucet, or starting the lawn mower or weed eater. But for the single mom, rather suddenly thrust into having to do these types of maintenance tasks, it can be overwhelming. However, from the male perspective, sewing on a button or ironing a shirt or cooking a nutritional meal may be issues difficult for him to deal with.

This is another place where the church could be of assistance. Either through a divorce recovery or single parenting support group or its singles ministry some of the men and women could make their talents and abilities known and then swap off doing some of the practical issues for one another. This would also be a good way to promote fellowship and to begin to build some new friendships.

**Dating and Possible Remarriage**

The possibility of dating and remarriage is or will become a very real issue to the overwhelming majority of single parents who were married. This is another area in which passions run high on both sides. There are good and godly individuals who take strong stands both for and against remarriage. One will find some who take the
position that one should never remarry following a divorce no matter the cause. Others would support the idea of remarriage following a divorce no matter the cause. There are many others who fall somewhere in the middle all along the spectrum. Thus it is an issue which cannot be ignored in a paper such as this. Though we will touch on some Biblical and theological views, for the most part we will take the view of Dr. David R. Miller in his book Single Moms, Single Dads. We will not 'primarily' look at theological and/or Biblical views of remarriage, but rather accept the facts of a sinful, fallen world and of divorce and offer some suggestions of how to face the issue when it presents itself.51 Supporting the fact that the majority of those divorced, including single parents, will remarry, John Splinter quotes Masters and Johnson’s On Sex and Human Loving, that 83 percent of men and 75 percent of women remarry. The general consensus of therapists is that approximately 80 percent of those who divorce will remarry. However there is further evidence that second marriages fail at perhaps a 60 percent higher rate than first marriages.52 Thus the admonition for all to give serious consideration to the possibility of remaining single.

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This author's survey indicates that dating, especially, is an issue of concern for approximately 48 percent of the respondents. However, when asked if they anticipated remarriage, it was an even split of 33.3 percent each for those who did anticipate remarriage, for those who did not anticipate remarriage, and for those undecided at this point in their lives. [See Appendix I.]

Jim Talley, in Life After Divorce, encourages the single parent to remain single and concentrate their efforts in the raising of their children. His reasoning is built upon two main issues: the children may be better off without the pressures of another relationship, considering the proliferation of AIDS and child molestations. His second premise is that the children will do better with your focused attention rather than your attention divided away from them to a new spouse, and them dividing their attention between two adults -- one who may have little or no interest in your children.53

Before a look at some practical suggestions regarding dating and remarriage, it would serve one well to consider what the Bible's basic position is regarding marriage, divorce and remarriage. The Bible is very practical and relatively clear concerning this subject, but as in all issues pertaining to scriptures, admonishes each individual

to decide for himself if he will follow Biblical guidance or perhaps choose to go his own way being willing to address the consequences thereof.

Marriage is the invention of God himself. He created marriage and instituted it among man (Genesis 2:18-25). God's original plan was to be one man and one woman joined together for life. They were to compliment and complete one another, which they did originally. God's original plan was marred due ultimately to the fall of man in the garden into sin. Though we are not given specific details, we know that by the time Deuteronomy was written divorce had entered onto the scene.

God's view concerning divorce has been consistent from the beginning. His original intent was for a man and woman to be married for life. At the end of the Old Testament He reaffirms his hatred of divorce in Malachi 2:15-16. Jesus, in Matthew chapters 5 and 19, reaffirms the Old Testament teaching of God’s high view of marriage and hatred of divorce.

With this stated and while being aware that all divorce is a result of sin, it must be made clear that not all divorces are sinful. God has allowed for or permitted divorce in the case of marital infidelity through sexual unfaithfulness. Some would also understand I Corinthians 7:15-16 to allow for divorce in the case of an unbeliever.
deserting their believing spouse after the believer has done all they could biblically to keep the marriage together. In either of these cases remarriage is at least assumed if not more specifically spelled out. Again this is from a Biblical perspective in regards to the permissibility of divorce and remarriage.

The question of divorce and remarriage on non-biblical grounds must be addressed. In such a case of a non-biblical divorce, remarriage would not be an allowance biblically, but reconciliation would be the preference. It is quite possible for one to know God's specific will and to knowingly and openly violate it; they are truly unregenerate individuals. On the other hand it is also quite possible that they are truly regenerated but simply disobedient and carnal. In such cases, God will be the final judge. One must look at the overall fruit of his life to better determine his position in Christ. However, for a truly regenerated person to violate God’s will, there will be chastisement for and consequences to his sin. The consequences and complications can be very far reaching. At the same time, though there are consequences of one’s sins, there is also complete forgiveness in Christ for all sins. There is no sin too small that it does not need the forgiveness Christ offers and no sin too large that Christ cannot provide forgiveness from it.
Thus as a single parent, primarily so by divorce, considers the possibly of dating and remarriage they should consider the scriptural teaching regarding their current position and the possible consequences and potential complications.

With this in mind, it is still true that the majority of single parents will remarry someday. The questions then become more of a practical nature, such as how long should one wait before remarrying? When will one know if ready to begin developing more intimate relationships? And how do the children fit into the scenario? These and other questions should be given a fair hearing to determine the possibilities of dating and remarriage.

When should a person even consider the possibility of dating again is a question asked by most single parents and divorced persons soon after the break up of the previous marriage. There is no magic time frame. It depends on the length of and circumstances surrounding the previous relationship. There are several suggested time frames. Dr. Splinter suggests a two-year period after the divorce.\(^{54}\)

Gary Richmond suggests one year of healing for every four years of marriage.\(^{55}\) Dr. Jim Talley suggests a five-

\(^{54}\) Splinter, 202.

\(^{55}\) Richmond, 144.
year period of healing for the single parent.\textsuperscript{56} Dr. Tom Jones of Fresh Start Ministries also states that one year is a minimum time for healing to begin.\textsuperscript{57}

Perhaps, rather than establishing an arbitrary time frame, it would be more accurate for individuals to look at certain characteristics of their lives to help determine their readiness. This is largely due to the fact that healing times vary according to individual and circumstance. A safe maximum for the single parent considering remarriage would be better late than early. Gary Richmond, taking a similar approach, has delineated some questions worth looking at by the one considering the possibility of dating and remarriage. He believes that time is an important indication along with correct, healthy responses to the following questions, but he prefaces all by saying, that if one is at all still emotionally attached to the former spouse they are definitely not ready to enter a new relationship. Should they enter too early it is with great certainty that they or the other will be hurt.\textsuperscript{58}

To show the necessity of a proper length of time to heal before entering remarriage he states that second marriages have a 24 percent success rate within five years.

\textsuperscript{56} Talley, 141.

\textsuperscript{57} T. Jones, 216.

\textsuperscript{58} Richmond, 141.
or conversely a 76 percent failure rate. Third marriages are successful only 13 percent of the time thus failing 87 percent of the time, with fourth marriages succeeding only 7 percent of the time and failing 93 percent of the time within the first five years.

Some questions are offered to help one take a practical look at their level of healing. He asks:

1. Am I now living more in the present than in the past?
2. Have my periods of depression become fewer and farther apart?
3. Have I overcome my tendency to look for nurturing or rescue?
4. Have I learned to live alone and not be lonely?
5. Am I spiritually secure?
6. When problems hit do I have a problem-solving attitude or do I overreact?
7. Have I identified my weaknesses and am I willing to work on them? Ask yourself these kinds of questions:
   * Did I yell too much or become icily silent during intense periods of communication?
   * Were my spending habits responsible or did they create tension?
   * Was I more concerned with my needs and feelings than my mates?
   * Did I have early childhood damage that kept me from being a healthy partner?
   * Am I obsessive in my use of drugs or alcohol?
   * Do I work too much?
   * Do I have to be perfect and demand that standard from those around me?
   * Do I have problems with lust that I periodically cannot keep under control?
   * Do I need to be in control of those around me at all times?
   * Do I have violent mood swings?
   * Am I violent?
8. Am I thankful for the hard times?
9. Do I still entertain fantasies of reconciliation?
10. Am I ready to contribute to a new relationship?
11. Do I consider myself complete with God, whether or not I ever remarry?  

Jim Talley, in his book *Life After Divorce*, suggests some additional areas to consider as well. He suggests:

1. Have I stabilized my life?
2. Are my children ready?
3. Am I just looking for companionship?
4. Can I afford to date?
5. Am I willing to be hurt again?
6. What do my family members think?
7. Do I have clear moral standards?
8. Will my dating affect the possibility of reconciliation with my former spouse?
9. Am I emotionally ready for another divorce?
10. Have I faced the possibility of child abuse?
11. How important is my church and my commitment to it?
12. What is the age difference?
13. Am I ready for more children?
14. Am I prepared for a fight over inheritance?

If one can answer these questions in positive and constructive ways in an honest and objective way perhaps with the help of an objective party then the possibility of a successful second relationship is greatly increased.

Though not exhaustive in mentioning every need of the single parent nor in the content of the needs touched upon, it is obvious that the single parent faced with the reality of life as a single parent could easily be overcome by the simple consideration of it all. Hagar was ready to sit down in the desert and give up. So too might the single parent wish to do the same. However, we must not forget that at

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59 Richmond, 141-146.

60 Talley, 142-151.
what appeared to be the darkest and most hopeless moment of Hagar's experience, it was then that God came to her to encourage, strengthen and empower her to not be overcome by the circumstances, rather to be an overcomer of the circumstances with God's help. Thus is the encouragement to the contemporary single parent as well. "As Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man," the single parent will be able to look back at situations they thought to be insurmountable and see that they have not only gone through them, but also grown through it in all and will stand amazed at the grace of God to meet all our needs.

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CHAPTER 5
THE NEEDS OF SINGLE PARENT CHILDREN

It has long been this author’s contention that one of the main reasons God has such a hatred of divorce, as He speaks of it in the prophet Malachi, is primarily because of the effect divorce has on children. If there truly is an innocent party in a divorce situation it is the children. Jesus often showed his love for children by making reference to them and calling them to himself. One such incident is found in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter eighteen. In referring to one of the harshest penalties the Greeks had for punishment, Jesus said if anyone caused a child who believed in Him to stumble that, “it is better for him that a heavy millstone be hung around his neck, and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6 NAS).

As we turn back to the “Book of Beginnings”, the book of Genesis, chapter twenty-one, we are given another view of God’s great love for and tender care of the child of the single parent household. Sara bears Abraham a son, the son of promise, Isaac. We know from Scripture that Ishmael was at least thirteen years of age. Abraham loved his son by Hagar. They had been through much together. Ishmael viewed
Abraham as his father and Abraham viewed Ishmael as his son. They obviously shared that father-son love for one another intensified by the fact he was an only child.

Following Isaac being weaned from Sarah; Abraham threw a great feast to celebrate the weaning. Apparently jealousy arose within Ishmael’s heart toward Isaac or at the very least elements of sibling rivalry arose and Ishmael mocked Isaac. Sarah saw this and was exceedingly angry. She demanded that Abraham “drive out” his first born son and the mother of his first born son. Sarah refused to allow Ishmael to become an heir with Isaac. It is perhaps an interesting side note of the parallel to the issue of the blended family arising within this same passage, and the unique problems which accompany such. Nevertheless, Sarah refused any such blending of their families.

Abraham was greatly grieved about the prospects of sending his firstborn son away. God in His sovereignty, knowing the end from the beginning, came to Abraham and assured him that Ishmael would be fine and that He would make of Ishmael a great nation also. Thus Abraham believed God and complied with Sarah’s wishes. At God’s prompting, he sent Ishmael and Hagar away. Only a father who has lost a son who truly wanted him and wanted to love him can imagine the deep anguish he felt in sending Ishmael away.
At the same time Abraham’s great faith in and obedience to God is to be commended.

Hagar again found herself wandering as a single mother in the wilderness with a teenage son. While wandering in the wilderness she ran out of provisions including water. Having lost all hope she put Ishmael under a bush to die and turned her back to him that she not witness his death. Hagar had literally come to the end of her rope as a single mom with a teenage boy. She was truly broken and prepared for her son to die when at the seeming last minute God appeared. He again encouraged Hagar. The Bible says God heard Ishmael’s cry and came to Hagar and Ishmael to assure them that they would be provided and cared for. As we see later in the chapter (vs. 20), Scripture says, “God was with the lad, and he grew, and he lived in the wilderness and became an archer”. We are also told that he married and as we know had many descendants recognized today as the Arab world.

From this passage we can learn several things about the single parent child. Above all we see that God does not abandon the children. It’s interesting that God heard Ishmael’s cry, not Hagar’s. God responded in His perfect timing to Ishmael as he cried out to God. We also learn that not all sons raised by single-moms will grow up as sexual deviates and become homosexuals as many tend to
believe. Ishmael grew up to become an archer, a very "manly" thing. He also married and obviously had many children. Though there can be gender issues with single parent children, there does not have to be. We learn also that the situation Ishmael innocently found himself in did or at least may have contributed to his being as God said, in the book of Genesis 16:12, "a wild donkey of a man with his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him.” It would appear that a great deal of anger was exhibited in and through his life and lifestyle, possibly due to the effects of the separation of his parents.

Divorce affects children no matter the age of the child when the divorce occurs. Dr. Judith Wallerstein made this clear in her longitudinal study of the effects of divorce. In fact, she did her study to dispel two basic myths about divorce. One, divorce is short term in its impact and that every adult can weather a relationship that is broken. Two, children are naturally resilient and will recover from the divorce experience.62 Gary Richmond goes on to state, “Children never really heal from divorce but they can rise above the wounds dramatically.”63 Dr. Lee Salk, a prominent child psychologist has said, “The trauma divorce is second only to death. Children sense a deep sense of loss and feel


63 Richmond, 107.
they are suddenly vulnerable to forces beyond their control."\textsuperscript{64}

\textit{Family Policy}, a publication of the Family Research Council, sites reports from the Progressive Policy Institute, the U. S. Catholic Conference and the National Commission on Children, all confirming the superiority of the intact, two-parent family. The National Commission on children stated in its 1992 report, "Children do best when they have the personal involvement and material support of a father and a mother."\textsuperscript{65} Abraham Maslow, observed that, "there is nothing more important in the raising of a child than the discipline of a family man who keeps his promises to his wife."\textsuperscript{66}

Educational outcome, mental and physical health, school dropout rates, teen suicides, drug use, non marital sexual activities, pregnancy and abortions, delinquent and other self destructive behaviors, are all affected by family structure. Adverse affects of broken family structure have been found irrespective of age, race, income, or educational attainment of parents.\textsuperscript{67}


\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., quoting Abraham Maslow.

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.
Because of the potential destructive effects on children of single parent families, it is essential to understand the effects upon the children, when and where they might occur in regard to their developmental stage of life and what might be done to lessen such effects. This chapter will identify many of the effects, offer some suggestions in addressing them as well as identifying when they may occur in the developmental stage of the children.

**Denial**

When a child experiences the break up of what has been for him a stable or at least relatively stable two-parent family, one of the first things he may experience is what has been identified as denial. Of those surveyed, nearly one-quarter of the parents said that the issue of denial was a concern to their child, although it did not appear in any of their top concerns. [See Appendix I.]

As with any traumatic situation of severe loss, in an effort to try and change reality the child will simply refuse to recognize the reality of the change within their family structure and pretend that it simply is not happening. Circumstances in most instances will bring a child to the reality that change is or has occurred in their family structure. The parent should be sensitive to when the child wants to talk about the changes and not become reactive in their response to the child. The parent would
do well at this point to reassure the child that he is loved and was not the cause of the situation.\textsuperscript{68}

\textbf{Anger}

Perhaps one of the more widespread and intense emotional reactions of a child entering into a single parent situation is anger. This author’s survey indicates this to be a significant issue to children of the single parent home. Over half, 57 percent, say anger was or is an issue with their child. Of those responding, 75 percent would put it as one of their top five issues affecting their child. [See Appendix I.]

The children cannot get what they want. The goal of having an intact two-parent loving family is blocked thus they become very frustrated. Their anger is a way to deal with their frustration. Because divorce and separation is a “process” and not an “event”, they are unable to overcome the frustration and the anger persists.

God designed anger as somewhat of a protective device for individuals. It is to help one to overcome particular obstructions or obstacles or threats, which confront an individual. It becomes a problem when aimed in a wrong direction or for a wrong reason, or expressed in an incorrect fashion, which would basically be opposite God’s

directions. The anger may be directed at either one or both of the parents or even at God for allowing this to happen to them. A majority of both teens and children say they were angry with everyone and everything.\textsuperscript{69}

The anger can be expressed in a variety of ways. It can be expressed outwardly by acting out in a number of ways, such as using foul language or gestures, or arguing with those in authority or through direct disobedience. Greg and Dana Cynauman, have charted some of the most common areas in which teenagers and children say they have acted out:\textsuperscript{70}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage of Teenagers</th>
<th>Percentage of Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cut school often</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt they just hated everyone</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoplifted</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stole from others</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fighting</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ran away from home</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurt animals</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanted to physically hurt others</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Anger may also be shown in less direct ways. It can be masked, suppressed or hidden, or remain dormant and express itself in negativity and moodiness. Other less obvious expressions of anger would be via passive-aggressive means. Anger can be expressed passively through constant irritability, withdrawing oneself from others, becoming very critical of one's parents or siblings, as well as other

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 200.

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 34.
ways. Interestingly enough, often anger is expressed toward
the custodial parent with little or none shown toward the
non-custodial parent. The reason for this seems to be that
the child feels safe in expressing his anger to the parent
who has custody perhaps feeling they will not be abandoned
by them. Not wanting to further isolate themselves from the
non-custodial parent they refuse to express their angry
feelings.

Archibald Hart identifies four causes of anger, all of
which could apply to the child. First is instinctive
protection, an involuntary response reacting to a feeling of
being threatened. Obviously the child’s safety and security
is being threatened as he is forced into a situation he does
not desire.

A second cause of anger is that of being a conditioned
response. It has become an automatic response to a
situation in which we have experienced anger before. This
could have built up over a period of time as the child
watches the poor relationship his parents had while still
together.

Thirdly, anger can come from pure frustration. It is a
means to attempt to overcome the frustration of being forced
into a situation he does not desire.

Hart defines the fourth cause of anger as arising from
hurt. This hurt can be either physical pain or
psychological pain. Both may have been experienced during and after the break up of the intact family.\textsuperscript{71}

Anger is not always a problem. Under some circumstances it can be healthy and beneficial. Though there is no real consensus, many believe every child of divorce or those placed into single parenting situations for whatever reason, should be carefully observed by a person trained to detect anger problems. If it continues over a period of several weeks, certainly professional help should be sought.

How can people be helped with the issue of anger? One thing to be remembered is that the anger is good to the extent that it indicates to us that they are reaching out for help. They are asking for assurance of their love and for security. Those acting out their anger are asking for boundaries to be set to also give them the security of knowing their limits, which when done will give them a sense of security.

To help overcome this anger and to help the child work through it, the parent needs to do some intense active and empathetic listening. It is through the active listening that one can begin to discern the root of the anger. You should make yourself available to your child and plan specific times to spend alone with each of your children.

\textsuperscript{71} Hart, 102-3.
The parent should also above all model the behavior you want your child to emulate.\textsuperscript{72}

\textbf{Bargaining}

As the child or teen passes through the anger stage and determines it has gotten him nowhere, following a typical cycle he may then enter into a time of bargaining. In another attempt to try and change the reality of the circumstances they find themselves in, they may begin to bargain with God, their parents or anyone in a position of authority or influence who might bring change to their situation. It is somewhat an "if...then" proposition. They hope that by bargaining "if mom and dad would get together, or if mom and dad would quit fighting then I promise I would..." do certain things. His or her final appeal to God or whomever going unanswered and all of the bargaining seemingly having no effect, could well push them into greater anger toward God and/or others. Following a typical pattern it may even push them toward the depths of depression. In this author's survey, 33 percent of the respondents indicated that their child was obviously involved in some type of bargaining situation. [See Appendix I.]

The parent can be of tremendous help at this point by spending time with the child and pointing out the truth

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 107.
regarding his current thinking. The original paradigm of Hagar and Ishmael will serve as a basis of showing God's great concern for the children of single-parent families. Additional Scripture references could well support this truth, including the fact that Jesus himself apparently spent time in a single-parent family. This being supported by the references of Mary's appearances during the later part of Jesus' ministry apart from Joseph, indicating his removal from the scene presumably through death.

The parent should also help the child to understand that God allows us to make choices and some people make bad choices that often affect innocent people. However, one must understand that the nature of God will not allow Him to ever abandon the single-parent child. He has promised to never leave nor forsake His own.

If the child is able to comprehend this aspect of God's nature, he can understand that God is sovereign. That means He does take even the bad choices of others and weave them together for good to the person who loves and trusts God. He sees the end from the beginning and will ultimately work toward our good and His glory.

Though the child sees and understands that God has not forgotten him, the child may still continue to work through the typical cycle of grieving the loss of the stable environment and the loss of one parent in the situation.
Should that be the case, the child may move from denying the loss of one parent to anger over the situation exhibited through his acting out episodes to bargaining with anyone whom might change the situation. All of these having failed to accomplish his objective, he may well turn his emotions and anger inward leading to depression.

**Depression**

Some of the common signs of depression may include some or all of the following:

- Poor appetite or overeating
- Sleep related problems
- Low energy, lack of motivation, or fatigue
- Low self-esteem or poor self-image
- Poor concentration in the classroom or during homework
- Preparation or difficulty in making decisions
- Feelings of helplessness and hopelessness
- Isolation or withdrawal from family and friends
- Tearfulness or uncontrollable emotions
- A lack of regard for physical appearance

Additional indications may include rebellion, negativity, resentment, anger, impaired social performance, feelings of despair, psychomotor retardation, suicidal threats and ideas, psychosomatic illness (headache, stomachache), etc.

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Depression which is a response to a major loss, often known as "Severe Reactive Depression" along with other terms, is a part of the normal grieving cycle and its ultimate form often depends on the personality and emotional healthiness of the particular child experiencing it.\textsuperscript{75}

We should be reminded that God has built depression into our systems as a natural and normal device of protection for us. It serves somewhat as a warning light in an automobile which is low on oil to prevent a complete breakdown, or as a circuit breaker in an electrical system to prevent a fire.

During times of depression, when our energies are needed to cope with the issues at hand, we tend to lose interest in many of the things we would normally find interesting and thus devote energy toward. This energy can thus be devoted to our healing. Following the times of depression our normal energy levels return to us and we return to our regular activities. This author's research showed almost 30 percent of the parents indicating depression as an issue within their child's life. More significant than that, is that of those indicating depression as an issue with their child, 67 percent ranked it within their top five concerns of their children. [See Appendix I.]

\textsuperscript{75} Hart, 120-21.
Dr. Archibald Hart gives seven suggestions for helping children experiencing depression:

1. See the loss from the child’s point of view.
2. Accept the child’s depression as a normal reaction.
3. Help your child experience the depression as fully as possible.
4. Avoid perpetuating the depression.
5. Help your child accept the reality of the loss.
7. Pray with your child.

Hart continues with some useful hints to help decrease the intensity of the divorce. Here he offers four hints:

1. Provide distractions for your child.
2. Work out rules that you can implement.
3. Be careful what you say around your child.
4. Respect the rights of the other parent. 76

The depression is ultimately aimed at protecting the child from more pain. In accomplishing Dr. Hart’s suggestions, one needs to help the child identify his source of pain and expose it to the truth and the light of God’s love and care. In some way convey to your child that you too have wrestled with the same or similar issues that he is dealing with, or perhaps seeking not to deal with, and how you have dealt or are dealing with the issues. Keeping in mind the things shared with your child should be age appropriate for them to hear.

The ultimate conclusion of the grief cycle is to bring the child from initial denial through anger, into bargaining to and through depression, to accepting the situation and

76 Ibid., 127-130.
circumstances as they actually are. They need to understand that things will be different but still things will be okay.

The typical stages of the type of grief experienced by a child transitioning to a single parent household, though perhaps somewhat predictable are not necessarily consistent in every case. The extent and duration of each stage is also diverse. There may also be regression to previous stages thought to have already been experienced. Thus, when dealing with the complexity of human emotions it is difficult to be dogmatic. However, no matter the diversity of the individual and their particular situation, there is one constant - God. As with Ishmael, He will not forsake nor abandon the child who calls upon Him.

In addition to the emotions already addressed there are others. Though not identified as specific stages of grief, nonetheless, they affect the child. These emotions tend to occur commonly among children of single parent households and may coincide with one or more of the particular stages previously described. In this portion of the paper we will address some of the more common emotions shared and experienced by children of the single parent home.

**Fears**

Most children experience fear when thrust into a new family situation. Perhaps because the young child is consciously or unconsciously aware of their need of and
dependence on their parents there is the fear of being abandoned completely by the loss of one parent. They perhaps reason that if they lose one parent or perceive that one parent has left them, that they might lose the other or that the other might leave them also and they would be totally alone. This author’s survey indicated this to be true of many of the children. The child is left feeling very vulnerable. Of all the issues listed and comments made by the parents regarding their children, fear outranked them all. In fact, 71 percent of those responding said their child’s fear was a significant issue for them to deal with. Sixty percent of those responding placed their child’s fears within their top five issues and 33 percent listed the child’s fears as their number one concern. [See Appendix I.]

This fear of abandonment and perhaps even betrayal may well carry over into later years negatively affecting all future relationships. This could well explain or at least be a part of the explanation of Ishmael being portrayed as an angry man unable to have peaceful relationships in his life. The actual facts are that some children do in essence become parentless as both parents become absorbed in themselves and their own wants, needs, desires and hurts.

For parents who want to meet the needs of their children in this area, the parents must seek to parent well
within their own sphere of influence and seek to live cooperatively with the other parent. If parents are unwilling to work in a cooperative fashion it is the children who suffer its effects.

Another fear often associated with single parent children is the fear that they somehow were the cause of the break up or demise of the two-parent family. Judith Wallerstein tells the story of a child who for five years believed she was the cause of her parent’s divorce because she failed to give the message from one parent to the other.\textsuperscript{77}

Additionally children have to often deal with the fear of being disloyal to one or the other parent and find themselves caught in the middle between the parents.

In helping the child cope with his fears, the parent must give the child as secure an environment as possible. That will include reminding the child that God has not nor will He ever abandon the child. Dr. Archibald Hart gives eight specific suggestions for coping with the child’s fears and anxieties.

First he suggests that you find out what is bothering your child. This can often be accomplished through active listening. Being very sensitive and often “listening

\textsuperscript{77} Wallerstein, 13.
between the lines” to what your child says will give you clues to the issues bothering your child.

Step two would be as you discover your child’s fears help them determine which are genuine and which are not. Of those which are genuine, help them to see the truthfulness of the intensity they feel concerning each. Third, give the child reassurance to help allay his fears. Fourth, provide as stable an environment as possible. A fifth step to help the child cope with and overcome his fears is to spend more time with your child. This will have to be a deliberate and determined act for many because it will entail acts of selflessness and your own needs for a while. This leads to the sixth step, which is avoiding the communication of your own fears and anxieties, at least to the point of not adding to their fears. A seventh way to help with a child’s fears is to provide them with an appropriate outlet for their emotions. Finally, Dr. Hart suggests you respect your child’s need for independence even when they are in need of security. You need to be there and available for them when they need you.\(^78\)

**Self Esteem**

Along with the various fears a child may experience is the issue of self-esteem or self-concept. As mentioned in the previous chapter regarding self-esteem, 43 percent of

\(^78\) Hart, 95-96.
both parents and the children thought self-esteem to be a significant issue dealt with by themselves. Often the child’s self-esteem is based not only upon how he feels about himself personally and the inner standards he has established for himself, but also much of his self-esteem is derived from his parents and their personal, individual self esteem and the relationship between his parents with one another. Many other factors are involved in the development of healthy self-esteem; they include the child’s physical appearance, their abilities and involvement in things they do well. Environments also affect self-esteem and the surroundings in which they are forced to be in.\textsuperscript{79}

One’s self-esteem and image begin being developed at the moment of birth. The parents play the largest role in further developing the child’s self-esteem by reinforcing either positively or negatively how the child feels about himself. The parents convey in many ways the worth or worthlessness of the child. When the parents separate, the child loses a part of his self-esteem support system. Therefore, if the parents are responsible they will work to continue to build their child’s self-esteem though one being absent from the home.

The goal is that the child perceives himself as significant, worthwhile and loveable. The most effective way to foster a positive self-image is to love as God loves us, in an unconditional manner. Dr. Archibald Hart offers several specific suggestions in which single parents can help build positive self-esteem in their children.

First is to be kind but honest in the feedback you give your children. In this we are to be realistic, not unbalanced in being overly critical or dishonestly uncritical. Second he suggests we instill within our children that it’s okay to be imperfect because in reality there are no perfect people. Unrealistic expectations of our children and their performance are a third step to be avoided in helping them develop self-esteem. As previously mentioned, we should show unconditional love to our children in spite of our approval or disapproval of their behavior. A fifth step is to not expect your child to live up to your expectations or desires but rather learn to appreciate what your child enjoys and excels at. A sixth suggestion and an expansion of number five, is to help your child discover what they are gifted in and enjoy. This will help to compensate in areas in which they do not excel. Seventh, the parent must help them deal in an understanding way with other children who are unkind or cruel to them because of a deficiency they may posses. Finally, the parent must convey
to the child that it is Christ who makes us whole and complete. It is the inner person of the spirit where true beauty lies. Our ultimate esteem lies in the fact that we are made in the image of God and that that is where our real self worth and value stems from. This above all must be conveyed to the child.  

**Loneliness**

Loneliness is an issue many if not most single parent children experience. A part of the family is missing that was once there and that they were accustomed to. That support, listening ear, the one you did things with, and just the physical presence is gone. On top of that the person left is often too busy or too caught up in their own issues to be there for the child. The single parent child will long remember the Sunday School teacher or Scoutmaster or neighbor who took time to spend with them and listen to them. In Judith Wallerstein’s study fewer than ten percent of the children had an adult speak to them sympathetically during or about the situation which brought about the singling of the parenthood. She further found that ten years following the divorce almost one-half of the boys are lonely and unhappy. Because of their fear of rejection in

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80 Hart, 117.
relationships “they tend to live inhibited, lonely lives in which they may not acknowledge the loneliness.”

To help overcome this sense of loneliness or aloneness, a grandparent, other adult family member, teachers, mentors or other caring adults can make a tremendous impact. In addition to a caring adult being available, if a child is taught to develop his relationship with God through prayer and Bible study on a personal level, much of that void of loneliness can be overcome. The parents themselves, if at all possible, are the ideal ones to keep communications open and conversations flowing while spending significant time with the child.

Sexual Identity

A final issue regarding children of single parent families is the issue of sexuality and the sexual identity of the child. Statistics show us that the heads of most single parent homes are women. Such women often fear raising sons without a male role model in the home and its effects on the sons’ sexual identity. The same would be true for men raising daughters without a major female role model for them to observe. It would appear that though an intact two-parent loving family would be the best environment in which to raise healthy children (physically and emotionally), it is by no means a certainty that a child

\[81\] Wallerstein, 13, 67, 70.
raised in a single parent home will grow up with a warped sexual identity. The truth is that such children can emerge from either a one or two parent family. What seems to be a larger influence on the child’s sexual identity is how well the parents and parental figures relate, not necessarily on the intactness of the home life. In fact Dr. Bobbie Reed in her research of the issue could “could find no significant correlation between being raised by a single mom and being gay.”

Homosexuality is clearly labeled as sin by the Scriptures and is in contradiction to God’s plan and purpose for men and women. No one is quite sure why a person would be more predisposed to this particular sin than another but Dr. Reed suggests four possible scenarios that might precipitate this situation.

One possible precipitating scenario would be the lack of bonding in the critical early years of a child that might motivate him to find that “fatherly, male love and acceptance” and thus seek sexual attention from men. A second scenario suggested by Dr. Reed is that of a child being abused by his father figure and the mother becoming over protective and not allowing him to be exposed to other male influences. Yet a third possible influence would be

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82 Bustanoby, Being a Single Parent, 164.
83 Reed, Single Mothers Raising Sons, 133.
of an over protective mother who uses her son to meet some of her own emotional needs and can thus thwart the normal and natural development of his sexual identity. Dr. Reed finally suggests a child can develop a warped sexual identity by becoming involved out of curiosity at a premature age with the same sex in experiencing sexual pleasure.

In order to combat these previously suggested causes, seven suggestions are made by Dr. Reed to help develop healthy views of sexuality.

1. Be comfortable with your own sexuality as a parent.
2. Develop a social network for yourself and encourage you son to have friends of both sexes.
3. Provide several good male relationships for your son.
4. Allow your son to develop his own personal blend of aggressive and passive characteristics. Encourage his masculinity without making him the "man of the house."
5. Don’t become so worried about his sexual orientation that you suspect he is gay just because he has not had a date with a girl by the time he is sixteen or so. Some boys grow up slower than others, that’s all.
6. If your son does share with you that he is gay, and you are devastated, you may need to see a counselor to help you work through how to accept a person but reject his lifestyle. You will need to get past the heartbreak and get on with your own life.
7. If your son should develop AIDS, you may need to be the one who reaches out to him in love to do what you can to help.84

Dr. Andre Bustanoby suggests that gender identity is something that is learned. Boys and girls both learn their

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84 Ibid., 137-8.
roles primarily by observing others of the same sex model these roles, thus becoming their preference. By eighteen months a child is aware of his or her gender identity with the parents’ job being to strengthen and confirm their identity. Dr. Bustanoby further suggests that a child’s sexual identity is based upon, “how well the parents or parental figures relate, not on the intactness of the home”.85

Two types of family structures or systems are seen as being very destructive to the sexual identity of children whether they be one or two parent families. The first is identified as the “skewed family”. In this particular model the mother became over protective of a male child trying to live her life through him. The mother is over protective and dominant along with being cold and rejecting toward the child. In such situations the father either actually or emotionally divorced himself from the situation leaving the son seeking acceptance from his mother. In order to receive his acceptance he must be different than was his father. Thus the son’s full male identity is never completely developed.

To combat this or prevent this the mother will help him fit the gender role model that God and society (for the most part) expects him to exhibit. The single mom should also promote her son experiencing positive male role models and

85 Bustanoby, Being a Single Parent, 163-4.
she should not speak negatively about the father as a male role model.

A second family structure deemed as destructive to a child’s gender role model development is the “schismatic family”. This type model is most destructive to the female. The mother offers the daughter no love, is overprotective and finds no satisfaction in the daughter. The father seeks the daughter’s affections by offering the love her mother refuses her but she must reject the mother in order to experience the father’s love.

The task of the single parent is clear. The father must not degrade the mother before the daughter. The mother must embrace her own femininity and allow and even encourage the daughter to develop positive feelings toward her own femininity.

Thus the single parent must be the adult in the situation. They should be emotionally healthy and expose their children to emotionally healthy adults of both sexes. ⁸⁶

With the complex emotional make up of each individual, there may be other issues the children of single parent households will face beyond the ones herein described. If so, the single parent and their children should take hope from the previous discussion and realize that there are

⁸⁶ Ibid., 166-8.
solutions to issues faced by the single parent and the children of a single parent family. God has not nor will he abandon the single parent child. The example of Ishmael is a clear testimony of that fact that one can take hope and encouragement through.

In regard to the issues faced by the children of single parent households, several authors have suggested various forms of a chronological description of the effects on a child when they are thrust into a single parenting situation. Not all agree on every point or divide the life cycle and effects at the same ages. The following is offered by Dr. David Miller through a single parenting workshop and is further expanded upon in his book Single Moms, Single Dads, published by Accent Books. The chart will put into a chronological perspective what the single parent might expect of their child and at what age. It should help the single parent to be sensitive toward and understanding of some of their child’s actions, reactions, and provide a starting point for seeking to meet the needs of the child.

**Chronological Impact Upon Children**

**Birth to 2 years**

1. Divorcing parents with infants should pay special attention to maintaining routines and reducing exposure of the child to parental upset.
2. Infants can handle day-care very well if the caregiver is the same person or small group of persons over time.
3. In boys 18 months to 30 months, night terrors after father has left the home reflect anxiety over father loss. Possible remedies include removing the child from the parent’s bedroom, an increase in father contact, and reassurances at a level that the child may understand.

4. Infants typically show less reaction to parent loss compared to any other age group.

**Two to three years**

1. Typical reactions for this age group include:
   A. Regressions, including loss of toilet training, increased masturbation, increased separation anxiety, and a return to use of reassurance objects such as blankets, Teddy bears, etc.
   B. Irritability.
   C. Aggressiveness.
   D. Tantrum behavior.

2. The most severe reactions occur in this age group when the child is not given an explanation for the absence of the missing parent.

3. Parents usually underestimate the ability of children (at any age) to understand and use information on what is happening to the family.

**Three to five years**

1. Boys with father loss prior to age 6 have more trouble obtaining a masculine identity than with father loss after age 6.

2. A major problem the (sic) begins at this time is that parents use the children to reduce their own pain.

3. Children who move into the parental bed are more likely to be immature.

4. Boys have more trouble adjusting, at this and all other ages.

5. Disobedience in boys is probably related to sex role identification.

6. Parents must insist that the child did not cause the divorce and can do nothing to reverse it.

7. Divorce and separation are predictors of school-based problems, including:
   A. Anxiety
   B. Dependency
   C. Poor on-task behavior
D. Poor general adjustment in preschool
E. All the above are more severe in boys

Five and six years

Adams (1984) summarized 7 national studies and concluded that children who were under six when parents divorced were three times as likely to need counseling and other forms of psychological help compared to children who experienced their parent’s divorce after age six.

Problem areas included:
A. Aggressiveness
B. Anxiety
C. Whining
D. Moodiness
E. Irritability
F. Separation anxiety
G. Tantrums
H. Eating disorders
I. Phobias
J. Feelings of rejection

Seven and eight years

1. A major shift in mental abilities occurs around 7-8 years, moving the child from pre-operational thought to concrete operational thinking.
2. By age 7, a normal child can understand the concept “forever”.
4. Active wishing for parent’s reconciliation is common.
5. Children must be encouraged to see both parents as good.
6. Divorced children at this age show more:
   A. restlessness
   B. obstinate behavior
   C. class disruptions
   D. impulsiveness
Nine to twelve years

1. Children can be more responsible, and help with babysitting, chores, etc.
2. "Parentification" is a risk.
3. Parents lessen the risk of parentification by not unburdening themselves to their parents.
4. Children who are allowed to develop "pseudomaturity" tend to have problems with psychosomatic illness and depression.
5. Anger is the most common emotion expressed by this age group.
6. Child adjustment is related to parent’s skills.

Adolescence

1. Egocentrism is high, leading to "universal audience".
2. Empathy diminishes, causing lack of sympathy for parent’s problems.
3. Separation/Individuation again becomes an issue:
   A. Adolescents have their own separation to deal with.
   B. Most adolescents will withdraw from family and other problems to avoid the pain.
   C. Divorced adults tend to be more isolated, leading to subtle pressure on the teens in the family to stay home.
   D. The young (sic) the adolescent at the time of the divorce, the more intense the feeling of loss and abandonment.
4. Adolescents tend to make judgments on an absolute basis.
   A. Loyalty conflicts re-surface.
   B. The formerly over-valued parent may be the target for greater anger and devaluation.
   C. Parents should protect teens from parental anger.
5. Adolescents have difficulty with their own sexuality and that of their parents.
   A. Exposure to parent’s sexuality should be minimized.
   B. Father leaving may represent sexual rejection to adolescent girls.
   C. Parents need to resist becoming overly permissive out of guilt.
   A. Adolescents react to divorce by accelerated or decelerated entry into adulthood.
B. Evidence of premature entry into adulthood:
   1. sexual activity
   2. drug and/or alcohol use and abuse
C. Many acting-out adolescents are asking for 
   restraints to be placed upon them.
D. Adolescents tend to worry about their future 
   marriages.\(^7\)

As we have seen, children of single-parent households 

tend to have more possible issues to deal with in their 
lives than do children of two-parent families. The single 
parent might be tempted to do as Hagar did and just give up 
and wait to die. However, let us not forget that at what 
seemed the darkest hour God came to her with reassurance. 
Hopefully the single parent can use the previous material to 
be forewarned of potential issues that they may be facing. 
To have been forewarned is certainly to be forearmed to meet 
the challenges head-on in a positive manner. And above all 
never to forget that God is with you and will remain a 
Father to the fatherless.

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\(^7\) David R. Miller, Single Parent/Step Parent Workshop. Notes from 
a workshop taught by Dr. David R. Miller, Professor of Counseling and 
Psychology, Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA. The workshop was held at 
Calvary Baptist Church, Knoxville, TN.
A Case for Church Involvement

As we conclude our examination of single parenting, the question of "Should the church have a ministry to single parents?" is almost too ridiculous to even ask. Yet through casual observation it is obvious that very little concentrated or focused effort is being made by the church to take up this challenge. Therefore, it is a question which must be asked.

The church is the extension of God's Kingdom on earth. The church therefore should be concerned about the things God is concerned about and involved in the things God is involved in. It is clear in both the Old and New Testaments of Scripture of God's concern for the single parent and the children of single parents. From the very first book of the Bible, the book of beginnings, we see in the life of the very first single parent, Hagar, and the very first child of a single parent home, Ishmael, God's great concern and involvement in their lives.

As Hagar finds herself alone and pregnant the Scriptures tell us that the Angel of the Lord "found her".
He was obviously looking for her since he "found her" (Genesis 16:7+). After Ishmael’s birth and into his teen years, he and his mother again find themselves in a single-parent situation cast out by Abraham and Sarah. Again at their most desperate point the Scriptures tell us that God Himself heard the cries of Ishmael and promises to care for she and the child (Genesis 21:17+).

Thus, it is abundantly clear that if God has concern for single parents and their children, we as his church ought to share that concern. In fact, the story of Hagar and Ishmael offers clear pedagogical implications for the church’s concern for and ministry to single adult families.

Hagar’s plight was obvious to God and all that would notice. We as a church must become aware of the need for ministry to single parent families already in our churches and beyond to our communities. We must educate ourselves to their plight. As God accepted Hagar, though she acted rebelliously toward Sarah and was not guiltless in the situation, and as He reached out to Ishmael, though he might be viewed today as an illegitimate child, we must reach out with an agape, unconditional love, showing forth God’s great grace and mercy. Further, as they had very real needs, we must identify those needs and respond to them and commit ourselves to meet them in a positive fashion. In Hagar’s case, she needed water to survive and God obviously
provided. Many other needs are obvious and have been identified in previous chapters. We must devise ministry to meet those needs. Again, because it mattered to God, it must matter to us as His church.

The situation with Hagar and Ishmael is certainly one example of God’s concern, but there are others as well. Bob Burns, in his book *Recovery From Divorce*, makes a compelling case that both the Old and New Testaments “mandate” God’s people to give themselves in compassionate ministry to the separated and divorced. The assumption is made to include the single parent and their children but it must be specifically stated. Burns understands divorce in the Old Testament to be a result of the fallen nature of man and against God’s original plan for marriage and family life.

To further illustrate God’s concern, Burns shows that the Hebrew word “almanah” not only refers to a woman who has been “divested of her male protector,” but also refers to a woman who enjoys no financial support from any male members of her family. He suggests it also refers to one who has lost her spouse through death and/or also can refer to a woman who has lost support through divorce. Thus “almanah” can refer to the widowed or abandoned or divorced woman. He sites examples of God’s divorcing Israel but His not being dead (Isa. 47:8; 54:4; Jer. 3:8). Reference is also made to 2 Samuel 20:3 in which David put the ten women whom Absolom
had had relations with in seclusion but did continue to support them. They remained there until their death, in essence living in widowhood though their husband was alive. Thus, in conclusion, these women fell in the category of the widowed though their husbands were still alive. The case could also be made from the Old Testament law that a spouse which committed adultery was to be stoned to death, thereby creating a widow, thus freeing her to remarry. Yet, God’s grace at some point in the Old Testament period, and no one knows exactly where this occurred, removed the death penalty for adultery, or at least out of His great mercy allowed it to not be implemented. Instead, He showed forth grace by not putting the adulterer to death. The guilty party, though not stoned to death, was viewed as though they were dead thus permitting remarriage for the widow. 88

The implication of the divorced, widowed or separated single, and perhaps single parent was that God is concerned for the widow and orphan in a special fashion. God required justice for the widow and expected it of His people toward the widow also. His people were to provide for the needs of the widow. God Himself would punish those who did not care for the widow. 89


89 Deuteronomy 10:18, 14:28-9, 24:29-22; Psalms 68:5, 146:9; Proverbs 15:25; Isaiah 1:17, 23-25; Jeremiah 7:5,6; 22:3; Zechariah 7:10; Malachi 3:5.
Dr. Burns carries the mandate from the Old to the New Testament in regard to Jesus’ teaching regarding divorce in Matthew’s gospel. Jesus’ attitude toward the “woman at the well” found in John 4 is illustrative of His overall attitude toward the divorced and single. Rather than legalistically condemn her, He confronted her sin and showed her the way of salvation. In another portion of Scripture Jesus met the widow of Nain whose only son, her only visible means of support, had died and was about to be buried. Jesus showed His compassion for her by raising her son from the dead. The conclusion is that the New Testament developed what the expectation of the Old Testament was arrived at. Thus, the church today is to have the same attitude held by both the Old and New Testaments as well as God Himself towards its care and concern for the divorced, widowed and single parent.

In response to the question of whether or not the church should offer ministry to the single parent and their children, the answer comes back a resounding “yes”. God Himself has made it very clear in Psalm 68:5 that He is, “A father to the fatherless and a judge (defender) of the widows.”

Gary Richmond, believed to be the first full-time pastor to single parents, when asked why the church needs a ministry to single parents responded that it was Biblical
and makes reference to the church’s job to visit widows. Further, because divorce and separation are the second and third most difficult personal and emotional experiences that a human can experience, thus the church should respond to these critical issues of life. Ann Gardner Melton states,

“Single Adult Ministry [including single parent ministry] is not the task of the select few, whether that be the professional minister with a related staff assignment, the members of the single adult council, or volunteer leaders. It is the business of the church as a whole.”

In addition, we saw that in 1978 one in eight families was headed by a woman, and by 1993 one in four of all families was headed by a single parent and 85 percent of the single parents are women. These numbers are ever increasing, thus providing a ready and responsive mission field to present the gospel to. In so doing, it will also be fulfilling the Great Commission of the church given in Matthew 28:18-20.

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93 Jerry & Lana Wilkinson, 12.
Steps for Developing a Single Parent Ministry

At this point the question is specifically how should the church go about this task of ministry to the single parent and their children? There, of course, is no one infallible and correct way to enter into single parent ministry. As Carolyn Koons and Michael Anthony state, “There is tremendous diversity of approach and format in the church’s ministry to single adults. One congregation’s successful design may not work in a different setting, because no model of ministry will be appropriate for all singles.”94 Several suggestions are offered here. One can also draw additional suggestions from other available resources as well as by observing currently successful ministries to single parents.

Included in the Appendix is a copy of the Single Parent Fellowship manual and the Leadership Structure from the Single Parent Ministry of the First Evangelical Free Church of Fullerton, California. Gary Richmond, who is considered the first pastor exclusively to single parents, helped develop their ministry and the manual. It is offered as an example and perhaps a springboard for your thinking. [See Appendix II.]

For a single parent ministry to have its best possible chance at success, someone must have a burden for that

94 Koons and Anthony, 174.
ministry or a specific calling from God to pursue the ministry. Tim Cleary, former Single Adult Field Specialist with the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, in “Twelve Steps to Beginning and Growing a Successful Single Adult Ministry,” recognizes this in his first step, “Identify yourself as a key person to initiate the process leading to beginning and/or re-energizing single adult ministry within your church or organization. If God has given you the burden and interest as a single or married person, prayerfully take the initiative.”

Hopefully that burden would begin with or at least be shared by the senior pastor. If not with the pastor then the one who does have this burden should approach their pastor and explain the burden God has given them. They should seek the pastor’s endorsement and full support for the ministry. The pastor is God’s authority and leader of the local church. Generally speaking, if any ministry is to be successful it must enjoy the support of the pastor. According to Nilson and Morgan,

Single ministries that are supported from the pulpit and integrated into the church’s structure usually have the best chance to take root and grow. Lip service by the church’s administration is inadequate. For a single program to thrive, both the pastor and the staff must support it with a comprehensive attitude of inclusiveness toward singles and enthusiasm about a single ministry.

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The pastor and the staff must set the example for their congregation with their words, by displaying sensitivity in all church programming — even by naming various church activities.\(^{96}\)

In speaking of the success of a singles ministry, they state, "The senior pastor’s support certainly made a difference in this church — and it will in yours, too."\(^{97}\) Tim Cleary of the Southern Baptist Convention concurs that "most congregations take their direction from their leaders."\(^{98}\) Certainly, if God can move the heart of a King He can also move the heart of a pastor to see the need and be burdened for a single parent ministry.

The next step would be giving consideration to the church as a whole. Certain questions must be addressed. One needs to give consideration to the church’s view of divorce and remarriage. These can be very volatile issues of doctrine with some individuals within a local church and with entire congregations. Nilson and Morgan suggest you become very well acquainted with your church’s view of marriage, divorce and remarriage. They further suggest that "churches with strict guidelines about divorce and remarriage often struggle to establish a ministry with divorced persons."\(^{99}\)


\(^{97}\) Ibid.

\(^{98}\) Cleary.

\(^{99}\) Nilson and Morgan, 16.
It may be the issue of marriage, divorce and remarriage should be taught in an effort to clarify everyone's understanding and seek to bring everyone to a clear, biblical consensus of its teaching. Like many contemporary authors on the subject of divorce, remarriage and single parenting, Carolyn Koons believes the church is called to minister to the unique needs of the single parent family. It is her opinion that the church can no longer take its long held, never questioned, traditional approach of “turning their back on these people” and treating them as “second-class” citizens of the kingdom of God. The church must be educated about what the truth of Scripture is regarding these issues with a gracious understanding of all men’s frailties, thus providing practical ways of helping. It would be well for the church to establish in written form its understanding. Because of the strong conviction of some, a different approach may be needed. The statement of divorce held by the Focus on the Family organization is here offered for your consideration.

Focus on the Family strongly opposes the idea that divorce constitutes a solution to marital discord or unhappiness, for often the problems of one marriage are carried to the next relationship. Jesus taught that in God’s plan marriage is meant for life. Yet every marriage will at times be more of an ordeal than a love affair. The degree of commitment to God’s principles and the confrontation of each partner’s problems in these difficult times are what ultimately builds or destroys a marriage.

100 Koons and Anthony, 133.
Focus on the Family is painfully aware that some marriages do fail and believes we must do all we can to care for the victims and their children. Dr. Dobson argues that it is extremely important not to become so caught up in expounding the biblical teachings on divorce (e.g. when it is permissible and when it is not) that we fail to show compassion for the individuals involved. The human heart is never served by condemnation.

Focus on the Family sees itself particularly called to be an agent of healing and help in the midst of the tragedy of divorce while still upholding the institution of marriage.

The issue of remarriage after divorce arouses even more controversy and not all theologians agree. Focus on the Family holds that there are three sets of circumstances under which remarriage appears to be scripturally justified:

1. When the first marriage and divorce occurred prior to salvation. God’s promise in 2 Corinthians 5:17—“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things have passed away; behold new things have come”—applies to divorce as well as all other sins committed in the believer’s past.

2. When one’s mate is guilty of sexual immorality and is unwilling to repent and live faithfully with the marriage partner. However, we must be careful not to make Jesus’ statement to this effect (Matthew 19:9) into a broad, sweeping, simplistic formula. Instead, we must evaluate each case independently, bearing in mind that “immorality” here refers to persistent, unrepentant behavior, and that divorce and remarriage is only an option for the faithful partner—not a command.

3. When an unbelieving mate willfully and permanently deserts a believing partner. This does not refer to a temporary departure, but to a permanent abandonment where there is little or no hope of reviving former commitments and salvaging the relationship.\(^{101}\)

Another consideration in regard to the individual local church is its size. Is it large enough at this point to take on a ministry to single parents and if so on what scale? In regard to size, one must consider if there are enough single parents within your own particular church or the surrounding community to warrant your church’s efforts in this area. Size may or may not be an issue to you because,

Singles ministry (single parent ministry included) can occur among a few individuals who meet together for support, prayer and godly encouragement. Yet at the same time, a single group that is growing in numbers represents a more exciting entry point for new singles coming into your church.¹⁰²

If the church is not sufficiently large to accomplish this ministry, perhaps one might consider a joint effort with other interested churches. Additionally, one must consider the physical facilities available to begin such a ministry. If insufficient space exists, one might creatively consider additional off campus facilities. However, some make a case for the ministry remaining on the church campus. A former single adult pastor stated, “It is important that the singles not be separated from the church - psychologically or geographically.”¹⁰³ Though this carries

¹⁰² Nilson and Morgan, 17.

some merit, it would be far more advisable to provide adequate, spacious, quality facilities, even if off campus, in order to reach and minister to the single parent.

Also will the church’s budget support such an additional ministry at this point? Alternative financing may need to be a consideration. A church must be able to provide the initial “seed money” to begin this vital ministry. Otherwise the need of materials, activities, child care, publicity, etc., will not get off the ground nor will the overall ministry. Jesus said in Matthew 6:21, “for where your treasure is there will your heart be also.” If a church is willing to invest money in the single parenting ministry you will soon find that the heart will follow. For those who think a single parenting ministry is too much of a drain financially on the church, note Gary Richmond’s comments.

You can put this in print. Our single parents give close to $100,000.00 a year to the church. They more than pay for this ministry. When people’s needs are met, they respond generously. It is a real benefit in the life of our church to have this single parent ministry.\(^{104}\)

Next, it is suggested that you begin with the end in mind. In other words develop your vision for the single parent ministry that God puts on your heart, envisioning what it would look like if God gave you everything you wanted and you thought He wanted for your ministry. George

\(^{104}\) Richmond, 7.
Barna defines vision as "a clear and precise mental portrait of a preferable future, imparted by God to His chosen servants, based on an accurate understanding of God, self, and circumstances." \(^{105}\) Barna also suggests vision as being, "foresights with insights based on hindsights." \(^{106}\) After you have clearly articulated this vision it should be committed to paper.

Developing your vision will do much in the direction and success of your single parent ministry. Here are four suggestions by Dr. Aubrey Malphurs:

First, a vision answers the question, "What are we going to do?" It gives the ministry its direction; it announces to all where it is going.

Second, ...a vision is directional. It serves to focus an organization’s direction. When a ministry knows its direction, it is able to focus its attention and the energies and efforts of its people. A vision functions much like a telescope. It brings the distant horizon – the destination – into clear view.

Third, far too many ministries are not aware of the importance of articulating a clear vision that provides a focused direction. Thus, a large number are plateaued or in decline and find themselves locked into a maintenance mode with a museum mentality.

Finally, a vision focuses on the future... It is a mental picture of what tomorrow will look like. It is a focused view of the ministry’s preferred


future... When they know precisely where they are going the chances are good they will get there.¹⁰⁷

Dr. Malphurs further elaborates on the necessity of vision in Developing a Vision for Ministry in the 21st Century.¹⁰⁸

From your vision, imagine or literally draw three columns A, B, C. Begin in column C and list everything specifically and individually that will exist when the ministry is fully operational. Next in column A list all of the things currently available in relation to column C. Finally in column B you will list what you will need in order to get from where you currently are to where you want to be. These can serve as ministry action points for you to prioritize and begin working on each item one at a time.

Perhaps some or all of the following suggestions will appear on you list of what needs to be accomplished to get from point A to point C. If you have well thought out your goals and vision you will have covered most everything.

Gather the names of single parents within your own congregation and those of the surrounding community of your church. Nilson and Morgan suggest that in determining the need for a single adults (and single parent) ministry, you must ask the question, "Does a significant single adult


population (single parents) already attend your church or live in the neighborhood or community?"¹⁰⁹ They also suggest you check with your state’s Department of Economic Development or the U.S. Census Bureau’s national “State Data Center Program.”¹¹⁰ From there you may want to get creative in reaching out to the community. Check with local daycare facilities and public schools to inquire if there are any single parents interested in being a part of this type ministry. You may also begin contacting other churches in an effort to partner together in this effort. If nothing else, it might stir some other churches out of their complacency toward single parent ministry. They may even begin their own efforts to begin a single parent ministry. Remember, in a free market economy, competition always benefits the consumer.

Having gathered a listing of those with potential interest, your next step would be to survey those whose names you have gathered in order to discern the needs of those to whom you could minister. You might even narrow the list to the top five or ten issues in which you give initial consideration to. Jerry and Lana Wilkinson provide a Need-Point Identification in Single Parent Family Ministry chart that is helpful and an excellent method of identifying the

¹⁰⁹ Nilson and Morgan, 14.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 15.
needs of single-parent families. Many of those issues you will find have already been addressed in this paper, perhaps giving you at least a jumping off point to begin developing your plans to meet those needs. In all probability you will find these needs previously addressed, but in addition to these felt needs described by your survey, you should also think in broad terms of meeting additional needs in four basic areas. We find these areas described in Luke 2:52 in regard to our Savior’s life. It says, “And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.” These four areas which need to be planned for are the mental (wisdom), physical (stature), spiritual (in favor with God) and socially (in favor with man). These four areas are broad enough to be non-restricting but narrow enough to easily plan and program for.

In regards to the mental or educational needs, the church can provide specialized opportunities through classes, seminars or workshops. Some of these might include:

- The Single Adult Identity
- Divorce Recovery Workshops
- Grief Recovery Workshops

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111 Jerry and Lana Wilkinson, 29.

• Managing Your Finances\textsuperscript{113}
• Sex and the Christian Single
• Raising Children in Single Parent Homes\textsuperscript{114}
• Entering the Occupational Workforce\textsuperscript{115}
• Beginning Again\textsuperscript{116}

Concerning the physical needs of single parents and their children the possibilities are numerable. You will find an over abundance of ideas in the \textit{Idea Catalog for Single Adult Ministry}.\textsuperscript{117}

In the basic area of the development of the single parents’ spiritual life, it must be remembered that the source of our ability to minister to the single parent is through the spiritual aspects of their lives. Being able to meet the spiritual needs is the one thing the secular world could never do. That is why Carolyn Koons and Michael Anthony make the statement, “There is no need to apologize


\textsuperscript{114} A good resource is Gary and Anne Marie Ezzo’s video series \textit{Preparation for Adolescence: Growing Together through the Middle Years}. (Chatsworth, CA: Micah 6:8, 1996). Geared toward parents with children 8-12 years of age. Specialized materials are available for single parents.

\textsuperscript{115} Local placement agencies will often offer free seminars on reemployment.

\textsuperscript{116} Gary Richmond. \textit{Successful Single Parenting: Going it Alone} video. (Miller, Maguire, and Ashby Productions, 1991) and distributed by Christian Life Resources, 427 N. Town East, Suite 106, Mesquite, TX 75150. Serves as an excellent resource for single parents starting over again.

for being Christian in focus."¹¹⁸ In fact, it is this
distinction which will draw many to find complete wholeness
which the worldly secular offerings could never do. Solid
Biblical answers are the only true answers the single parent
will find and we as the church must offer it. The resources
for spiritual growth are innumerable and plentiful.

We are all social or relational creatures. Though many
single parents would like to hide socially it is not
possible. Others who would love more social interaction are
prevented by the demands life has put on them. The great
thing is that many of their relational-social needs can be
met simultaneously while participating in the area of the
spiritual, physical and mental areas of growth and
development.

If the ministry is to prosper and grow there must be
additional effective leadership. Where do you find
additional effective leadership? -- you train them yourself.
The statement that "everything rises and falls on
leadership" is true here as well. In developing your
leadership team, because of its critical nature to the
overall ministry, Nilson and Morgan make some specific
suggestions in your selections. They suggest, "Starting
right the first time is much easier than going back and
trying to revive a floundering singles ministry that was

¹¹⁸ Koons and Anthony, 188.
poorly conceived." Therefore, in selecting your leadership team, especially your initial team, you should, "recruit key people to serve on this team." The type of people you look for should be:

- People with various perspectives. This will add variety and a wider diversity of ideas.
- Positive people. Complainers tend to turn planning meetings into gripe sessions.
- "In-Touch" people. People with their fingers on the heartbeat of the single adult (single parent) population.
- Non-Christian/Unchurched. If you wish to reach out beyond the church this is a suggested must.

Your particular denomination may have some excellent materials available to train your leadership. If not, some excellent resources are available.

As growth continues, the statement which says "in order to get larger you must first get smaller" comes into play. If the needs of the individuals are to be met in an authentic fashion, it will have to be done on some type of personal basis. To accomplish this, some type of care group, small group or cell group ministry should be given

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119 Nilson and Morgan, 44.
120 Ibid.
121 Ibid., 44-45.
consideration in your visioning process and worked toward its implementation early on in the process.

With these previous steps in place, you might want to develop a recognizable theme, slogan or logo in order to distinguish your ministry to the community and from other similar type ministries. The author has seen two that were effective. One was the view of two singles viewing the cross from either side and their focus being upon the cross. This ministry was known as Single Focus. A second effective logo was the numeral one placed across the letterhead with a plus mark (or cross) between each one conveying the idea of one plus one plus one is no longer one, but that which brought them together, the cross of Christ.

One way people identify with your particular ministry is through graphic designs and/or slogans which distinguish and describe your particular ministry setting it apart from others.\textsuperscript{123} In selecting your particular logo, at least three things should be kept in mind, "(1) the quality statement, (2) the target group, and (3) the geographic location."\textsuperscript{124} Additional considerations include:

1. Does our suggested name (logo, etc.) accurately indicate our identity?
2. Does our suggested name (logo, etc.) confuse our purpose?
3. Does our suggested name (logo, etc.) unintentionally limit our target audience?


\textsuperscript{124}Ibid., 61.
4. Have we approval of our new name (logo, etc.) from the staff or senior pastor?\textsuperscript{125}

It also adds a touch of professionalism, which your current and potential participants will appreciate.

At some point you will want to establish an ongoing outreach effort. This could be well accomplished through your small groups’ ministry. Church growth experts have demonstrated that ongoing “entry points” in any church or special ministry effectively attracts new people.\textsuperscript{126} These “entry points” can be special events, special seminars, workshops or any variety of activities that would attract others.

Nilson and Morgan suggest three items necessary for successful entry events:

1. It is easy to attend. It should be a convenient day, time, location, and have proper childcare offered.

2. It provides a new learning experience, enrichment, or fun with others. A purpose for coming to an event provides courage to face what may otherwise seem to be a formidable group of strangers.

3. It creates an obvious opportunity to meet with other new people of like mind or life-style. It needs to be a place where a newcomer will meet other newcomers.\textsuperscript{127}

It will soon become evident to you that as you genuinely seek to meet the needs of those in your single

\textsuperscript{125} Nilson and Morgan, 49.

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 62.

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 62-63.
parenting ministry, that outreach and networking will not be an issue. It will be as one beggar telling another where to find food. You will also find a deep level of commitment and loyalty to your ministry from your single parents in return for your much wanted and needed ministry on their behalf.

CONCLUSION

Single parent families are one of the fastest growing segments of our society today. "Nearly 64 million cannot and should not be ignored," says Harold Ivan Smith. Many in the field of marketing are aware of the tremendous force of the single population of America and they are designing many of their products just for them. The single parent population is a significant part of that population. Any church that does not consider their single adults and design programming for them, as marketers have in their product design, is signing their death certificate or at the very least is certainly looking at diminishing their potential as a church and it’s growth.

From the very first book of the Bible and throughout Scripture, God shows us His concern for the single parent. To fail to minister to this significant population is to commit the same sin of Acts 6 in ignoring the widows. To neglect the single parent is to ignore what James 1:27 says

is true religion – caring for the widows and orphans. The church which ignores the single parent ignores Jesus’ example of caring for the widowed and their children as well as the care he showed for his own mother. A church that is ignoring single parent ministry will never be on the cutting-edge of ministry but will be forever stagnant in the relics of the past. But the church that does minister to the single parent will be blessed by God, for they shall be like God in His care for the single parent.

God is very clear in His concern and love for the single parent and their children. We dare not ignore His great concern by failing to convey His love for and our love for such a large segment of our society. The fields are certainly white unto harvest among the single parent population in our society. May you be one of the servants He sends forth and may you reap the great rewards available through single parent ministry.
APPENDIX I

SINGLE PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE
SINGLE PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

The following is a questionnaire that will be used in a doctoral thesis paper to help determine the needs and intensity of the needs of single parents and how the church might assist in meeting those needs. Please fill out the questionnaire and return them to the group leader.

1. Age:
   ____ a. 16-20
   ____ b. 21-25
   ____ c. 26-30
   ____ d. 31-35
   ____ e. 36-40
   ____ f. 41-45
   ____ g. 46-50
   ____ h. 51-55
   ____ i. 56+

RESULTS: Of those responding, 14% were 26-30 years of age, 5% were 31-35, 33% were 36-40, 6% were 41-45, 19% were 46-50, 6% each were 51-55 and 56+.

2. Sex:
   ____ a. Male
   ____ b. Female

RESULTS: 38% of our respondents were male and 62% were female.

3. Education:
   ____ a. No high school diploma
   ____ b. High school diploma
   ____ c. Some college
   ____ d. Associate degree
   ____ e. College degree
   ____ f. Graduate degree
   ____ g. Post graduate degree

RESULTS: 6% of our respondents had a high school diploma, 33% had some college, 19% held an Associate degree, 29% held a College degree, 6% held a Graduate degree.

4. Became a Single Parent:
   ____ a. Never married
   ____ b. Divorced
   ____ c. Widowed
   ____ d. Separated
   ____ e. Adoption
RESULTS: 14% were never married, 76% divorced, 5% widowed, 5% separated.

5. Number of Years Single Parent:
   ___ a. Less than one year
   ___ b. One year
   ___ c. Two years
   ___ d. 3-5 years
   ___ e. 6-8 years
   ___ f. 10 or more years

RESULTS: 5% less than one year, 6% one year, 6% two years, 33% 3-5 years, 6% 6-8 years, and 33% 10 or more years.

6. Annual Income Range:
   ___ a. Less than $10,000 per year
   ___ b. $10,000-$15,000 per year
   ___ c. $15,000-$20,000 per year
   ___ d. $20,000-$30,000 per year
   ___ e. $30,000-$40,000 per year
   ___ f. $40,000-$50,000 per year
   ___ g. $50,000-$80,000 per year
   ___ h. $80,000 plus per year

RESULTS: 6% less than $10,000 per year, 5% $10-$15,000 per year, 19% $15-$20,000 per year, 14% $20-$30,000 per year, 29% $30-$40,000 per year, 14% $40-$50,000 per year, 5% $50-$80,000 per year.

7. How often do you go out socially apart from the child(ren)?
   ___ a. Less than once a week
   ___ b. Once a week
   ___ c. Twice a week
   ___ d. Three times a week
   ___ e. Once a month
   ___ f. Less than once a month
   ___ g. Do not go out at all

RESULTS: 5% less than once a week, 24% once a week, 6% twice a week, 14% three times a week, 24% once a month, 19% less than once a month, 5% does not go out at all.

8. How many children do you have:
   ___ a. One
   ___ b. Two
   ___ c. Three
   ___ d. Four
   ___ e. Five or more
RESULTS: 24% has one child, 48% have two children, 24% have three children, 5% have four children, 0% have five or more children.

9. Do you anticipate remarriage:
   ___ a. Yes
   ___ b. No
   ___ c. Undecided

RESULTS: Each category, Yes, No and Undecided, had 33.3% of the people respond to each.

10. How do most people you date respond to the fact that you have children:
    ___ a. Generally positive
    ___ b. Somewhat positive
    ___ c. Neutral
    ___ d. Somewhat negative
    ___ e. Generally negative
    ___ f. Haven’t dated

RESULTS: 33% responded generally positive, 19% somewhat positive, 29% neutral, 5% somewhat negative, 0% generally negative, 14% haven’t dated.

11. How do your children generally respond to your dating:
    ___ a. Generally positive
    ___ b. Somewhat positive
    ___ c. Neutral
    ___ d. Somewhat negative
    ___ e. Generally negative
    ___ f. Haven’t dated

RESULTS: 33% responded generally positive, 14% somewhat positive, 14% neutral, 19% somewhat negative, 5% generally negative, 14% haven’t dated.

12. When do you usually introduce your date to your children:
    ___ a. First date
    ___ b. Second date
    ___ c. Third date
    ___ d. When the relationship seems serious
    ___ e. Never

RESULTS: 6% first date, 5% second date, 14% third date, 48% when the relationship seems serious, 6% never, 14% haven’t dated.
13. Which of the following best describes you:
   ___ a. Exclusive custodial parent
   ___ b. Primary custodial parent
   ___ c. Non-primary custodial parent
   ___ d. Equal primary custodial parent
   ___ e. Non-custodial parent

RESULTS: 57% exclusive custodial parent, 14% primary custodial parent, 0% non-primary custodial parent, 24% equal primary custodial parent, 5% non-custodial parent.

14. Please check the following items that have been an increased need of your since becoming a single parent:
   ___ a. Finances
   ___ b. Housing
   ___ c. Clothing
   ___ d. Transportation
   ___ e. Childcare
   ___ f. Emotional needs
   ___ g. Loneliness
   ___ h. Trust
   ___ i. Sexuality
   ___ j. Self esteem
   ___ k. Dating
   ___ l. Remarriage
   ___ m. Odd jobs
   ___ n. Other(  )
   ___ o. Other(  )

RESULTS: 86% finances, 43% housing, 38% clothing, 38% transportation, 43% childcare, 76% emotional needs, 67% loneliness, 71% trust, 29% sexuality, 43% self-esteem, 48% dating, 14% remarriage, 5% odd jobs and 5% other.

15. Please check the following items that you have noticed as issues your children are or have faced:
   ___ a. Denial (or loss of one parent)
   ___ b. Anger
   ___ c. Bargaining
   ___ d. Depression
   ___ e. Fears
   ___ f. Self esteem
   ___ g. Loneliness
   ___ h. Sexual identity
RESULTS: 24% denial, 57% anger, 33% bargaining, 29% depression, 71% fears, 43% self esteem, 19% loneliness, 5% sexual identity.

16. Go back to questions 14 and 15 and on the lines to the right rank your top five issues (1 being your top concern and 5 being your least concern of the five chosen.)

RESULTS: Of the 86% responding, all 86% listed finances within their top five concerns. Of the 43% responding to housing 33% placed it in their top five concerns. Of the 38% responding to clothing only 6% of them listed it within their top five issues. Regarding transportation 19% listed it in their main concerns. 29% listed childcare as a top five need, emotional needs had 19% of the top five list. Loneliness had only 5% listed in the top needs of the country. Trust said 57% placed it on their top five list. Sexuality was on only 5% of those responding that felt it was a top five. Self esteem was considered by 24% of the respondents as being within their top five. Dating made it to the top five spot only 6% of the time. 14% placed remarriage in their top five positions. Odd jobs and other was found in the top five only 5% of those responding to the survey.

Denial was found a top five issue for children only 5% of the time, anger, however, was in the top five list 83% of the time or in 83% of those responding to the top five list. Bargaining was in the top five 19% of the time, depression was a top five issue 14% of the time, fears was in the top five issues 43% of the time, self esteem found itself in the top five list 14% of the time as well, and sexual identity was a top five concern only 5% of the time.

17. List three to five specific fears your child may have faced initially or currently due to entering the single parenting situation:

a.
b.
c.
d.
e.

RESULTS: Many comments were received. Some of these were: Fear of the future, custodial parent’s
remarriage, daycare caregivers, losing custodial parent also, no money, concerned for father’s well being, no money for extras, embarrassment, helping the child to understand why the other parent is not in their life, fear of additional physical harm for their departed parent, feeling less than others, fear of loss of departed parent’s love, trusting others.

18. Does the church have a specific ministry geared toward single parents and their children:
   ___ a. Yes
   ___ b. No

**RESULTS:** 57% said their church did have a specific ministry geared toward the single parent and their children. 33% said their church did not. 5% of those responding did not attend a church.

19. How well does your church meet the needs of the single parents within its congregation.
   ___ a. Very good
   ___ b. Good
   ___ c. Fair
   ___ d. Poor
   ___ e. Not at all

**RESULTS:** 19% said very good, 29% good, 19% fair, 14% poor, 5% didn’t attend church.

20. Please briefly describe (one or two lines per item) how you think the church could help meet the top needs of you and your child(ren).

Your needs:
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Your child(ren) needs:
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

**RESULTS:** Response included comments such as the following for “your needs”: Role models for kids, interaction with married couples with children, support
groups, home fellowship and outings, financial assistance and seminars regarding divorce, finances, parenting issues, etc.

Response for your child(ren) needs: Positive opposite sex role model for kids, spiritual support, a caring godly adult the kids can talk to, strong ministry with emphasis with focus on relationship with Christ, godly examples from leaders, providing opportunities to serve, support for children having issues adjusting.
APPENDIX II

MANUAL DESCRIBING THE SINGLE PARENT FELLOWSHIP AND LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE OF THE SINGLE PARENT MINISTRY OF FIRST EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH FULLERTON, CALIFORNIA
Single Parent Fellowship

First Evangelical Free Church
2801 North Brea Boulevard
Fullerton, California 92635-2799
(714) 529-5544
Newcomers Coordinator
The Newcomers Coordinator oversees welcome of newcomers to SPF. Responsibilities include preparation of and delivery of a Tuesday night class for first-time visitors; insuring warm introductions for new members into the ministry of SPF; acquainting new attenders with all facets of SPF ministry, including Sunday morning and Tuesday evening activities, small groups, social events, SPY activities, etc.; and integrating newcomers into the Single Parents Fellowship.

Single Parent Youth Coordinator
The Single Parent Youth (SPY) Coordinator oversees activities for children of SPF members. Responsibilities include working with the Social Events Coordinator to plan regular activities for children of SPF members and planning and coordinating the Rainbow Kitads (i.e., Children's) program.

Standards of Leadership
We require that all individuals elected or appointed to leadership be professing evangelical Christians and that they have attended SPF activities for at least six months before serving. This six month requirement allows existing leaders to observe the moral qualities of life on the part of the candidate and also allows for observation of the candidate's willingness and desire to serve the larger group.

New officers are elected by the retiring officers at the Single Parent Fellowship of the Evangelical Free Church of Fullerton. Anyone may apply for any office, but in the event of a tie vote by the leadership, the group as a whole must break the tie. Anyone who has attended for at least six months may vote.

The Single Parent Bookshelf
Attached is a suggested bibliography of materials that anyone working regularly with single parents and their children should have at their immediate disposal at all times. Buy them for your SPF library, and be sure to make multiple copies available for checking out from your church library. They'll be read often.

About this manual...
This portion of the manual was prepared by William Welty and Gary Richmond.
advance tickets, reservations, etc.; coordination of insurance and legal requirements for SPF-sponsored events, when appropriate; attendance at regular leadership meetings; giving of all announcements at SPF's Tuesday and Sunday morning functions; coordination of and supervision of meetings of a social events committee for the planning of SPF social events; and reporting to the sponsoring couple, advisory board, and pastor to single parents.

**Refreshment Coordinator**
The Refreshments Coordinator works closely with the Social Events Chairman to ensure that adequate refreshments are made available for social activities. The Refreshments Coordinator reports to the Social Events Chairman.

**Financial Coordinator**
The Financial Coordinator works with the Social Events Chairman and the Helps and Needs Coordinator. Responsibilities include purchase of required supplies, tickets, food, for all SPF social events; collection of all funds for all social events using a sign-up sheet prepared at least two weeks prior to events; setting prices for attendance at SPF-sponsored events so that SPF remains a self-supporting ministry unless specifically authorized by the Pastor to Single Parents to use SPF funds as a subsidy; setting and approval of payment of honoraria to be paid to special guest speakers, music, or other visitors to SPF (Staff or members of the church do not receive honoraria for ministry activities at SPF.); provision of a written accounting with receipts for each SPF social event within seven days following the event to the Social Chairman; provision of financial assistance for regular attenders of the Sunday morning ministry of SPF on a one-time basis when approved by the Pastor to Single Parents; and administration of SPF policy regarding benevolence when appropriate.

**Helps and Needs Coordinator**
The Helps and Needs Coordinator works with Social Events Chairman and Financial Coordinator to assist in the administration of practical helps projects for SPF members such as immediate needs (in keeping with benevolence guidelines); moving; and emergency transportation.

**Worship Coordinator**
The Worship Coordinator oversees worship and music activities within SPF. Responsibilities include screening and selection of special music and SPF events: coordination of, leadership of, and selection of qualified members of a committee to plan appropriate music for SPF activities on Tuesday evenings and Sunday mornings; and working with the Financial Coordinator to set an appropriate honoraria for non-member guests of SPF.
the larger Church; by representing SPF at adult fellowship meetings; by working with the SPF Secretary and the secretary to the Pastor to Single Parents to provide and maintain board meeting agendas and minutes; by presiding over sessions of the Board or Executive Board called to deal with disciplinary issues; by overseeing the coordination of major social events activities (annual retreats, monthly special speakers at potlucks, etc.); by overseeing SPF budgetary expenditures in cooperation with the SPF Treasurer; by meeting weekly with the Pastor to Single Parents to discuss unresolved problems and to appraise the Pastor to Single Parents regarding specific situations calling for pastoral assistance and/or intervention; and by reporting regularly to the larger SPF group via a monthly newsletter on current needs, events, or areas of special interest to single parents.

**Secretary**
Reporting to the President of the Single Parents Fellowship, the Secretary's main function is to maintain a comprehensive record of the activities set for the current year. The Secretary also is entrusted to maintain copies of all SPF guidelines, job descriptions, and the SPF Policy Manual; to maintain a comprehensive yearly calendar in cooperation with the President, the church secretary, and the Pastor to Single Parents; to arrange and coordinate an annual planning meeting for the SPF board; to maintain minutes of all board meetings; to prepare an agenda for all board meetings; and to maintain a current list of all board members.

**Sponsoring Couples**
Sponsoring couples are married people who have a special concern for the needs of single parents. While it is not a requirement that the sponsoring couple have been a victim of divorce, separation, or death of a spouse, sponsoring couples should demonstrate gifting in concern, empathy, and practical service to the needs of single parents. Their basic function is to model marital recovery from the trauma of divorce, separation, or the death of a spouse by providing hospitality on an occasional basis to visiting speakers; by attending as many of the main SPF functions as possible; by attending advisory board meetings; by assisting at regular Tuesday and Sunday activities; by screening potential leaders and teachers; by providing lay counseling as needed; and by serving as counselors when intragroup disciplinary proceedings are needed.

**Social Events Chairman**
The Social Events Chairman is primarily responsible for assembly of the monthly social calendar. Other responsibilities include presentation of a finished draft of the social calendar for production, printing, and publication by SPF; distribution of the monthly calendar to SPF members; production of maps and brochures concerning upcoming events; collection of and payment for all
offending party is always kept in mind. Our policy is first to determine the truth or falsity of any accusation that has been made. Then we enact discipline according to the severity of the offense and the evidence of repentance (or lack of repentance). This ranges from outright banishment (which has occurred only three times in seven years) to temporary restrictions on attendance accompanied by referral to a professional counselor. Repeat offenders have been temporarily barred from attending SPF activities for up to twelve months.

**Organizational Structure for a Single Parent Fellowship**

Effective ministry management requires clearly defined levels of pastoral authority and delegated responsibility. We have found that operation of a Board of Advisors composed of mature members of the Single Parent Fellowship helps the Pastor to Single Parents concentrate on overseeing ministry tasks. The attached organizational chart visually illustrates the authority structure that we have found effective. Of course, your actual situation will be different.

Each officer is entrusted with responsibility to form a committee that will involve as many people as possible within group activities. This sense of belonging reinforces the healing processes at work in the larger group. Most offices at the SPF have both male and female counterparts, except for the senior officerships (i.e., the President, the Secretary, and the Pastor to Single Parents).

**Pastor to Single Parents**
The Pastor to Single Parents provides direction to SPF as a whole. He maintains a ministry presence and models spiritual integrity and personal maturity by attending as many of the main SPF functions as possible; by presiding over all advisory board meetings; by serving as the regular Sunday morning SPF teacher; by providing direction to SPF, its leaders, and committees; by upholding the doctrinal standards of the church, and by maintaining a Christ-centered focus and teaching for the Single Parents Fellowship ministry as a whole. The pastor to single parents approves final selection of all leaders and teaching materials used with SPF and furnishes guidance, encouragement, and counsel to SPF members and leaders when needed.

**President**
The President of SPF presides over the main Tuesday evening SPF meeting and models spiritual integrity and personal maturity by presiding over all meetings of the SPF Board and all meetings of the Executive Board; by serving as a representative of SPF at meetings with the staff pastors, elders, and deacons of
Use your mid-week meeting as the showplace for your Single Parent Seminars. Don't do them on Sunday mornings.

After you've been operating awhile with Sunday morning meetings, expand your social events from bi-monthly to weekly. You may want to add a major weekend retreat twice a year. One should be planned to include children, but one should be planned to exclude them. Sooner or later you'll also need to bring to your campus a divorce recovery workshop lasting about ten weeks. Offer it two times a year, once in the Spring and once in the Fall. A divorce recovery program oriented to children should be added after you've established your divorce recovery workshops for adults. Lastly, add a six-to-ten week course dealing with preparation for remarriage and issues relating to blended families.

**Some Thoughts Regarding Operation Policies**

Effective operation clearly requires a clearly defined policy regarding specific areas that could cause controversy or awkwardness. Here are three representative areas in which we've clearly defined a policy.

**Babysitting Monies**

We allow anyone to receive a predetermined amount for babysitting costs who wishes to come to our Tuesday evening meeting. Membership in the church is not a requirement to receive this money. Of the nearly two hundred who attend, approximately ten take advantage of this offer.

**Benevolence**

We meet in conjunction with the church deacons fund to meet larger needs, including rent, emergency car repairs, utility bills, doctor bills, and (in rare instances) outside professional psychological counseling. (We rarely pay for outside counseling because we've found that it's cheaper for us to have a full-time counselor on the payroll of the larger church. Of course, we also realize that many churches won't have that luxury.)

**Discipline**

When private matters relating to morality or integrity of our group arise, we address them directly and in a timely manner. Due to the large number of people who attend our SPF, it is impossible for us to fully know the integrity of each individual who attends. Therefore, we encourage those who may have any questions about specific individuals or those who have been unduly bothered or harassed to contact a board member or sponsor for specific insight or assistance. Special name tags identify SPF leadership. The restoration of the
need about five dedicated leaders who are willing to commit to spending from ten to fifteen hours each week in the early development phases needed to build your group.

A comfortable home environment in which to hold your initial weekly meetings is a must. A newly formed group will be most effective if held in a residence, not in a church Sunday school classroom or other facility—it just won't have the warmth of a home. You'll also need an unswerving dedication to build your group on biblical principles. The Word of God must be your foundation of healing and health to the victims of marital separation and divorce.

Lastly, you'll need to back each of these ingredients we've listed here with an adequate budget to begin activities. It has been our experience that single parents will give to programs that help them, and that they will give more generously than will other groups within the local church. Our SPF group actually receives more money in offerings each month than is required to fund it—including the salary of the Pastor to Single Parents.

**Some General Advice**

Keep your SPF group meeting in a "home-type" environment as long as possible. Single parents need the feeling that they're back in a loving, accepting family. So don't be anxious to become a big group with a large, community-wide outreach. If you take care to be responsible for the depth of your ministry, God will take care of the breadth. To sum up, do your best to try to duplicate the family environment that has been lost to your people because of marital separation and divorce and you won't go wrong. Make your ministry a house of healing for trauma, and be sure that you assist in the care of emotionally wounded children.

**A Suggested Order of Ministry Expansion**

Start small. Begin with a single weekly meeting that serves as a local support group for the victims of marital separation and divorce. Then add a single social opportunity twice a month, such as a potluck that will allow participants to establish emotional and social bonding. Later on you can add a Sunday School opportunity where topics relating to divorce are generally avoided. This will give a feeling of re-entry into the "normal" Christian life of the church.
A Brief History of Single Parent Fellowship

The Single Parent Fellowship at the First Evangelical Free Church of Fullerton began in 1977 as a small group meeting in the home of Associate Pastor Ken Bemis. Early meetings were structured around a potluck or other meal because it was felt that those who would be attending needed to form new family relationships to help take the place of the families they had lost through marital separation, divorce, or widowhood. As the group grew larger, SPF began holding meetings in other locations (besides homes) where they could deal on a topical level with problems faced by the victims of marital separation and divorce. Regular social and diversionary activities were then added in order to balance the serious nature of the topical and educational sessions.

Component Elements of a Successful Single Parent Fellowship

It is our experience that five ingredients are needed to ensure that the group you are forming meets the needs of the men and women who attend. First, you'll need to create what we call a "trauma center" that offers help to those going through the chaos and shock of marital separation. The trauma center could start out by being a list of dependable people who could receive telephone calls or meet with hurting people. The second ingredient is a "therapy center" that prepares newly separated or divorced people to form a new life as a single parent. Third, you'll need an ongoing program for those who have recovered from the hurts of their divorce or separation. Fourth, you'll need to create or adapt for your own use an existing program geared to the children of single parents for their eventual remarriage. Since ninety-five percent of divorced people eventually remarry, be sure you don't overlook this last ingredient. It's more important than you might think.

What You'll Need to Start a Single Parents Fellowship

Start with the unqualified public support of the senior pastor and staff. This must include a willingness to make regular visits to the group a high priority. For example, here at the First Evangelical Free Church of Fullerton, the annual Christmas potluck held the second Tuesday in December has become one of the year's highlights for SPF.

Next you'll need a mature couple who can serve as married sponsors. Single parents need effective role models who can encourage them that there does exist a future probability or marital success and spiritual healing. You'll also
LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE

There are two leaders assigned to each area. They are responsible to develop and recruit for their program.

1. Tuesday Night Program, 1st, 3rd, 4th, & 5th Tuesdays
   A. Program committee
   B. 1st, 3rd, 4th formats
   C. 2nd Tuesday & potluck (Pastors responsibility)
2. Newcomers Fellowship
   A. Orientation - slides - welcome
   B. Lay counselor involvement
   C. Identify needs and advise
3. Sunday School
   A. Teaching
   B. Worship
   C. Fellowship
4. Helps and Needs
   A. Lay counselor training
   B. Housing and moving
   C. Food and financial aid
   D. Missions
5. Single Parent Youth - SPY
   A. Catalina
   B. Parent child activities
   C. Goal (divorce recovery for kids)
6. Ounce of Prevention
   A. Outreach ministry to our church and other churches
7. Administrations
   A. Money
   B. Thank you notes and condolences
   C. Directory
   D. Refreshments
8. Special Events
   A. Shadow Mountain - Palm Desert
   B. Leadership retreat
9. Curriculum
   A. Classes (about 10 choices every Tuesday)
   B. Divorce recovery
10. Prayer
    A. Education
    B. Requests
12. 2nd Tuesdays
    * Pastoral counseling
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