

CHAPTER THREE

RICH IN VISION

→ **Strategy:** The rich single life mines the essence of our identity and season of life for the hidden treasures of opportunity.

The classroom was stuffed with small huddles of posturing undergrads as I walked through the door on that first day of my junior year. It was a large group, especially for an upper-level college elective course. As I scanned the room, I recognized most of my fellow political-science majors. There was also a healthy sampling of frat guys, balanced by an equal number of outspoken feminists. Sprinkled in among them were some fine-arts punks, science brains, and aspiring intellectuals. This had the makings of a most entertaining semester.

Only a course entitled “The Politics of Sex” could have brought us all together that day. I won’t speculate on the motivations of my fellow students, but my reasons for being there were not exclusively academic. To my dismay, however, I soon discovered that the course content would be less about sex and more about politics. “Gender and the Struggle for Equality” would have been a more accurate course title, but far less attractive on sign-up day.

The premise of the course was that all of life is a political

“ As I worked with a wide variety of women, I began to notice something. It was clear that many of the women I talked to had been seriously mistreated. Some of them had faced great injustice in their lives. It was hardly surprising that they felt angry and bitter. Certainly, it was important to seek justice for them. Yet I noticed that these women had a problem whose roots went far deeper than discrimination. Even if they were given justice, they would still be left with the problem of their own anger and resentment, with their dissatisfaction with life.¹

— Dee Jepsen

struggle for power, rights, and freedoms, and nowhere is this struggle more aggressively played out than in the relationships between men and women. As if to demonstrate this premise, the class soon broke into two camps—the traditionalists (mostly male), and the progressives (mostly female). The rest of the semester was basically one big battle of the sexes, producing heavy ego casualties on both sides. I don’t recall the entire class ever agreeing on anything, except maybe where to have the keg party at the end of the term.

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For Further Study:

Read Genesis 3. What was the woman's contribution to the fall into sin? What was the man's contribution?

Meditate on Proverbs

26:17. Have you ever stumbled into a debate and regretted it? How should you approach these situations?

In splitting into two camps, the class reflected our society's schism over the "Sexual Revolution," that disastrous experiment begun in the 1960s. Regardless of gender or political beliefs, you and I are participants in this ongoing experiment. It's an experiment because it involves tampering with society's view of sex and how we see each other as sexual beings. It is a revolution because nearly every sphere of life—morality, law, entertainment, customs, economics—has been shaken and shaped by it. Decades after it began, this revolution remains a topic of heated debate. In the minds of some, it is destroying the very foundations of society. Others see any remaining obstacles to complete sexual license as repression of the cruelest kind. Meanwhile, revolution continues to swirl all around us.

Sexual Politics and the Church

Don't look now, but the sexual revolution is alive and kicking in the church as well. Some of the most divisive issues in the church today, such as the debate over women in ministry and the idea of a gender-neutral Bible, are a direct result of the encroachment of sexual politics into the Christian culture. Although most biblical scholarship affirms the traditional understanding of male/female roles and identities, the debates rage on. Often, opposing sides can't even agree on the question, much less the answer. Is the church stuck in outmoded and legalistic ways of thinking? Or are Scripture and Christian tradition being abandoned for a liberal political agenda that exalts human desires above God's law?

In these debates, liberals tend to envision a culture that emphasizes human freedom and equality as the highest possible good. Such a culture, however, could never bring human satisfaction, for the simple reason that it rejects God's laws regarding moral behavior for mankind.

Meanwhile, conservatives tend to look to the past for inspiration. Conservative Christians can appeal to almost any pre-1960 period of cultural history, as long as it was "more Christian" than our own. But we would do far better to take our life cues from the infallible Scripture rather than from the traditions of our all-too-fallible predecessors.

A humble study of the Bible and history reveals that those long-lost "good old days" prior to the sexual revolution were hardly a heaven-on-earth. Grievous injustice

For Further Study:

Read James 5:13. What will help us keep from evaluating others on the basis of our own limited cultural understandings?

toward women, in plain violation of Scripture, has regularly been tolerated throughout Christian history, simply because then-current secular culture and traditions found it acceptable. In fact, some notable Christian thinkers believe the sexual revolution was ushered in by the failure of twentieth-century men and women to rightly exercise their biblical roles and responsibilities.

The practical result has been great confusion—sometimes even within the church—over what it means to be a man, what it means to be a woman, and how the two can possibly co-exist. How can you express your unique attributes as a man or woman under Christ in this gender-blended culture? How can you confidently stand against the cultural tide without becoming entangled in the political push-and-shove that so often characterizes this debate? Space doesn't permit me to set out an apologetic against a feminist view of the biblical treatment of women; the recommended reading at the end of this chapter can help you there. But I do believe that the rhetoric of the sexual revolution can do great harm within the

church, primarily by muddling our understanding of the wonderful and complementary purpose of gender identities presented in Scripture.

Early on in writing this book I realized I would, at some point, have to address single men and women separately, for men and women approach the life of faith in very different ways. My problem, obviously, is that I only see through male eyes. I have tried to compensate by study-

ing and seeking help from the women I know, especially my extraordinary wife, Jill, who has coached me for 14 years. So here's my shot at this task. I hope you find it helpful.

“ Apart from a widespread national return to God, never again will the followers of Christ be able to take their sexual cues from this society. We must fend for ourselves, forge out our own biblical ethic, and enforce it where we can. In the process we must open wide our doors and invite in those weary pilgrims made open to Christian faith because they have tasted the bitter waters of the world's sorry alternative.²

— Randy Alcorn

Single Women: Keep the Flame

In Matthew 25, Jesus shares parables on how to prepare for the coming of the Kingdom of God. One parable concerns ten maidens who are waiting for the arrival of a bridegroom:

At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight the cry rang out: "Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!" Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out." "No," they replied, "there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves." But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. Later the others also came. "Sir! Sir!" they said. "Open the door for us!" But he replied, "I tell you the truth, I don't know you." Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour (Mt 25:1-13).

Meditate on Luke 21:34-36. In what ways might you lack readiness for Christ's return?

This parable is clearly about the need for every person to be wise in preparation because we don't know when Christ will return. Jesus uses a culturally familiar scene of ten maidens (the Greek word used here is *parthenos*, meaning "mature young women") who are performing the traditional duty of lighting the way of the bridegroom. Their "lamps" were probably torches on long poles with wicks that needed to be soaked in a flammable oil to remain lit.

If you were a "parthenos" listening to Jesus tell this parable, you might find yourself quite concerned about the choices made by the five foolish single women. Their lack of readiness cost them dearly. No doubt the first thing you would do when you got home that night would

be to check your own oil supply!

For the Christian single woman, today's messages about the requirements of femininity pose dizzying contradictions. Take a look at any magazine stand. What is the most important thing a woman needs?

“ At the heart of mature femininity is a freeing disposition to affirm, receive and nurture strength and leadership from worthy men in ways appropriate to a woman's differing relationships.³ ”

— John Piper

Independence? The right man? Equality in the workplace? Great nails? Proponents of the sexual revolution claim that women have always lacked independent identity, that they have been defined primarily in relation to men.

Feminist leader Patricia Ireland writes, “The essence of feminism for me is the freedom to live our lives as we

please, and to reinvent the world as we do so.”⁴ Helen Gurley Brown, for 31 years editor of *Cosmopolitan*, is radically different in view and constituency from Patricia Ireland, yet in a recent interview she com-

“ I’m tough, ambitious, and I know exactly what I want. If that makes me a [deleted], okay!⁵ ”

— Madonna, early 90s

For Further Study:

Read Proverbs 31:10-31. Which aspects of the Proverbs 31 woman would be most acceptable in our culture? Which would be least acceptable?

ments regarding why she wanted to run Cosmo: “I really knew from the very first hour what I wanted to say and who I wanted to write for—that 23-year-old with her nose pressed to the glass, not having everything, and wanting more, and willing to try hard for it...[The Cosmo Girl] wants to do it better, she wants to have it all.”⁶

The Militant Feminist and the sassy Cosmo Girl are both adamant about what they want, it’s just that they want quite different things. One defines her wants in terms of an independent identity, the other in terms of the culture of beauty. The modern woman is constantly pulled between these two mutually incompatible goals.

“ I am responsible for courting that fame, but I didn’t know what I was getting myself into. I convinced myself that it was going to be enough to take the place of real intimacy. I was incredibly naive. Part of it was just being young and having fun. The other part was a lonely young girl’s longing and search to be fulfilled.⁷ ”

— Madonna, 1998

For every *Ms. Magazine* there is a *Mademoiselle*. For every book on how to compete with a man there’s one on how to keep him. Both views, however, define womanhood unbiblically, because they define it in external terms. They falsely claim that the truly modern woman can only find meaning in how she looks or what she controls.

The biblical picture is quite different. The Bible portrays true femininity not as external assertiveness or attractiveness, but as something that is fundamentally internal. Biblical femininity is a conquest of the heart and a beauty of the soul. Scripture’s instruction to women emphasizes qualities such as reverence, self-control, purity, and kindness. Peter instructs women that, “Your beauty should not come from outward adornment....Instead it

INNER ADORNMENT—THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

One of the greatest challenges women face in the pursuit of godliness is the temptation to focus on outward appearance. This is not a new problem. First Peter 3:3-4 warns women not to evaluate their beauty by “outward adornment,” but instead by the “inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit.” Paul’s description of this inner quality is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). While men and women should both desire to produce this fruit, it can be particularly helpful to women in their battle against the cultural obsession with outward striving or adornment. The following definitions of the fruit of the Spirit may be helpful to meditate on.⁹

Love—a sacrificial commitment to the welfare of another person regardless of that person’s response, and regardless of what he or she might give me in return.

Joy—a deep, abiding, inner thankfulness to God for his goodness, that remains uninterrupted when less desirable circumstances of life intrude.

Peace—a heartfelt tranquility and trust that does not disappear during the storms of life, because it is anchored in the overwhelming consciousness that I am in the hand of God.

Patience—a quality of self-restraint that does not retaliate in the midst of provoking situations.

Kindness—a sensitive awareness and willingness to seek out ways in which to serve others.

Goodness—an unswerving capacity to deal with people rightly as God defines that term, even when they need correction.

Faithfulness—an inner loyalty that results in remaining true to my spiritual convictions and commitments.

Gentleness—controlled strength dispensed from a humble heart.

Self-control—an inward personal mastery that submits my desires to the greater cause of God’s will.

1 Read 1 Timothy 2:9-10. Write one phrase each to describe how you will express modesty in:

Dress:

Speech:

Behavior toward men:

should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight" (1Pe 3:3-4).

Is Peter saying the godly woman is to be seen and not heard? Or that women can only be godly when devoid of all adornment? No! Peter is encouraging women that the audience that really matters is an audience of One. The Bible provides women with wisdom that is timeless and fully relevant for today. In a world that would limit your vision to the superficial and

external, the woman of God fulfills her call from the inside out. The great examples of women in the Scriptures—Deborah, Ruth, Hannah, Esther, Mary, and

others—all exhibit this character, regardless of the task to which they were called. These women were not foolish, rebellious, or vain. They demonstrated true loveliness by being prepared in heart for the time and task of God's choosing.

The fight for power and position that consumes the feminist woman, and the lust for fashion that enslaves the worldly woman, are both enticements to the Christian

“ Women in the 1890s might have compared themselves with the other ten girls their age in the village. Women in the 1990s must compare themselves with pictures of the cream of the worldwide modeling industry. The images peer out from every magazine cover: men's magazines teach men what to look *for*, and women's magazines teach women what to look *like*.⁸

”

— David Powlison

woman. Who wouldn't be tempted to seek to "do it better, and have it all"? But at what cost?

The church is made up of women and men working in complementary relationship. In its ideal state this relationship, through a balance of outer impact and inner fire, produces a church strong in mission and deep in passion for God. But where lust for power or obsession with beauty is present among its women, the church is hindered in its passion for the Lord.

In the Scriptures the idea of a flame is often used to signify God's presence. The flame of God's presence led the children of Israel through the wilderness. The Spirit of God came upon the Christians at Pentecost as a flame. A flame represents power, purity, and light. A flame also requires tending and care. The five wise maidens in the

For Further Study:

Read Judges 4:1-10. How did Deborah acknowledge the distinctive leadership responsibilities of men and women in her interaction with Barak?

parable made sure their torches were ready, and that the flame stayed lit. How can you as a Christian single woman follow the example of the wise maidens, and care for the lamp of God's presence in your life and sphere of influence?

Meditate on 2 Kings

4:1-7. What can you learn from the widow about how to handle a sense of inadequacy or lack?

Tend the flame. Have you ever walked with a candle through a dark and drafty house? You learn quickly to protect the flame from the elements, or risk having it go out on you (typically, right after you hear a creepy noise in the next room). The tending of a flame is not done with bold gestures or impulsive activity, for as strong as fire can rage, it can also flicker and fade. Tending a flame requires patience, attention to detail, and a wisdom to know that the stronger the flame, the farther the light will push back the darkness.

How can you, like a wise maiden, tend the flame? First of all, don't let the howling winds of cultural change blow out your fire. Be a woman of the Word, and let the Bible define you, not the feminist movement or the fashion

“ Zeal, as you know, means an earnest, ardent desire, giving rise to a correspondent energy of action, to obtain some favourite object; and when directed to a right object is a noble and elevated state of mind....It is like fire, which may be applied to many useful purposes when under wise direction, but which if not kept in its proper place and under proper restraint may cause a conflagration....The zeal that is likely to be continuous, to honour God, to do good to our fellow-creatures, is that which is cherished in the closet of devotion, fed by the oil of Scripture, and fanned by the breath of prayer.¹⁰ ”

— John Angell James

world. Study what Scripture says about you, and value its wisdom for your life.

Recognize that stirring dying coals and fanning promising sparks in the church demands character. Discontent, double-mindedness, worldliness, and the like produce impatience with God and his plan for your life. In the end, your eternal reward will not be for the ministries you ran or the spiritual gifts you used, but for the lives you touched. A woman who perseveres in her distinctive calling in God will fan the flame of faith in the hearts

of many, and will be of great value to the work of God in her generation.

In Acts 16 Paul travels to Philippi. There he meets Lydia, a successful businesswoman who happens to be single. Whether she was ever married, we don't know. We do know that she is “a worshiper of God” (v.14) and that she received the gospel, becoming the first Christian in that part of the world! Her home became the meeting place for

For Further Study:

Read the account of Ruth (see book of Ruth). How did she exercise godliness in facing hardship?

2 Read the account of Anna (Luke 2:36-38) and Mary of Bethany (John 12:1-7). Write three words that describe their devotion.

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-
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the church in Philippi, and her gift of hospitality became one of the great marks of this church that Paul loved so dearly. Lydia's faith fanned the flame of a church that Paul considered his "partners in the gospel" (Php 1:5). Lydia was a single woman of influence, grace, and passion for God.

Fan the flame. Don't be content just to keep the fire burning—fan the flame! Disciplines like prayer, evangelism, worship, and servanthood will both increase your zeal and inspire others to greater passion in God. For

example, Debbie is a single sister in our church, and a highly successful manager in a national company. Is she known in the church for her business leadership? No, and she doesn't seek to be. She is known for prayer. She is an intercessor who regularly gathers folks at her home for times of prayer. Sylvia is a single woman in another church. She is a banker who doesn't let that often dry profession rob her radiant joy. She loves the lost with her life, and attracts them with her spirit.

These women contribute in many other ways, but their primary vision is that the church maintain a burden for the lost and a heart for God. I don't know where we'd be without them and the many others like them. Deb and Sylvia are doing more than tending the fire, they're fanning the flame in themselves, and warming us all in the glow.

Pass the torch. Hannah More was a woman of extraordinary talents. An accomplished playwright, she traveled in the best circles of London society in the late 1700s. Her faith was sincere, but carefully adapted to her secular lifestyle. The deaths of some of her closest friends shook her and sent her on a quest to understand the faith of her childhood. In time she found her friends changing, and her heart as well. She met people who were serious about applying their faith to real-life dilemmas, and they lovingly challenged her to do the same. Encouraged by her new pastor, John Newton (who wrote the hymn "Amazing Grace"), she caught a vision. God had given her intelligence, gifting, position, and wealth, and she wanted to spend it all for him.

Initially her "consecrated pen" became her ministry, and she produced many widely read tracts, dramas, and essays addressing the problems of the day from a

Meditate on Acts

9:36-43. Do you think that Dorcas was important to the church in Joppa? Why?

Christian perspective. Her writings helped stem the tide in England of a revolutionary anarchy that had already devastated France. With her longtime friend William Wilberforce she helped overthrow slavery in England. She became one of the most important benefactors to the ministries of John and Charles Wesley.

“ We are apt to mistake our vocation by looking out of the way for occasions to exercise great and rare virtues, and by stepping over the ordinary ones that lie directly in the road before us.¹¹ ”

— Hannah More

In time she and her sisters developed a burden for

the poor and, venturing out of their comfortable upper-class surroundings, created an education and evangelism program in one of London's poorest areas. Yet Hannah More also was deeply committed to the discipling of young women in the faith, serving them with her pen and her life. She became the most influential woman in England, even though she never held a position in any power structure.

What made Hannah More special? She had vision for a life beyond personal accomplishment. She worked within the biblical limits of her gifting and calling. She had a commitment to her local Christian community that nourished her faith. She was obedient to the promptings of God. She expressed her trust in God through the giving of her resources and life. She took Paul's admonition to "train younger women" (Tit 2:3-4) seriously. In short, not only did she fan the flame in her life and her church, she gave her life to passing it on beyond her generation and social group.

Meditate on Proverbs

14. How can you be building up your house? How could you be tearing it down?

- 3** Read Paul's closing greetings in Romans 16:1-16. What do Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, and Persis have in common?
- They are all supermodels
 - They have the same first names as The Supremes
 - They were Paul's travel agents
 - They were notable for their hard work for the gospel

We have a number of Hannah Mores in our church, any one of whom could carve out an impressive individual ministry for herself. But each is having a far greater impact by embracing the womanly call to stir up the fire of God in the midst of his people.

Every Christian single woman has the opportunity to be a Lydia or a Hannah More. The temptations to give in to the culture are real, and the choices you make are crucial. Which world will you live in, which Kingdom will have your allegiance? Let me leave

you to ponder this with the hard-won wisdom of Amy Carmichael:

“ A woman who is unmarried has the ability, by God’s grace, to honor God in her single life. If she can bring glory to God now, she can do it for life.¹² ”

— Lorrie Skowronski

We who love our Lord, and we whose affections are set on the things that are heaven for us *today*—we voluntarily and gladly lay aside things that charm the world, so that we may be charmed and

ravished with the things of heaven. Then our whole being may be poured forth in constant and unre-served devotion in serving our Lord, who died to save us....We are called to live daily in a higher Kingdom, where we are touched, and our souls drink from the Spirit of God.¹³

Single Men: Carry the Colors

I am a history buff with an intense interest in the Civil War. I particularly enjoy visiting the battlefield parks of major engagements of the war. Although not a fan of war itself, I find myself deeply moved when standing in the midst of a battlefield and realizing this is where men gave their lives for something greater than themselves. I can spend all day reading monuments and plaques. A life goal is to read all 5000 monuments at Gettysburg; I have about 3000 left.

One of the most beautifully preserved battlefields is Antietam, site of the bloodiest day of fighting of the Civil

“ At the heart of mature masculinity is a sense of benevolent responsibility to lead, provide for, and protect women in ways appropriate to a man’s differing relationships.¹⁴ ”

— John Piper

War. The Antietam visitor’s center holds an amazing painting of a group of soldiers battling around a regimental flag. Regimental flags were the individual banners or “colors” of a regiment that distinguished that group of soldiers from all others. The ultimate colors

of the army were the national flags—the Stars and Stripes of the Union, and the Stars and Bars of the Confederacy. The picture in the visitor’s center so fascinated me that I did some study on the purpose and use of flags and banners throughout history.

Banners and flags provide identity and direction to large groups of people who need to move in a coordinated way. In the Old Testament, the people were counted and organized

CARRYING THE COLORS—NOT FOR THE FAINT OF HEART

Some of the greatest gallantry of the Civil War was exhibited in the protection of or assault on the colors or regimental banners. The following are a few actual examples of soldiers who knew the life and death symbolism of the battle flag.

- A New York Regiment was surrounded and about to be overrun when the color bearer, instead of retreating, went out into the open in front of the troops and planted the flag, inspiring the troops to charge the startled enemy and drive them off the field of battle.
- At the battle of Cedar Mountain, General Stonewall Jackson saw his troops running from the battle. He grabbed the colors himself and carried them to the front, causing his troops to stop, turn around, and resume fighting.
- At the battle of Gettysburg, nine color bearers of the 24th Michigan regiment were shot and 14 of the 26th North Carolina Regiment were shot in a single day's fighting. The last man to die carrying the colors that day for the 26th NC had wrapped the colors around himself to keep them from falling into enemy hands. He lost his life, the flag was saved.
- Joshua Chamberlain, one of the great heroes of the Civil War, picked up the colors of his regiment when they had fallen during the battle of Petersburg and held them aloft for the troops to rally around. He was shot through both hips, and when he couldn't stand on his own, stuck his sword in the ground and leaned against it in order to keep the colors flying.
- The 54th Massachusetts Regiment, the first black fighting regiment in U.S. history, suffered more than 50 percent casualties in an unsuccessful effort to storm a confederate fort in South Carolina. Sgt. William Carney bore the colors that day and was wounded several times in the battle, yet as he was carried off the field his words to his defeated comrades were, "Don't worry, the old flag never touched the ground." Sgt Carney became the first black recipient of the Medal of Honor. The "Fighting 54th" was immortalized in the film, *Glory*.
- At the Battle of Antietam one particularly zealous color bearer was found standing in the open waving the flag furiously in the air. When asked what he was doing he said, "Need to get some bullet holes in it. Ain't no good without bullet holes!"

For Further Study:

Read Isaiah 11:10-12. What is the prophetic significance of banner imagery?

Meditate on Exodus

17:8-16. Who was most important in the defeat of the Amalekites: Joshua? Moses? Or Aaron and Hur?

by tribe and family under banners (Nu 2:1-2, 34). As the Israelites wandered in the desert, each evening the banners were planted around the tabernacle in precise array, enabling the people to transform themselves from a mob into a community of faith. Under these banners the nation traveled and arrayed in battle. The banners identified one's place of belonging in times of peace, and provided a rallying point in times of war. In Exodus 17, Moses himself became a human regimental flag: the Israelites were able to defeat the Amalekites only when Moses' hands were held aloft. But Moses, realizing it was not his power that won the day, dedicated an altar named "The Lord is My Banner." For Israel, a banner was a sign of God's sovereign control, intervention, and identification with his people.

How does all this apply to single men? Let's face it, the sexual revolution has done a number on guys. The traditional ideas of masculinity are under siege from every side. Men are told that to reclaim their identity they need to do everything from primal screaming in the woods to exploring their feminine side as if it were some recently discovered treasure island. Not surprisingly, this confusion has filtered into the church.

But I believe there is a clear call to masculinity for the Christian single man. The biblical call for single men can be expressed in the opportunity to "carry the colors" in the church. But what does this mean?

Sacrifice. Throughout history, the great honor of being selected to carry the colors of the army has gone to that soldier who was both totally trustworthy and extremely brave—for he who carries the colors has no hand free to carry a gun. Maleness in our day, by contrast, is all about attitude and image. I see it in the locker room of the gym I frequently (well, occasionally) attend: guys preening in

““ The real qualities of leadership are to be found in those who are willing to suffer for the sake of objectives great enough to demand their wholehearted obedience.¹⁵ ””

— J. Oswald Sanders

front of mirrors, talking trash about women, complaining about their bosses. Rebellious attitudes, slack-erism, fatalism, rowdiness, materialism, and the like all speak of a lack of sustaining vision or mission for our maleness. While still at the top of the social power

structure, men are taking hits on all sides, and are deserting their positions of influence in the culture wars. We have become fans of everything, but participants in little that ultimately matters.

Meditate on Daniel

1:3-20. What are some of the peer pressures that Daniel and his friends might have experienced?

Contrast this with the vision of single man Paul, as expressed in these excerpts from his letter to a persecuted church in Philippi:

Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the Word of God more courageously and fearlessly....For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain....But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you....Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ....I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings....Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal (Php 1:14, 21; 2:17; 3:7, 10, 13-14).

4 In 2 Timothy 2:1-7, Paul gives three good pictures of how the godly man should live. Complete the following sentences with your own application.

Like a soldier, I will _____

Like an athlete, I will _____

Like a farmer, I will _____

Paul could have played it safe, made a name for himself. But he gave it up for a greater cause—something beyond himself. He embraced sacrifice as his lifestyle. The bearer of the colors knows that his is a lonely position, in the middle of the fray, unable to defend himself. Yet he presses on, because he knows that when he took the honor of the cause in his hands he gave away his right to think only of himself. He became a caretaker of the reality that there is more to the battle than survival. He gives himself wholly for the goal, knowing that others will follow his example.

How, in practical terms, can a single man live this sacrificial life? Let me tell you about Fred and Ed. Fred is Mr. Faithful on our sound team. He has been there for years, serving in obscurity, the first to be at the meetings and the last to leave. Ed serves on the parking team, rain or shine, helping people find spaces in the crowded parking lot. He also runs our nursing-home ministry, taking a team of folks out on Sundays to visit the elderly.

So what's the big deal? Well, Fred also happens to be an owner of a prestigious engineering firm downtown. Ed also happens to teach biblical studies at the graduate level. Fred and Ed could have traded on their personal accomplishments for prominence in the church. Instead

“ The crisis of belief is a turning point or a fork in the road that demands that you make a decision. You must decide what you believe about God. How you respond when you reach this turning point will determine whether you go on to be involved with God in something God-sized that only He can do or whether you will continue to go your own way and miss what God has purposed for your life. This is not a one-time experience. It is a daily experience. How you live your life is a testimony of what you believe about God.¹⁶ ”

— Henry Blackaby, Claude King

For Further Study:

Psalm 51:16-17. What heart attitude will produce sacrifice that is acceptable to God?

they took up the banner of servanthood, and are calling others to follow.

How can you live the sacrificial life? How about by not letting your job dictate your life? Leave the carrot of the career fast-track for someone else to grope at. How about by learning to babysit? Or by trading some nights in front of the tube for serious study of Scripture? How about helping a single mother rake her leaves? How about developing fewer opinions and more

questions? You get the idea.

Responsibility. In 1961, the USS Thresher nuclear submarine sank with 129 crew members aboard. The commander of the nuclear navy, Admiral Hyman Rickover, was summoned to Congress and asked to assess blame for the disaster. A strong leader, he had not only developed the nuclear program, but had butted heads with politicians over it for years. He knew he had enemies who were seeking to exact revenge. When asked to give his opinion as to what had gone wrong, he could have easily blamed any number of technical or human factors, but he shouldered the blame himself. In his testimony he explained,

Responsibility is a unique concept: it can only reside and inhere in a single individual. You may share it with others, but your portion is not diminished. You may delegate it, but it is still with you. You may disclaim it, but you cannot divest yourself of it. Even if you do not recognize or admit its presence, you cannot escape it. If responsibility is rightfully yours, no evasion, or ignorance, or passing the blame can shift the burden to someone else. Unless you can point your finger at the man who is responsible when something goes wrong, then you have never had anyone really responsible.¹⁷

Read that again and ponder it. What the admiral defined as responsibility, in older times was known as duty. For duty men often went to war, and sometimes to prison. For duty men told the truth, and men respected women. To carry the colors in a parade was an honor. To carry the col-

**Meditate on John
21:15-19, Acts 2:14-**

41. What do these passages tell you about God's ability to help us do what we are called to do?

ors in battle was duty. Sadly, the concept of duty is as out of favor in our day as is the idea of driving the speed limit.

Faith is a prerequisite of duty. That's why duty is never about doing things out of guilt. A man oriented to duty recognizes that nothing of consequence gets done unless someone puts himself on the line. Nehemiah was broken-hearted about the desolation of Jerusalem, but what set him apart was that he did something about it. It involved risk and hardship, but he saw that the occasion needed a man. He sought the Lord, heard God's call, and did his duty. Are you looking for fresh challenges in God, or are you bunkered down in survival mode? In an age where men avoid responsibility like it's a polyester leisure suit, a single man who is grace-motivated and duty-bound can make a difference in this world.

Resolve. The man carrying the colors was always included in the battle plan. He was told of the objective, and was to press on toward that objective with all diligence. He couldn't get caught up in the fray or turn back. He must lead on toward the goal. He was the focus of the advance. All the troops fell in behind him. At the same time, he was the focal point of the attack, for the enemy knew that if the color-bearer could be cut down, his fellow troops could be routed in the confusion.

Facing the full fury of battle and unable to defend himself or retreat, the color-bearer knew that he was the source

“ It is around the standard bearer that the fight is thickest. There the battle-axes ring upon the helmets and the arrows are bent upon the armor, for the foe knows that if he can cut down the standard, he will strike a heavy blow and cause deep discouragement.¹⁸ ”

— Charles Spurgeon

of hope amid calamity in battle. When the banner was lost, hope was lost. But as long as the banner was flying, there was reason to continue the fight. One color-bearer at Antietam described the dilemma of being the focal point of both attack and hope: “Between the physical fear of going forward and the moral fear of going back-

ward, there is a predicament of exceptional awkwardness.”¹⁹

Single brothers, this “exceptional awkwardness” is real to you, I am sure. The fight can seem overwhelming, and tangible reward for the effort can seem scarce. Resolve is the faith that keeps you moving even when the fog of battle overwhelms you. Jesus had resolve in going to the Cross. Paul had resolve in pressing on toward the goal. Resolve looks ahead. Resolve is clear-eyed, level-headed, sober-thinking. It is fueled by the burning reality that

For Further Study:

Matthew 26:31-46. In what ways did Jesus have to express resolve in this passage?

service in this life is the only battle that matters, and that God himself has placed you in it. So spend it all here. As the famous missionary motto proclaims, “No retreat, no surrender, no reserve.”

God made you a man for a purpose. Inherent in your masculinity is a call to step forward, not simply to take the flag, but first to ask for it and reach toward it. Masculinity is the raw material of leadership in God’s government, but you don’t need to wait for a tap on the shoulder to express your innate leadership call. You can lead by influence and example. If you are not being trained to lead, get your Bible out and train yourself! Your Christian single sisters are always looking for men to step out in leadership in areas such as purity, discernment, decisions, and godly conversation. Like Nehemiah, the only things you need to make a real impact are a willingness to sacrifice, the faith to do your duty, and resolve to finish the task.

Men and women, weary of fighting the battles of the gender wars, are yearning for peace. Christian men and women who relish the roles and responsibilities that God has given can provide a way out of the confusion. The beauty of God’s way is that whether your singles group is counted by the hundreds or by the handful, you can be a compelling example of the richness of biblical manhood and womanhood if you embrace your distinctive call.

Sisters, fan the flame. Brothers, carry the colors.
Be the Church! ■

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What has most shaped your views of the opposite sex?
2. How can Christians remain true to biblical standards while reaching out to those with different social views?
3. How important is it that we try to change the way our society deals with moral issues?
4. What well-known personality currently represents the cultural ideal of womanhood? Why?
5. What well-known personality currently represents the cultural ideal of manhood? Why?
6. What are some ways in your local church where women can fan the flame of the church?

7. What are some obstacles that single men will face if they pick up the banner in the church?

8. Reread the quote from Admiral Rickover on page 47. Which of the ways to avoid responsibility described in the quote are a temptation for you?

9. Have you had a moment of “exceptional awkwardness” like the one described by the flag carrier? What caused it?

RECOMMENDED READING *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991)

Christians in the Wake of the Sexual Revolution by Randy Alcorn (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1985)

Spiritual Leadership by J. Oswald Sanders (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980)

Let Me Be a Woman by Elisabeth Elliot (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1976)

NOTES

1. Dee Jepsen, in John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), p. 388.
2. Randy C. Alcorn, *Christians in the Wake of the Sexual Revolution* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1985), p. 172
3. John Piper, in John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, p. 46.
4. Quoted in *CBMW News*, October 1996.
5. Quoted by Carolyn Warner in *The Last Word* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1992), p. 40.
6. Quoted in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1/29/97.
7. Quoted in *USA Today*, 5/3/98, p. 20.
8. David Powlison, "Your Looks - What the Voices Say and the Images Portray," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Vol. 15, No. 2, Winter 1997, p. 40.
9. Richard Mayhue in John MacArthur, ed., *Rediscovering Pastoral Ministry* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1995) pp. 160-161.
10. John Angell James, *Female Piety* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1994), p. 137.
11. Quoted by Carolyn Warner in *The Last Word*, p. 40.
12. Lorrie Skowronski, in Elyse Fitzpatrick and Carol Cornish, eds., *Women Helping Women* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1997), p. 145.
13. David Hazard, *You Are My Hiding Place/Amy Carmichael* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1991), p. 44.
14. John Piper, in John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, p. 36.
15. J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980), p. 25.
16. Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King, *Experiencing God* (Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), p. 133.
17. Quoted in "Thought for the Week," *Washington Business Journal* June 15-21, 1992.
18. Charles Spurgeon, *The Power of Prayer in a Believer's Life* (Lynnwood, WA: Emerald Books, 1993), p. 96.
19. Attributed to D.L. Thompson.