

Single Threads in the Gospel Tapestry

By Kellene Ricks Adams
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Single members of the Church have discovered that the gospel offers guidelines for a peaceful, happy life.

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Kathy St. George remembers the day clearly. A member of the Thatcher Fourth Ward, Thatcher Arizona Stake, she was sitting in a Relief Society homemaking meeting, struggling to find order in life after her painful divorce. The teacher began talking about priorities.

"Suddenly my mind flashed back to a lesson I had heard years before when I was in college. In my mind I could see the list of priorities I had written on a steno pad during that lesson. 'Priority 1: My relationship with the Lord. Priority 2: My husband. Priority 3: My children. Priority 4: My Church callings.' Other priorities listed included career responsibilities and service to extended family, ward members, community, etc.

"The thought struck me that even though I now needed to draw a line through priority number 2, the rest of the list was still exactly the same. I still had a responsibility to draw close to the Lord. I still had a responsibility to teach my children in the ways of the Lord. And I still had responsibilities as a daughter, sister, aunt, niece, visiting teacher, neighbor, and member of my community. What a difference understanding this concept made in my being able to let go of my guilt and get on with my life."

Time Out for Take-out

Getting on with life—regardless of marital status—is crucial to eternal salvation, but it isn't always easy. Comments of single members of the Church reflect the way the gospel is helping them meet their challenges.

"I realized the other night that enjoying life and being single are two situations that can occur at the same time," notes Melinda Cunningham, a member of the Lake Oswego Ward, Lake Oswego Oregon Stake.

"My two children were with their father for a few days recently. Rather than doing my usual hectic routine of catching up on housework and homework (I'm in nursing school), I decided to do something I had never done before—I planned fun for myself. I love Chinese food but could recall having it only three times in the last few years.

"At this rate, I was going to be missing out on one of life's pleasures if I didn't take responsibility. I called and ordered take-out (I do not consider sitting alone in a restaurant one of life's pleasures) and enjoyed every bite. Dinner was such a success that I got back in my car and took myself out for ice cream.

"That evening was a turning point for me. I never thought being single could be enjoyable. So it wasn't. Now I am doing things I never would have done in the past. I got up at 4:30 in the morning and waited in line for basketball tickets for me and my children. I went to the theater and planned a horseback riding outing. Life is still not easy. I work at two jobs and am a full-time

student. However, life is better now.”

“Being single is hard,” acknowledges Deena King, Falls Church Ward, McLean Virginia Stake. “Then again, I’m told that being married can be hard, too. Single or married, as members of the Church we all have at least one important thing in common: a testimony of the gospel.

“But whether we are married or single, each of us is an individual—an individual who is personally responsible for his or her own salvation. Even though socially I sometimes feel alone, spiritually I know I am not. There is someone nearby who understands the trials I am going through. And when the challenges I face seem too difficult to bear, I remember that the Savior’s trials were more difficult and more painful than mine will ever be. Jesus Christ is my Savior; not only did he die for me, he set an example that helps me endure the challenges I must face in this life.”

Pulsings of the Soul

The example the Savior set for us, his followers, includes a regular regimen of prayer and scripture study and a high priority on developing a personal relationship with Deity.

“I never thought I would be at this stage of life, unmarried and childless,” says Joanne K. Piles, a member of the Ventura Second Ward, Ventura California Stake. “This has caused me deep sorrow at times. But whenever I feel my sorrow is more than I can bear, I go down on my knees and pour out my heart to Heavenly Father. I know Heavenly Father knows my heart, my concerns. I know he is there for me. When I hurt, I let my Heavenly Father know so that he can help me.”

“I have had wonderfully sacred, inspiring experiences because of prayer,” says Nancy Clays, a member of the Lake Ward, Fremont California South Stake.

“I try to have a constant awareness of Heavenly Father in my heart; when I am troubled, when I am grateful, when I need help, when I am struck by a beautiful scene or song, when I have something of worth to communicate to my Heavenly Father, it is conveyed through this channel.

“Some things are expressed in formal prayer, others through simple pulsings of the soul. Prayer, at times, takes great effort, but I have learned to establish the habit of prayer so that I can have the help and guidance I need. This has a tremendous impact on how I deal with the challenges of being single.”

Judy Downey, a member of the Ruston Ward, Monroe Louisiana Stake, has learned to rely on the Lord. She says, “I have found that for me it is mandatory that I begin and end my day with prayer and scripture study. It is spiritual suicide to neglect this simple but powerful opportunity Heavenly Father has provided for his children to help them resist the influences of Satan and the world. Not only do I receive spiritual strength by inviting the Spirit to be with me as I study and go about my day, I also receive the reassurance from my Heavenly Father that he loves me and will help me. This constant outpouring of love and assurance gives me the faith and confidence to meet any problems, and together we overcome.”

Hit in the Heart

The scriptures have played a major part in Kenneth Reeves’s life. “I sometimes feel a sense of

despair as this aspect of my eternal progression, finding an eternal companion, doesn't always seem to be progressing as I wish it would," he explains. "But the Lord expects us to do more than merely survive as singles. We must develop a sincere, unwavering love toward our Savior and our fellowman, and we must labor unceasingly in service to each other and to our Lord. As we do so, the Lord will bless us with a higher degree of inner happiness.

"Whenever I start getting discouraged or feeling inadequate for the tasks of mortality, my most effective resources are the scriptures or a favorite general conference talk. As I read, I am able to focus on the whole eternal scheme of our Father's plan rather than the brief here and now."

During one difficult time in his life, Ron Johnson, a member of the Colfax Ward, Pullman Washington Stake, heeded the advice of a bishop and began reading the scriptures every night before going to bed. "When times seemed tough and I was truly humbled by the experiences I was going through, I found much comfort and more understanding through the scriptures," he says.

"When you read of the trials others have gone through and how they had faith and a willingness to listen to their Heavenly Father, it can hit right in the heart. The gospel is truly for everyone. Through prayer and study I have overcome more of my weaknesses and made more progress than I ever did on my own. By living the gospel, I enjoy life so much more!"

No Separate Grouping

Much comfort and peace can be found in attending the temple, notes Christie South, a member of the Sparks Fifth Ward, Sparks Nevada Stake. "During one of my first visits back to the temple after a long period of inactivity, I was struck with the realization that the Lord makes no promises he doesn't intend to keep. I found no separate grouping for singles. There were no specialized covenants set aside for those of us who come to the temple as unmarried members of the Church. I came to understand then that if I lived my life so as to be worthy to enter the Lord's house, having a desire to apply the teachings and insights to my daily life, I could still lay claim to great promises and blessings of the Lord."

"My marital status, although important, is not the only thing that I ponder," says Briant Carter, a member of the Taylorsville Thirty-third Ward, Taylorsville Utah North Central Stake. "My greatest quest is to overcome evil and live close to the Spirit so that I might be his instrument in blessing others."

Service is a high priority in Brother Carter's life. He often finds that as he serves others, his own needs are met as he gets acquainted with new people and enlarges his circle of friends.

"The gospel plan provides me with the knowledge of who I am and why I am here. The Spirit sustains me in times of difficulty as I strive to work out my salvation. I am working to improve myself. As I rise and fall in my struggle to prove myself worthy, I can only hope that the blessing of finding an eternal partner will someday be granted to me. In the meantime, it is enough to be called his son.

"Unmarried members often feel they are missing something in not having a family of their own. The gospel plan helps us to keep an eternal perspective of life. Although at this time I am missing the experiences associated with marriage, I strive to live a full and active life."

Mourning Cloth and Tapestries

A full and active life comes from recognizing what one wants and working for it, says Donna Richardson, a member of the Staines Ward, Staines England Stake. She remembers clearly a seminar she attended years ago:

“The speaker, whose subject was goal setting, stated that everyone should set goals: short-term, long-term, and eternal. The imagery he used for learning purposes was two overlapping circles. The first circle represented the goals of a single person; goals that include profession, finances, education, etc. The second circle represented goals married people would work towards: children, homes, family needs, etc. The overlapping area represented goals that everyone, married or single, would try to achieve: daily scripture study, missionary work, daily prayers, temple attendance, etc.

“I am now in my mid-forties and still single. More than twenty years ago I drew my two circles and set my goals. The imagery of those circles has stayed with me. Many of the goals within the single circle have been achieved. Others have been deleted, revised or changed. I would like to have married, but those goals are still in my future.

“I have been discouraged. I have been lonely. I have wanted things I have not yet been given. But then I remember who I am—a daughter of my Heavenly Father—and that wherever I am in the world I can find companionship, friendship, support, priesthood blessings, and service opportunities by finding the nearest Church meetinghouse. I remember that my Heavenly Father loves me and answers my prayers and that if I try to achieve my eternal goals I can return to him. Then I know I can get on with my life.”

Goals have played, and continue to play, an important part in Teresa Bateman’s life.

A member of the Federal Way Fifth Ward, Federal Way Washington Stake, Teresa believes in the old saying: “You can lament because rose bushes have thorns or rejoice because thorn bushes have roses.

“I count the roses in my garden daily and have found that the gospel brings me peace, comfort and guidance—just like any other member of the Church, regardless of his or her marital status.

“I have discovered that I am never alone when I have the gospel; there are always members and meetings where I can find brothers and sisters. I think maintaining a sense of humor is crucial. And I have learned that goals are still important as I progress and grow. These goals keep me focused, and joy comes as I experience success in their completion. The goal of marriage? Well, I hope I reach that goal someday. But I refuse to weave my hours into mourning cloth when there are lovely tapestries to be made.”

Treasured Relationship

Catherine M. de Vos, a member of the Toronto Beaches Ward, Toronto Ontario Stake, has found guidance and comfort from her patriarchal blessing.

“My blessing, with its great promises and direction, is my own scripture, personally given to me from the Lord. These promises are a witness of his love, an acknowledgement of my valiance and

uniqueness. They verify my treasured relationship with the Lord and my worth as one of his children in his great kingdom. My patriarchal blessing is a verification of the gifts and talents he has bestowed upon me. I cannot adequately emphasize how much strength and guidance my blessing has given me.”

“Shortly after experiencing a very painful divorce, I realized the greatest strength and comfort I could receive would be from actually turning my burdens and cares over to the Lord,” says Ginger Jones, a member of the Arlington Second Ward, Jurupa California Stake. “I had been taught this principle from the time I was little. However, to kneel down and pour out my heart in earnest prayer to the Lord and to actually feel him lift the weight of the burden off of my shoulders confirmed to me the vivid reality of a living and loving Savior who knew and understood me.

“For now, the gospel is my partner in life. It is my strength, my comforter, and my guide back to the presence of my Heavenly Father. For this knowledge I am truly grateful.”

Gospel topics: priorities, scripture study, single members

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