

# Single and Satisfied

*A grace-filled calling for the unmarried woman*

Nancy Wilson

**To Bessie**  
who taught me that contentment is  
a deep satisfaction with the will of God.

*Elizabeth Catherine Dodds Wilson, 1919–2010*

This second edition to my ten beautiful granddaughters:  
*Jemima, Belpheobe, Hero, Lucia, Ameera, Lina, Daphne, Chloe,*  
*Marisol, and Blaire.*

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# Introduction

**Y**ears ago my husband and I were attending a church dinner where part of the program included asking all the singles in the church to stand. At that time there were only three, my oldest daughter and two young men. When my daughter's turn came to be introduced, my husband said, "She's not single. She's a daughter!"

Ever since that evening, I have felt uncomfortable with the term *single* when referring to unmarried men and women in our church. Today our numbers have swollen, and we have many unmarried men and women of "marriageable age" as part of our growing church community. Our individualistic culture wants to label unmarried people as *singles*, but in the covenant community of God, there are no *singles*. God calls us *family*: brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers in Christ. We are each to be wonderfully connected to the other as part of a church community, where each person is needed and attached to others in her own family as well as to the broader church family.

In a healthy church community there will, of course, be many married couples with children of various ages; but there will also be widows, couples who do not have children, old

people, college students, and unmarried men and women. In our church it is not uncommon for us to attend several baby or wedding showers a month. It's very easy to focus on the needs of these young women who are becoming wives or mothers, and forget to look out for the needs of the widows, childless couples, elderly saints, or the single men and women. This is why we need to stir one another up to love and good deeds. We are to minister to one another in various ways, and if we were all the same, life would be boring indeed. Fruit is never uniform; it is scattered about, some branches more heavily laden than others. Fruit is messy, but it is delightful. The church community is much the same. A single woman is just as much a part of the covenant community as the mother with ten children. And she can be just as fruitful as the mother with the large family, even if her fruit doesn't look the same. In the providence of God, each of us has a unique place among the saints.

Still, even if we adopt the common terminology and call unmarried women *singles*, we have to stop treating them as singles. My point here is to remember they are part of the covenant community and not unconnected to the rest of us. This requires wisdom for all the church, because the women in this category have a difficult time today finding their place in the world as well as in the church community. They can feel a very real pressure and expectation to get married. Many of the saints make well-meaning (but thoughtless) comments that exert this sort of pressure.

Another difficulty is the emphasis in the church on *family*. This is as it should be, for God designed the family as one of His great blessings to us. However, when so much of the church's good, biblical teaching revolves around being a godly wife and mother, an unmarried woman can wonder what she is supposed to be doing with her life. What is her role in the church? Does she have a purpose if she is unmarried? Is it just to look for a husband? Should she pursue a career? Unless the

single women are instructed carefully and encouraged regularly, they can fall prey to discontent, self-pity, or anxiety, and they can fade into the woodwork, feeling a little useless.

To make single people feel like a part of the church, some churches start ministries to singles or have career groups that meet regularly for fellowship. Of course, this is not necessarily a bad thing itself, unless the group is devoted to silly skits and junior-high level games. But even if it is a sound group, it can become unhealthy if the only regular contact the unmarried women have with the church family is with their own peer group of “singles.” These women need to be integrated into the families within the church. We are designed to fellowship with all age groups, babies to grannies, and we should not become exclusively attached to our “group.” A Christian culture integrates everyone, young and old, married and unmarried, into the life of the church.

God did not design His people to live as “singles.” We are to live as families even if we are not under the same roof. An unmarried woman should have a high view of marriage, but she should also have a high view of God’s sovereignty in her own life. He directs our steps, He establishes our ways, and He certainly decrees when and if and to whom each woman is to be married. He does all things well. Whether a woman is called to singleness for a short time or for her whole life, she is called to be fruitful in God’s kingdom. She is called to glorify and enjoy God with her whole heart. She is called to grow in grace and faith and to be of great use to the kingdom of God. Marriage is a means, not an end. It is one of the means God uses to glorify His name among us, but it is not His only means.

All of Scripture is given to all of us. The passages in the Bible that speak to women, speak to married and unmarried alike, though points of application may differ. The unmarried woman is to rejoice in her calling before the Lord. She is to be virtuous. She must cultivate a biblical femininity, be modest

## CHAPTER 1

# Taking Offense

**N**o doubt we have all heard people say rude things to single women. Even worse, maybe we have said rude things ourselves. Single women, depending on how long they have been in the “still not married” category, could no doubt make an impressive list of thoughtless comments spoken to them by well-meaning people, often at social gatherings, and especially at friends’ weddings. The old standby is, “Why isn’t a pretty girl like you married?” It’s a compliment, right? But it’s also a nosey question. The women who have been the recipients of such comments should try to attribute the best of motives. Most of the time people are trying to be funny, or they are trying to make conversation, and it is all they can think of to say. We really must think the best of them. Taking offense at insensitive comments only makes for bitter women. If you can quickly bring to mind a list of people who have said unkind things about your unmarried state, perhaps you need to confess some hard feelings and bitterness. Let it go.

If we are going to talk about single women living in community with lots of married people, we have to be determined from the outset that we must all get along. And we must even



do better than that: we must love one another and be quick to forgive. I suggest that you accept the fact that people, even dear, sweet, Christian people, can say and do atrocious things. And if they weren't saying stupid things that hurt your feelings about being single, then they would be saying something else that would be a temptation. Married women are not immune to such things. So realize that this is just a fact of life, and until the world changes, we will all be exposed to comments that are either deliberately rude at worst, or at best thoughtless and unkind. We might as well determine now that we will handle this like Christian women. And how exactly is that?

First of all, handle it with grace. A gracious spirit answers with gracious words. Peter tells us that "the Lord is gracious" (1 Pet. 2:3); Christ was known as gracious (Lk. 4:22), and Ecclesiastes says that "The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious, but the lips of a fool shall swallow him up" (10:12). It is easy to be annoyed or offended. We don't need grace to do that. But it requires grace from God to return good for evil, to overlook an insult, and to respond to an unkind comment with kindness. We are God's people; we must imitate Him in this.

Sometimes we really are too hard on others. They meant no harm. They did not realize it would hurt your feelings. They thought they were being friendly or funny. In fact, they meant it as a compliment! After all, they said you were pretty. But our tendency is to take it hard. We immediately attribute motives and assume they were intending to hurt us. This is where we have to lighten up a little and have a sense of humor about it. People generally are insensitive and say stupid things without thinking. That is why the Scriptures are so full of exhortations about the tongue. Assume that for each hurtful comment you have ever received, you have probably spoken at least a dozen to others. This will then give you a spirit of humility yourself. Let others' unkind comments be sermons to you, teaching you to be far more sensitive and caring to others than you have been before.

## CHAPTER 2

# Is This an Affliction?

*And if it is, what do I do about it?*

One of the things I want to address in this book is the need to come face to face with reality and quit pretending that being unmarried is lots of fun. In some cases, it may be. And in other cases, it is a phony show. On one hand, single women are encouraged to be content in their circumstances and to trust that this is “God’s best” for them; on the other hand, they are urged to view their unmarried state as an affliction from which they are seeking deliverance. So which is right?

I believe that being single can certainly be an affliction for those who are not gifted with celibacy. It was not a hardship for the apostle Paul. But for someone without that calling, it is a hardship and may be a form of suffering, depending on the circumstances. If being unmarried really is an affliction for you, then Scripture has much to say about how you are to view it, and we’ll consider some of those things shortly. If a woman who longs for marriage and does not have the gift of celibacy pretends that her life is easy, she will not find the help from God’s Word that is available to her.

At the same time, some women really do not feel *afflicted*. They are busy, fruitful, and truly contented, though they do

pray for a husband. All women are different, and they handle things differently, so I am hesitant to call the unmarried state an affliction across the board. For some, it truly is.

When I was single and out of college, I had a friend who viewed her singleness as an affliction indeed. She spoke of it constantly, and I remember her working on some needlework and saying, “When I get married, I’m going to tell my husband, *‘I did this while I was waiting for you!’*” Everything she did was in relation to waiting for her husband. I remember disliking her viewpoint and wanting to adopt a different one. I remember thinking it over and determining that I wanted to have a different perspective. I didn’t want to be “waiting around.” I wanted to be *going* somewhere. I did not want to view my time as simply treading water, always waiting for something to happen. I thought that I should be moving forward in my Christian life, believing that God would bring someone into my life along the way.

Now I think both perspectives are lawful. I think I was happier than my friend, but I don’t think she was necessarily in sin because she was constantly thinking about marriage. But she wasn’t always fun to be around. She got married a few years later, and I wonder if she had the same attitude about having children. And then about the next thing and the next. We establish patterns that are hard to break.

I assumed that I would eventually be married, and I prayed regularly, not for *a* husband, but for *my* husband, whoever he was. I knew that God knew who he was, even if I didn’t. So I prayed that he would be growing in faith and walking with God. I had lonely times like everyone else. I had temptations to get impatient.

At the same time, I wanted to have direction and purpose, and I wanted that purpose to be maturing in the faith, growing in my Christian life. So I tried to attend as many Bible studies and conferences as I could, knowing that after I was married

## CHAPTER 3

# Unmarried Women in the Covenant Community

**I**t's tempting to think that there really isn't a niche for the single women in the church. The married women have their hands full with helping their husbands. The mothers have a big job managing their homes and rearing their children. Scripture lays out the duties of wives and mothers clearly, and the church provides plenty of teaching and instruction on the family. Sermons on marriage, books on courtship and child-rearing, conferences for wives and husbands seem to occupy a central place in the work of the church. And of course, these are very important issues and need to be addressed. But the single woman can feel at sea in all this. If she is not engaged, what is she doing really? Does everyone assume she is biding her time waiting to get married? Is that necessarily bad? What is she supposed to be doing?

Actually, many Scriptures address unmarried women as well as married women. We are sometimes too quick to divide up into the married/unmarried categories. Though the Bible sometimes singles out different groups, most of the Scriptures address us *all* as God's people, no matter what our individual station.

Galatians 3:28–29 tells us we are “one in Christ Jesus” whether we are male or female, and we are all “heirs according to the promise.” We all share the same fundamental duties as Christian people, and our first duty is to worship God rightly. This is of first importance. Paul says to “present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1). It is only in light of this most important calling that we should consider the specific duties God lays out for us as women—whether married or not. In other words, our primary calling is to be good Christians. Being a woman is secondary, and being single follows this. In other words, you cannot be a godly single woman if you are not a godly Christian. So we should consider these primary duties first.

This means that you should be giving foremost attention to how you are worshiping God. Are you a woman of prayer? Do you love God’s Word? Are you striving to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength? Are you worshiping God on His day in a reverent way that glorifies Him? Are you concerned with obeying Him, no matter what others think or say? Do you love your neighbor? Are you forgiving others? Do you confess your sins? Each of us is called to live a fruitful, obedient, joyful, and abundant life according to the promise. You have a Savior. Your first duty and calling as a Christian is to love and serve Him with a whole heart all your life. This has to be our starting point, because if you are not clear on this, you will not be able to be a fruitful member of His church.

So you need to be in a healthy church, a church that faithfully proclaims the Word, and feeds and shepherds the people. Sometimes people view going to a solid church as just a lucky happenstance rather than the result of a deliberate search. If for some reason you are not in such a church, then you must make every effort to find one, even if it means relocating. In our culture today, Christians relocate for jobs, but seldom for a church.

Actually, the church you are in is far more important than the job you have. If, for some reason, it is entirely impossible for you to be in a good church, then you must be attached to some church, even if it is mediocre. You must be meeting with and worshiping with God's saints. You can still be a woman of the Word and a woman of prayer, even if you don't have a lot of encouragement. Particularly as a single woman, it is very important that you be surrounded by godly, serious Christians who will be a family to you.

After you find a good church, what can you really do as an unmarried woman in the church? Women (whether married or not) are often mentioned in the Bible as helpers, offering support to those who labor with the ministry; they are described as helpers *of the gospel*. In Romans 16, Priscilla (with her husband Aquila) is called a helper (v. 3). The church met in her house. That is no small thing! Mary (v. 6) is described as bestowing much labor on Paul and his band. She must have fed, cared for, and provided housing for Paul and those with him. Phoebe (v. 1) is called a servant of the church. She obviously did so many things for the body of Christ that they were filed in the "too numerous to mention" column. These women are described as serving, sacrificing, bestowing, and helping. Women like this are a tremendous resource in the church. They were in Paul's day, and they still are. But I often think that single women in particular don't realize the huge impact for good they can have in the church. They don't give themselves a good job description, and they don't think they can really be very fruitful (at least in any important manner) until they are having babies. But this is simply false.

2 Peter 1:5–8 gives us all enough to do to keep us very busy for the rest of our lives, insuring that we are fruitful in God's kingdom:

## CHAPTER 4

# What About Dad?

One of the big questions that single women often ask is, “What about my dad? How involved should he be in my life?”

This is a question with many angles, depending on your situation. So I am going to try to lay out some basic biblical principles here, and my hope is that you can apply them to your own story.

In a perfect world, we all grow up with loving and sacrificial and protective fathers. Girls always have and always will most definitely need good daddies. But in our imperfect world, things can be and often are very messy. The dads themselves can feel rejected and unnecessary, or unclear of their design and mission. But it’s not my job here to go over their responsibilities; rather, I’m going to go over the responsibilities of daughters.

The first principle is laid out in Ephesians 6:1-3: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother,’ which is the first commandment with promise: ‘that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.’”

Are you a daughter? Do you have parents? Then you are required to obey them when you are a child, and you are required to honor them all your days. But when does obedience cease to be required? I believe that strict obedience is no longer required when a daughter is no longer under her parents' roof and is providing for herself. In other words, if your dad is paying your rent and your tuition, you should still strive to obey him. Hopefully, as you've grown up, he doesn't really need to give you any "commands" anymore like he did when you were a toddler. And if you were an obedient daughter when you were young, you probably didn't need much supervision once you hit the double digits. But some girls are rebellious and disrespectful all the way up. If that describes you, then the first order of business is to put some things right. Were you sneaking out when your parents wanted you home? Stealing money from your mom's purse? Lying about where you had been? If so, then it is never too late to apologize to them and ask for their forgiveness. Put things right on your side as far as is possible with you.

But if you are a daughter who has always enjoyed a happy relationship with your parents, then you are blessed indeed. Don't take that for granted! My point here is that the goal of childrearing is to get the children to internalize the Christian standards their parents are teaching them. But if your parents were letting you figure things out on your own, or teaching you ungodly standards, you should thank God that He picks you up where you are and not where you should have been.

At some point then, your parents have ceased to require obedience. If they are still giving you commands when you are in your mid-twenties and self-supporting, then you may need to find some help to disentangle yourself.

So much for the command to obey your parents. Once you are an adult (and by that I mean no longer relying on their support), you should continue to honor your parents as much as



## CHAPTER 5

# Is This Really God's Best?

Good doctrine protects us from all kinds of errors and all kinds of fears. One of the important things you must know, understand, and *believe* is that God has planned good for you and not evil. He loves His children. His providence rules His world, and He governs His people with kindness. “All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, to such as keep His covenant and His testimonies” (Ps. 25:10). If you have a solid, biblical doctrine, not only of God’s sovereignty, but also of His wisdom and love for you, this will protect you from many doubts, worries, and fears about the future, as well as keep you from fretting over the past.

Years ago, a young woman asked me what I thought about her praying for a husband. She had been taught that God didn’t know the future, so He didn’t know whether she would marry or not. This made her wonder what the point of praying could be. Bad doctrine has bad consequences. Good doctrine teaches us to ask God for the good things He created. He mandated marriage; it was His idea. So a Christian woman should be able to ask God to bestow His good gift of marriage on her. I

have sometimes told women to “tug on the Lord’s sleeve.” He likes us to persevere in prayer!

In the meantime, she can expect to be assailed with temptations to worry about the future: What if I never marry? What if I marry, but it is too late to have children? What if there is no one for me after all? What if I missed “God’s best”? These are questions that are impossible to answer because all “what if” questions are not really questions at all, but doubts. They disrupt your peace and bring troubling thoughts; they rob you of your joy by introducing fictional and future trials. Jesus warned us not to borrow trouble because each day has enough of its own (Mt. 6:34). These sorts of thoughts are temptations, and God wants you to learn to deal with temptations, whatever form they take.

Jesus tells us not to be anxious about our lives (Mt. 6:31–33). We are to cast all our cares on Him because He cares for us (1 Pet. 5:7). Worrying will only make life miserable. It is fruitless. It is telling ourselves bad stories. So how should you deal with temptations that come in the form of “what if” questions? This may seem like a simplistic answer, but here it is: ignore them. Do not answer them; in fact, do not listen to them. Rather, ask what good things God has given you to do today. Focus on today’s duties. This is a fruitful use of your time. Recognize that those “what if” questions are temptations to get you to feel blue, worried, lonely, or anxious. Do not engage in a conversation with yourself about this stuff. Ignore, ignore, ignore. And set your mind on something helpful, something that is profitable. This is how we fear God. And when we fear God, that holy fear swallows up all our other petty fears.

If you have a long history of worrying about such things, it may take you a while to change your habits. You may not even realize how much time each day you are thinking such thoughts. Start paying attention to your thought habits and reject the questions. Do not listen. If you were listening to a

## CHAPTER 7

# Don't Pretend to Be Happy

One of the many temptations for unmarried women is to pretend to be happy. Now before you throw this book across the room, let me explain. I think that unmarried women *should* be happy, of course, and I know many who are. Contentment is required of us all, and unmarried women have much to be thankful for.

But here is the temptation: if you are struggling with contentment, longing to be married, and not always being thankful for your unmarried state, it is easy to want to hide it from everyone else. If you admit that you want to be married, you may think (wrongly) that you are admitting a weakness or a fault. Or you might not want to seem like a marriage nerd, always on the lookout for “him.” So you pretend to be doing fine when, in fact, you are *not* doing fine. You may even convince yourself (while dogmatically telling others) that you don't really want marriage right now, that you're not interested in a relationship because you don't have the time. But we all know that if God sent the right man along right now, you would happily drop everything in a heartbeat. And we would commend you for it.

Imagine a conversation with a sweet Christian woman who is in this kind of jam. You run into her and ask how she is doing. She then falls all over herself telling you how much she loves her job, how busy she is, how much traveling she is doing, how she really doesn't have any time (or need) for a social life. Or she tells you about her classes, when she'll have her degree, and all the wonderful job possibilities waiting out there for her. Now I'm *certainly not* saying that she is lying about all this. Don't get me wrong here. But I *am* saying that it is *possible* that this is all just a very hollow cover to make you think she is "happy, happy, happy all the day" when she would really like to cry and say she hates all of this. She might really want to tell you that she is miserable, frustrated, and lonely traveling by herself, that she wishes she could be doing something that would give her more fulfillment and make her feel more a part of the body of Christ. But this, she thinks, would be admitting defeat, and so she convinces herself that her career is all she wants after all.

Part of the way to freedom for women in this bind is to help them see, first of all, that it is not only okay, but positively healthy to want to be married. There is nothing in the world wrong with wanting to be married. It is only wrong to be miserable about it. And wanting to be married does not equal discontent. Many women are feeling a false guilt about this. It goes something like this: "If I were truly godly, I wouldn't want to be married. I would be happy to be unmarried for the rest of my life. But I do long to be married, therefore I am not rejoicing in the Lord, and therefore I am guilty of sin." But you can confess false guilt all day long and never feel forgiven. God forgives real sin not our imagined sin.

God created marriage, and He has given women a desire for marriage. This is good. I suggest that an unmarried woman thank God that she longs to be married. Thank Him that He has given you these desires, and ask Him to keep you and