

# Contents

How to Nourish Your Soul 9

Introduction 11

## **Building on a Sure Foundation**

**Day 1:** True Identity 17

**Day 2:** The God Who Sees 19

**Day 3:** The God Who Knows 21

**Day 4:** The God Who Promises 23

**Day 5:** Your Body Matters 25

**Day 6:** The Gospel Matters 27

## **Cultivating Relationships**

**Day 7:** Belonging to the Body 31

**Day 8:** Tending to Friendships 33

**Day 9:** Brothers and Sisters 35

**Day 10:** Needing One Another 37

**Day 11:** Be Known 39

## **Lamenting What's Hard**

**Day 12:** An Invitation to Lament 43

**Day 13:** Mourning What's Lost 45

**Day 14:** Loneliness 47

**Day 15:** Rejection and Heartbreak 49

**Day 16:** Empty Womb and Empty Arms 51

## **Growing in Maturity**

- Day 17:** The School of Sanctification 55
- Day 18:** Waiting Well 57
- Day 19:** Fear and Anxiety 59
- Day 20:** Preaching to Our Self-Pity 61
- Day 21:** Practicing Hospitality 63
- Day 22:** Sabbath Rest in Singleness 65
- Day 23:** Discernment in Dating 67
- Day 24:** Sexual Faithfulness 69
- Day 25:** The Discipline of Rejoicing 71
- Day 26:** Honoring Marriages 73
- Day 27:** A Living Sacrifice 75

## **Enduring for the Long Haul**

- Day 28:** A Beacon of Hope 79
- Day 29:** Scarcity or Sufficiency? 81
- Day 30:** Look to Jesus 83
- Day 31:** We're All Waiting for a Wedding 85

Conclusion 87

Acknowledgments 91

Notes 93

Suggested Resources for the Journey 97

## How to Nourish Your Soul

*A LITTLE BIT every day* can do great good for your soul.

I read the Bible to my kids during breakfast. I don't read a lot. Maybe just a few verses. But I work hard to do it every weekday.

My wife and I pray for one of our children, a different child each night, before we go to bed. We usually take just a few minutes. We don't pray lengthy, expansive prayers. But we try to do this most every night.

Although they don't take long, these practices are edifying, hopeful, and effective.

This devotional is just the same. Each entry is short. Just a few tasty morsels of Scripture to nourish your hungry soul. Read it on the subway or the bus on the way to work. Read it with a friend or a spouse every night at dinner. Make it a part of each day for thirty-one days, and it will do you great good.

Why is that?

*We start with Scripture.* God's Word is powerful. Used by the Holy Spirit, it turns the hearts of kings, brings comfort to the lowly, and gives spiritual sight to the blind. It transforms lives and turns them upside down. We know that the Bible is God's very own words, so we read and study it to know God himself.

*Our study of Scripture is practical.* Theology should change how we live. It's crucial to connect the Word with your struggles. Often, as you read this devotional, you'll see the word *you* because Jenilyn speaks directly to you, the reader. Each reading contains at least one reflection question and practical suggestion. You'll get much more from this experience if you answer the questions and do the practical exercises. Don't skip them. Do them for the sake of your own soul.

*Our study of Scripture is worshipful.* As you study your Bible, you will learn God has a lot to say about singleness. There are good days, when your love for Christ is vibrant and truth feels close at hand. There are also hard seasons—filled with loneliness, disappointment, and longing—when your heart feels overrun and singleness feels too hard. But God has not forgotten you. The Father sent Jesus his Son as a testimony of his love and as the great Rescuer to redeem your soul. This gospel plan is the centerpiece of his Word, and he offers it to you. He wants you to know his love. God walks alongside you in your singleness. He opens your eyes to know him better. As we read, study, and pray, and as we meet with believers who teach us about God’s riches in Christ, our hope grows. As you grow in your love for the King of the universe, you can’t help but worship him. Our study of Scripture leads us to worship.

This devotional provides a wonderful starting point for pondering faithfulness in singleness. If you find this devotional helpful (and I trust that you will!), reread it at a later time to remind yourself about what God and his Word teach us about singleness. If you are hungry for more on this topic, Jenilyn has listed biblically sound resources at the end of this devotional. Buy them and make good use of them.

Are you ready? Let’s begin.

Deepak Reju

## Introduction

THIS IS NOT the life I expected. I have wanted to be married for as long as I can remember. Growing up, I figured I'd probably marry within a few years after college, have some kids, follow a path similar to the one my parents and many other adults I knew had followed. That is the life that my church, my Christian summer camp, and my college ministry prepared me for. No one ever mentioned the possibility that marriage may not be on the near horizon. Being single was, effectively, just the period of waiting and preparing to find a husband and get married.

I'm nearly forty now. I've had only a couple of significant dating relationships in my lifetime, and I don't know if the Lord has a husband in mind for me, as much as I still hope he does. These years of singleness have not been easy. At times, my singleness has felt like a problem that needs to be solved or even a disease that needs to be cured. At other times, it has simply felt like a holding pattern, as if I am waiting to get married so my life can really begin. Through the years, and through the help of wise mentors, friends, and a lot of prayer, I have come to understand that this is not how God views my singleness.

One conversation several years ago was particularly helpful in reorienting my perspective to align more with God's. I sat with my pastor and shared my disappointment over a dating relationship that had ended before it really even began. My pastor listened and tended to my aching heart, but before our meeting was over, he asked, "Have you ever thought that Paul might have a point?" I asked him to clarify which point he was referring to . . . Paul makes so many, after all.

"About singleness. Paul says that singleness is a good thing. An opportunity to serve the Lord." My pastor was referring to

Paul's commendation of singleness in 1 Corinthians 7, a chapter I always wanted to skip over in my reading: "The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. . . . I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord" (vv. 32–35).

In contrast to married people, whose interests are divided, single people have an opportunity to focus on an "undivided devotion to the Lord." I don't recall exactly how I responded to my pastor in that conversation, but I'm guessing there was some good-natured grumbling on my part. Nonetheless, his question and Paul's point stuck like pebbles in my shoe, and I was forced to pay attention and continue mulling them over.

Since then, I have sought to view singleness as its own unique season of life, just as marriage is. Each season has its own blessings, its own challenges, and its own opportunities to grow in relationship with the Lord and serve his people. Singleness does allow us to be "anxious about the things of the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:34) in a way that marriage does not, so faithful singleness demands that we ask how we can offer our time, resources, relational capacity, and selves to his service. Singleness also brings particular hardships and burdens, and God ministers in and through those difficulties in particular ways.

As I have spent time talking with other Christians who have been single longer than they would have chosen or expected, or who find themselves single again, I've realized most of us have never been given a clear picture of what faithful singleness looks like. Discipleship in our churches tends to focus on marriage or the path toward it. Many of our ministry leaders, close friends, and family haven't experienced extended singleness themselves. In light of this, we often struggle to find the guidance, support, and sense of community we need to thrive.

If we are to live faithfully in our singleness, we first need to have a solid understanding of our identity in Christ, coupled with a robust theology of singleness. We also need to acknowledge the aspects of singleness that are hard and bring our pain before the Lord. He will be faithful to bring joy and comfort, and one way he will do that is through the love of his people. We need the body of Christ, a local church family, in which we can fully participate as both recipients and stewards of God's grace. These relationships are essential to our growth and flourishing, and, to that end, I hope you'll consider inviting a Christian friend, a mentor, or even a small group to go through this devotional with you.

This devotional is not meant to be a magic pill or Band-Aid. It is meant to offer some insight into how Scripture speaks to the experience of singleness in our culture today. It is also meant to offer some gentle nudges, like the one my pastor gave me, to consider whether Paul might have a point about the benefits of singleness. My hope is that these readings and reflections will be a helpful contribution to a broader conversation about how we can disciple one another when marriage is not a guarantee.

On that note, my voice is just one in this broader conversation. I write as one who has never been married but who still desires marriage. There are single people who don't share that desire or don't feel it strongly. There are others who find themselves single again, whether through divorce or through the death of a spouse. And there are others for whom biblical faithfulness means pursuing a lifelong call to celibacy rather than the same-sex relationships they might desire. For each of us, there are particular ways in which our family dynamics and cultural and religious backgrounds influence our experience of singleness. I hope that even if our personal experiences and longings differ, your time spent engaging with this devotional will still enable you to take encouragement from the truths of Scripture and the invitation to look to Jesus, time and again, in our singleness.

If you are not currently single but are reading this devotional

to help you to better care for the single people in your life, I'm glad you're here. I hope this little book will serve as a starting point for conversations and will help you to listen to and learn from the single people you love. You might even consider inviting a single person you know and care about to read and talk through this devotional with you.

This is not the life I expected. But I am abundantly thankful for how God has sustained and provided for me in my singleness, especially through my church family. I have also been deeply encouraged as he has shown me time and again that my singleness, however unwanted, can serve as a blessing to others.

My hope and prayer is that the following pages would be a blessing to you, whatever your experience of singleness has been. As a fellow traveler, I'm glad to have you joining me on this road. More than anything, I pray that the words and ideas here will point you to our Savior and Redeemer—Jesus. He has walked this road before us, he is walking it with us, and he's waiting to welcome us home.



## BUILDING ON A SURE FOUNDATION

Before we begin talking about how we can be “anxious about the things of the Lord” in our singleness (1 Cor. 7:34), we need to sink our roots down deep into the Lord himself. Who is he and how has he shown his love for us? What’s true about who we are in Christ? God has given us a sure foundation (see Isa. 33:6) on which to build our lives—one that will remain secure throughout every stage of life and every trial. Over the next few days, we’ll reflect on several foundational truths.



## DAY 1

# True Identity

*See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. (1 John 3:1)*

IF YOU'VE EVER made a major move, you can appreciate the identity crisis that comes with transitioning to a new place. I felt this keenly when I moved to a different state shortly after my college graduation. It was as if I left my college campus wearing twenty different name tags: roles in which I served, job titles I held, nicknames given by beloved friends—all significant markers of my identity. But a thousand miles away from that community, the name tags were meaningless and were quickly stripped away. It was hard to know who I was and where I fit.

As a single woman in my late thirties, I've had my share of introductory conversations that have involved people asking, "What does your husband do?" or "How many kids do you have?" There's inevitably a bit of awkwardness when they learn that I'm not married and don't have any kids, and the conversation hits a speed bump. My introductory biography on the website of the church where I work always looks a bit thin with no mention of a husband or children. When my married peers find so much of their identity in being spouses and, in many cases, parents, it can once again feel hard to know who I am or where I fit.

In those post-college days, my starting place for rebuilding my sense of identity was the one name tag that wouldn't be stripped away: "Daughter of God." Fifteen years later, that's the name I still cling to, the one that has endured through two more moves, through life changes, and through the ongoing longing to add the name tag "Wife." To be called a daughter of God is an incomparable gift.

John was so deeply secure in his identity in Christ that he referred to himself as “the one whom Jesus loved” (John 20:2). His writings repeatedly speak of God’s deep, intimate love for his people as revealed in Jesus (see John 10:14–17, 27–30; 17:20–26; 1 John 4:10–12). It is this love that has been given to us, at such great cost, so that we would no longer be enemies or slaves of God but his *children*. We have access to the creator of the universe because he is our Father (see Rom. 8:14–17). We have a loving advocate in Jesus because he is our big brother (see Heb. 2:17). And we have a secure, unchanging, glorious identity as sons and daughters of God (see Eph. 1:3–14).

This Christian identity is the most important thing about us. We are known and defined, first and foremost, not by our singleness but by our identity as sons and daughters of God. Our marital statuses, addresses, jobs, and church communities may change over time, but our identity in Christ remains constant. Whether we wear the name tags of husband or wife, dad or mom, best friend or housemate, our primary identity will never be found in our earthly relationships. Our heavenly Father looks at us all—single, married, divorced, or widowed—and sees the same thing: his beloved children. And so we are.

**Reflect:** What are the various “name tags” that you currently wear? Which of these titles, roles, names are most important to you? Which are hard for you to wear? Are there name tags you wish you could be wearing but aren’t?

**Act:** Spend some time meditating on 1 John 3:1 and Romans 8:14–17. What difference does it make in your life to be called a child of God? How does this, or how could it, impact how you think about your singleness?

## DAY 2

# The God Who Sees

*So [Hagar] called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, "You are a God of seeing," for she said, "Truly here I have seen him who looks after me." (Gen. 16:13)*

"MISS JENILYN, LOOK at me!" If you've spent any time around children, you've heard an excited plea like this one many times. From the youngest age, we have a deep desire to be seen. We want our joys, our accomplishments, and even our wounds to be noticed and attended to by those who love us.

As we grow up, the longing to be seen persists. At the same time, those who love us often fail to see us, or we look around and realize that no one's watching. This is something I hear often in ministry—a longing for one's toil, pain, worth, and beauty to be seen and validated, as well as the ache that comes when this doesn't happen. Have you felt this ache? Maybe when your contributions at work have been overlooked, or social gatherings are consumed by talk of babies and date nights, or you've endured another long day of single parenting. Of course, enough married people have voiced this longing to be seen that I know marriage is not the cure for this ache, but there remains a sense in which the absence of a spouse can make one feel particularly invisible.

Hagar was a servant and an outsider. She likely spent much of her life feeling unseen—or else seen with disrespect and condemnation. But when she ultimately fled the scornful eye of her mistress Sarai, it was the Lord who chased after her. His messenger found her, called her by name, and spoke words of challenge and encouragement. It was clear from the angel's words that she was seen and known, inside and out. This could have been frightening or caused Hagar to cower in shame, but rather than feeling

exposed or condemned, Hagar was drawn to the Lord. His gaze was not cold and critical but caring and compassionate.

That day, Hagar learned that the God of Israel is a God who sees the unseen, those who are vulnerable, those who hide in shame and fear. He not only sees them but also pursues them, listens to them, comforts them, and calls them to faithful obedience.

In our singleness, there are times when we will feel invisible. We will ache for someone to notice our slumped shoulders at the end of a hard day, to affirm good work, to offer a listening ear. But even if we remain unseen by friends or spouses, our God is still the God who sees. He saw Hagar in the wilderness, and he sees you as you work late at your desk, wash another sink full of dishes, let yet another episode play, and shed tears as you try to fall asleep. He sees your dignity, he sees your pain, he sees your toil and calls you to continue in faithful labor under his loving gaze.

**Reflect:** Do you struggle with feeling unseen? If so, what are the circumstances in which you tend to feel unseen or you particularly long to be seen?

**Reflect:** Has there been an experience in which you have felt particularly seen by the Lord, as Hagar did that day in the wilderness? How did God remind or assure you that he sees you?

**Act:** Think of someone in your life who may feel unseen right now. Reach out to this person to remind him or her that he or she is seen by both you and the Lord.

## DAY 3

# The God Who Knows

*O LORD, you have searched me and known me! (Ps. 139:1)*

PSALM 139 IS a remarkably personal psalm. Reading it feels like eavesdropping on a private conversation between a king and his God. Yet its inclusion in the hymnbook of the Bible means that this is a conversation that we're all invited to have with our God. Throughout the psalm, we're reminded that our God knows our actions, our thoughts, our ways or habits, our words, our physical bodies, our days, our cares and burdens (see also Ps. 94:19), and our sins. Pause for a moment: Isn't it amazing how intimately God knows you?

The knowledge that David describes and praises here isn't the knowledge of a student about a subject or even the relational and physical knowledge of an intimate human relationship. Rather, it is the deep and abiding knowledge that only the One who "knitted [us] together" could have (Ps. 139:13). God knows exactly who we were created to be and what we were designed for (see Eph. 2:10), and he knows how sin has marred our good creation (see Rom. 3:23). He knows our secrets, both those that bring us shame and those that feel too tender to share (see Ps. 44:21).

How can God's knowledge of us as described in Psalm 139 encourage our hearts?

*We can be assured that we're never alone, never hidden from his presence. Even in the darkest places, our all-knowing God is still leading us and holding us (see vv. 9–12).*

Because God made us and wrote the story of our days, *we can trust that we were created with great care, wisdom, and intentionality.* God's works are wonderful, and that is true of each of us (see v. 14).

When we feel anxious, conflicted, or lost, God knows us better than we know ourselves, and *we can come to him for insight and direction* (see vv. 23–24).

*We can be honest with God about our sin.* He already knows our “grievous way[s]” better than we do (v. 24), and desires to lead us in *his way*. David knew this very personally: after having his most shameful sins exposed, he received God’s forgiveness and ongoing care (see 2 Sam. 11–12; Ps. 51).

*We can come to God with our pain, burdens, and deepest longings.* We need not minimize our pain or dismiss the ache of our unmet desires. We can find comfort and rest in the fact that even the parts of ourselves that feel most vulnerable are lovingly known. Whether in the darkness and vulnerability of sleep (see v. 18), the womb (see vv. 13–15), or sin and shame (see vv. 11–12), we can follow David’s lead by finding reassurance in the Lord’s knowledge.

*We can rejoice and delight in God’s intimate knowledge of us.* How wonderful and precious it is that the Lord would care to know us (see vv. 6, 17).

God knows our best and our worst, the beautiful and the ugly, and everything in between. He knows every detail, and yet he loves us still (see Rom. 8:31–39). For me, and perhaps for you too, that is the most wonderful part of all.

**Reflect:** How do you tend to think about God’s intimate knowledge of you? Is it something you welcome, shy away from, or easily forget about? Why do you think you respond to it this way?

**Reflect:** Which sources of encouragement listed above most resonate with you right now?

**Act:** Meditate on Psalm 139:23–24. Spend some time praying over these verses, sharing your heart with God and asking him to expose anything unhealthy or sinful in you.