

## CHAPTER FIVE

# RICH IN IMPACT

→ **Strategy:** The rich single life resonates with the impact of a whole-hearted devotion to God and his agenda for our lives.

The bit players of the Bible fascinate me—those people who show up for a few verses and then disappear, never to be mentioned again. I think of Simeon and Anna waiting patiently for the coming of the Messiah. I think of Zacchaeus, the tree-climbing tax collector. What ever happened to this radical guy? Or Dorcas, the gracious woman whom Paul raised from the dead. How did that miracle change her life?

One of the most intriguing biblical bit players is Demas. Demas is mentioned briefly by Paul in three of his letters. He was evidently a Greek convert to Christianity and traveled with Paul on his journeys. He apparently stayed close to Paul during his first imprisonment; Paul's prison letters to Philemon and the Colossians both mention Demas by name. We know that Paul considered Demas a "fellow worker" (Phm 24), among the highest tributes Paul could pay to those who served with him. Demas was apparently dear to Paul. He stayed with him in dark times, bringing him the refreshment of friendship. Demas worked and sacrificed for the cause.

But the last word on Demas is not a good one. In prison and awaiting death, Paul closes his last letter to Timothy lamenting that many had left him. He says of Demas, "because he loved this world, [he] has deserted me" (2Ti 4:10). Think about this for a second. A man who worked with Paul for almost Paul's entire ministry, who had labored in the founding of churches, and who made his stand at Paul's first arrest, suddenly turns his back on the dear old servant of God and walks away. After all the trials he must have endured at Paul's side, what could have been so powerful to harden the heart of the once-faithful Demas?

Paul's reason is cryptically succinct. Demas "loved this world." Persecution, hardship, and imprisonment had forged a friendship, but in the end Paul's "fellow worker" was undone by love of the world. Demas the good soldier became forever known as Demas the deserter. What is this "love of the world" that could so damage a person's spiritual destiny?

**Meditate on  
Philippians 2:19-30.**  
Reflect on the differences between Demas and Epaphroditus.

## Do Not Love the World

The Apostle John gives us a crystal-clear view of what it means to love the world. In addressing those who would find themselves in the valley of a Demas decision, John cautions:

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever (1Jn 2:15-17).

The “world” John describes here is not the world that “God so loved” (Jn 3:16)—referring to people in need of the Savior. The “world” John warns us against has been described by one commentator as “the organized system of human civilization which is opposed to God and alienated from God.” It is human existence without reference to God, existence as if eternity did not matter. This world—infested as it is with idolatry, cravings, and boastings, a world that captures hearts and destroys lives—is all anyone can know apart from Christ. It is the love of this world that brought down Demas.

For the Christian single in our day, the “world” and its temptations can take many forms. R.C. Sproul graphically describes the challenge of the Christian in the world:

We live in this world. We are part of the world. We are to a certain degree products of this world. And the world is our battlefield....The world is a seducer. It seeks to attract our attention and our devotion. It remains so close at hand, so visible, so enticing. It eclipses our view of heaven....It pleases us—much of the time anyway—and, alas, we often live our lives to please it. And that is where conflict ensues, for

pleasing the world so seldom overlaps with pleasing God.<sup>1</sup>

Consider, for example, the temptations found in advertisements. It is estimated that you and I are exposed to about 3,000 advertisements per day, on

### For Further Study:

Read Luke 4:1-13. What temptations of the world did Satan offer Jesus in the wilderness?

“ Materialism will inevitably produce the kind of society....where people know the price of everything, but the value of nothing—where people have a great deal to live on, but very little to live for.<sup>3</sup> ”

— Randy Alcorn

average roughly one every 20 seconds of our waking lives.<sup>2</sup> Most of these ads seek to appeal to some basic desire—to possess, experience, control, consume, avoid—all of which beckon us to worldliness. Every day, we face the unrelenting assault of such enticements.

Out of millions of Internet sites to choose from, sites devoted to pornography consistently hold several of the top five slots—an alarming testimony to the insatiable sexual lusts and cravings in our culture. Religion itself can be worldly. Deepak Chopra, guru of the 1990s, once described his appeal this way: “They say you have to give up everything to be spiritual, get away from the world, all that junk. I satisfy a spiritual yearning without making [people] think they have to worry about God.”<sup>4</sup> When we crave attention, lust after position, or boast of our achievements, we are demonstrating love of the world. In short, worldliness seeks to—and is fully able to—infect every level of our lives.

The Bible teaches that we live in a world that “hates” the things of God (Jn 15:18), that will give us much trouble (Jn 16:33), that is hollow and deceptive (Col 2:8), that

will be like pollution to our souls (Jas 1:27), and that will eventually pass away (1Co 7:31). We are told not to be conformed to the world (Ro 12:2) and to flee from the world (1Ti 6:11). Yet Jesus prayed for us this way, “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one....As

you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world” (Jn 17:15, 18).

Historically, Christians have had two basic tendencies when dealing with the world. One is to withdraw, avoiding worldly influences as much as possible. The other is to conform, trying to be as much like the world as possible. Perhaps you have found yourself caught up in one of these extremes. Early in this century Oswald Chambers wrote about the challenge of being “in the world but not of it.”<sup>6</sup> He addressed the need for Christians to avoid such extremes, neither living in fearful withdrawal from the world, nor being indistinguishable from it. Chambers was talking about how to live in a fallen world *for* Christ because you have been placed here *by* Christ.

**For Further Study:**

Read Romans 1:18-25. How can we have an awareness of God yet insist on living as if he doesn't matter?

“ This world and man are secondary, not primary. God first, heaven first, ‘the glory’ first. This life is temporary, preparatory, impermanent. We are moving on. We do not neglect this world, we do not attempt to go out of the world; but we keep it in its right and subordinate position.<sup>5</sup> ”

— D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

**Meditate on 1 Kings**

**11:1-13.** Why do you think Solomon's great wisdom did not protect him from this sad end?

**1** Which of these activities would be considered worldly in your Christian circles? Why not search the Scriptures to double-check your convictions in these areas?

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flirting                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Surfing the Internet             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Having NFL season tickets         | <input type="checkbox"/> Watching R-rated movies          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reading <i>People</i> magazine    | <input type="checkbox"/> Investing in the stock market    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hunting                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Not hunting                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Drinking alcohol socially         | <input type="checkbox"/> Listening to non-Christian radio |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Having friends who are homosexual | <input type="checkbox"/> Watching PG-13 movies            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Voting Democratic                 |   |

**For Further Study:**

Read Genesis 24. What was the definition of success that Abraham's servant desired?

**For Further Study:**

Read 1 Samuel 13:1-15. How did impatience rob Saul of his future?

How do you relate to the world? Do you try to hide from it? Would people have trouble distinguishing in your life where the world ends and your faith begins? Do you long to find ways to bring the truth of liberty in Christ into collision with the enslaving ways of the world? Do you want to influence your corner of this fallen world for Christ with your singleness? Let's take the rest of this chapter to explore some ways that you as a single adult can meet that challenge, and make a difference that will change the lives of others.

### **An Agenda for Lasting Impact**

I began taking guitar lessons when I was in third grade. From my earliest memories of playing guitar, I wanted to be a rock star. Through my high-

school years it was my consuming fantasy. I went to every concert I could, studying the posturing and moves of my idols—Clapton, Springsteen, Pete Townsend, Keith Richards. I never practiced enough to actually play really well, but I knew how to look cool on a stage!

My big break finally came in college, when I got involved in a band with some other dreamers. At our first concert, hundreds of rowdy students jammed into a little coffeehouse to hear us. The show was great! Three hours of classic-rock cover tunes, all my favorites. We were all over the stage, jumping into the crowd—some of our equipment even caught on fire! It all culminated in a raucous, unrehearsed finale of “Summertime Blues.” At the end of the show I stood on the stage, holding my guitar in triumphal, heroic glee, eating up the glory as fellow students screamed out my name. At age 20 I had achieved my life's dream. It was seriously cool.

The downside hit me a short time later. Like about an hour later. Sitting on my bed back in my dorm room, it began to sink in: “I'm 20 years old and I have just accomplished the only thing that ever mattered to me. The rest of my life is going to be a real bummer.” That was seriously uncool.

What is your life dream? What is your view of success?

**Meditate on Hebrews 11:31-40.** When will these saints receive the full benefit of their success?

**Meditate on Acts 9:1-19.** How was Paul's vision of success changed?

How will you know when you have finally “made it” in life?

**We must have goals beyond success.** We live in a goal-driven, success-obsessed culture. In this affluent society, most of us can set our sights on a dream and have reasonable expectations of obtaining it. To succeed in your career, outwork the competition. To attain a certain standard of living, just borrow your way there. Within the limits of our natural abilities, we can pursue almost any kind of success we want. But two critical questions often go unanswered in our full-throttle chase after dreams. Will the pursuit of success satisfy us? And, will it allow us to leave a meaningful mark on our world?

This question took on fresh relevance for me when I became a pastor. I entered the ministry at a time when it seemed like every other week some well-known religious leader was being exposed as a fraud or confessing major sin. I began to wonder if I would be able to resist the temptations and pressures that had snared these men. I certainly was no better than they were. More than anything, I wanted to carry out my ministry well until the end of my days. But I was gripped by a deep fear that, somewhere along the line, serious moral failure would be inevitable.

As I examined this fear before the Lord, he began to encourage me by his Spirit. He reminded me that if I kept my attention on him, he would preserve my call. But he also gave me some fatherly advice. As I was driving to work one day pondering my future, I sensed him speak to my heart, “My son, people who finish well are people who have goals beyond success.”

The apostle Paul had an interesting perspective on success. He was among the social elite of his day—not just a good Jew, but “a Hebrew of Hebrews” (Php 3:5), and prominent among the movers and shakers in Israel. But a funny thing happened on a business trip. A dramatic encounter with the risen Christ on the Damascus Road created a major pile-up on Paul's highway to success. That encounter with Christ redefined Paul's goals.

Fast-forward several years. Paul sits alone in a prison cell. The sentence of death may draw the curtain of his life closed at any moment. On some grimy parchment he scratches out his thoughts:

To Timothy, my dear son....You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me....For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and

“ If you are God-centered, you will adjust your circumstances to what God wants to do. God has a right to interrupt your life. He is Lord. When you surrendered to Him as Lord, you gave Him the right to help Himself to your life anytime He wants.<sup>7</sup> ”

— Henry Blackaby,  
Claude King

**For Further Study:**

Read 2 Corinthians 12:1-10. What did Paul choose to boast in? Why?

was given the best of everything in the society of his day, he was a testimony to wasted potential. If you think of him as a gifted preacher who spent many of his best years in prison unable to use the gifts God had given him, his life was a tragedy of missed opportunity. But Paul's personal inventory tells a different story: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day" (2Ti 4:7-8).

Did Paul regret the work left undone? Probably. Was he perplexed that many of the people into whom he had poured his life had turned against him? Certainly. Would Paul have rather spent his final days in more comfortable surroundings? Wouldn't you? Did Paul consider himself a failure? Absolutely not.

Paul understood that although success is fine, the highest goal in the Christian life is faithfulness. Mother Theresa, who in her life set an impressive, decades-long

example of service to the poorest of the poor, was once asked if she ever became discouraged in her service. She replied, "No, because Jesus called us to be faithful, not successful."<sup>8</sup>

Success is a temporary, peak experience, not a lifestyle. And success is relative: anyone can succeed if

allowed to set the standard himself. In God's eyes, the height of our success is far less significant than the consistency of our faithfulness. Where worldly success is about achievement and conquest, biblical success is about

the time has come for my departure....At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength (2Ti 1:2,15; 4:6,16-17).

Was Paul a success? By whose definition? If you think of him as a man who

“ In any Christian view of life, self-fulfillment must never be permitted to become the controlling issue. The issue is service, the service of real people. The question is, 'How can I be most useful?', not, 'How can I feel most useful?'<sup>9</sup> ”

— D.A. Carson

who we are and how we finish our race. The beautiful thing about biblical success is that, in our pursuit of it, all of heaven's resources are at our disposal. If you want to have an impact as a single person, it's fine to enjoy earthly success, but set your goals beyond success—be faithful, and finish well.

**What we are a part of is more important than the part we play.** Here are two comments representative of many I've heard from single women and men over the years.

**Comment #1:** "The vice president of the company says they see me as having great potential. If I can give them three years on the fast track, I can write my ticket anywhere. It's a lot of travel, but I figure it will pay off in all I can do for God when I'm done."

**Comment #2:** "It seems like every time I sing my songs, people respond. Everybody says I should make a record so more people can hear my music, but I'd have to move to Nashville to do it. That's just the way the business is. But if I have a gift, shouldn't I find out what my potential is?"

“ May the Lord, in mercy to my soul, save me from setting up an idol of any sort in His room, as I do by preferring a work professedly for Him to communion with Him.<sup>10</sup>

— Henry Martyn,  
19th century missionary  
and life-long single man

Both of these issues, and countless others like them, address a larger question: "How do I use the gifts and talents God has given me?" What counsel would you give in the situations described above? I generally respond with what may seem like an odd question: "Why do you feel you need

*to reach your potential?"* This is a question that may challenge every lesson you have ever been taught. How would you answer it?

Let's examine the Bible's perspective on that question. First, Scripture says very little about using our gifts to their fullest potential. When Paul talks about spiritual gifts (in 1 Corinthians 12, for example), he is not encouraging folks to "find your gift." He is not recommending a gifts seminar or a spiritual-gifts evaluation test. He sees gifts spilling out all over the place and is calling people to use their gifts in an orderly and humble manner.

Paul describes the spiritual gifts as parts of a body. He does not say to the hand, "You need to reach your fullest potential as a hand," nor to the eye, "You know what's holding you back from really being something special? It's these two unreliable ears next to you." When people view

**Meditate on Romans**

**12:3-8.** What guidance does this passage offer for maintaining humility in the context of fully expressing our gifts?

the body, Paul wants them to see all the parts working “for the common good” (1Co 12:7)—a body working like a body should. While we *are* encouraged to “eagerly desire the greater gifts” (1Co 12:30) and “fan into flame the gifts” (2Ti 1:6) the larger issue is, “Why? To what end are we to pursue these gifts?”

On this point, the Bible is quite clear. *The use of our gifts is never intended for our personal fulfillment. Rather, it is always for the building up of the church, the body of Christ.* From this it follows that our gifts and callings have no real value apart from their contribution to the body, the church of Christ, and its mission in the world.

If you’re like me, you first became a Christian, then you started going to church, because everyone knows good Christians go to church. That’s American Christianity 101. The reality, however, is we are saved *into* the body of Christ. We don’t go to church, we *are* the church! The church is not some cosmic concept, some heavenly fraternity we sometimes kind of feel around us; it is the people of God, set apart for his purposes.

When it comes to the church, Christians are not, and can never be, “believers but not believers.” The Church Universal, the Bride of Christ, expresses itself at the level of daily life in individual local congregations. From the very beginning (see Acts 2) Scripture has directed every member of the universal church to be an active participant in a *local* church. This local community of faith includes not only dear old Pastor Bob and Wanda the Angelic-Voiced Worshiper, but Ed the Obnoxious Zealot and Betty the Chronic Whiner as well. Oh yes, you and I also bring our little casserole of mixed motives and limited skills to the party. Believe it or not, the imperfect church is the place God hangs out, it is the thing God says he will build, and it is the humble vessel through which he will reach the world.

How can we have an impact in the cramped confines of a local church? Jesus told his disciples, “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant” (Mt 20:26). The Lord, by the way, backed this principle up with his very life. Where the world says “Be all you can be,” Jesus says, “He who loses his life for my sake will find it” (Mt 16:24). The door to fulfillment of our call, expression of our gifts, and lasting impact in the world is opened by one key: the key of servanthood. As a single adult, you have a precious opportunity to make an impact on this world, but that opportunity begins through serving in the context

**For Further Study:**

Read Acts 2:37-47. God used the preaching of Peter to establish the first local church. What characteristics of that church does Scripture highlight?

**2** What spiritual gift or gifts do you presently desire? Write down three, and a brief reason why you desire these particular gifts.

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Reason:

of a local church, God's tangible presence in the world.

Joshua Harris is a young single guy I know. He has many gifts and talents and has made quite a mark in publishing a national magazine, writing a best-selling book, and holding conferences across the country. Josh would be a first-round draft pick of any ministry organization. But he has gotten off the calling track. Josh has traded in his desire to be in ministry for a passion for serving in the local church. As he tells it:

Too many people my age have lost a vision for the church....My dream is to be a part of bringing the church back to the place God has always meant for

““ Adults who happen to be single are not more important than any other group in the church, but they are as important. They are not in a ‘hallway’ unto marriage but in a ‘living’ room full of potential and possibilities, which may or may not have an entrance leading to marriage but has many doors that lead to ministry.<sup>11</sup>”

— William White

it to play in our lives....Someday I hope to pastor a church or serve under another man in whatever position I'm best suited for. I don't know all that the future holds, but I want to be in on the action, and I believe the action is in the local church.<sup>12</sup>

Do you suppose Josh might be right? That, as Scripture testifies, the action really is in the church?

When I focus on fulfilling my individual gifts and calling *as an individual*, my impact will be limited both by my gifts and my opportunities to use them. But taking a servanthood approach to fulfillment means throwing my gifts in with those of others in the church and seeing *the whole body in action*. This is impact multiplied. Then position, influence, recognition, ambition, and other idols of the world are far less likely to ensnare me, because I'm making my contribution with no strings attached.

Whether leading the parade or being “a doorkeeper in the house of God” (Ps 84:10), what we are a part of, as someone once noted, is more important than the part we play.

**Know your assets and how to use them.** Nick was a talented guy who managed the assets of investors by trading on the global stock market. He became a wheeler-dealer in

### Meditate on Hebrews

**13:17.** What is your attitude toward the leaders God has placed over you for your benefit in the church?

## USING OUR GIFTS

Steve Camp is a Christian musician with a long career in music ministry. As a well-known artist he has been around highly gifted people for many years. He recently issued a challenge to his fellow musicians who might be tempted to compromise God's best for the sake of worldly success in the recording industry. His challenge is in the form of a poster entitled "A Call for Reformation in the Contemporary Christian Music Industry." This call consists of 107 "theses" modeled on the 95 Theses of Martin Luther, which touched off the Protestant Reformation.

While not many of us have great artistic gifts, we all have gifts (1Co 12:7) for which we are responsible. Some of Camp's 107 challenges are applicable to anyone having a desire to make an impact in our world. Ponder the following excerpts from several of Steve Camp's theses.

- #12:** We fail to glorify God when we strive to please men rather than please God. (Gal 1:10; 1Th 2:4)
- #62:** Godly character exhibited in response to sound doctrine is paramount in serving the Lord. To live privately what we proclaim publicly is the manifestation of genuine faith. That is why from the stockroom to the stage Christ-likeness should evidence our behavior. God has not called us to be successful, but faithful. (2Co 6:3-10)
- #64:** Ministry is defined as service to God and his creatures as we employ our Spirit-given giftedness, according to the instruction of the Scripture as good stewards of the manifold grace of God for the advancement of his kingdom. (1Pe 4:10-12)
- #65:** God has designed genuine ministry to be inseparable from the life and leadership of the local church. Any ministry that does not strengthen one's commitment to the local church is inconsistent with the purposes of Christ. (Ac 2:42-47; Heb 10:23-25)
- #84:** We are not, however, called to isolationism. We are called to be salt and light in the world. We are to be faithful witnesses of God's mercy, love, and grace to the lost and dying. We are to cultivate personal relationships with unbelievers, love our neighbor and our enemy, serve them, and share our faith with them. (Mt 5:13-16; 40-44)
- #92:** To have a good name in the community-at-large is vital in representing Christ. We must demonstrate honest, equitable handling of the lesser things: business, money, trade, etc., in order to be entrusted with the superior things: His Word, the church, and the souls of men. (Ps 15:2-5; 1Ti 2:1-2; Tit 3:1-2)
- #96:** We will purpose to keep personal relationships more important than business deals; family more valuable than commodities; and faith more precious than fortune. The struggle is maintaining an eternal perspective in the transitory moments. May our light so shine before men. (Ps 90:12; Mt 5:16; Eph 5:22-23; Php 2:1-5; 1Pe 3:7)

“ You don’t have to have a college degree to serve. You don’t have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve. You don’t have to know about Plato and Aristotle to serve....You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love.<sup>13</sup>

”

— Martin Luther King

**For Further Study:**

Read Luke 12:13-21. In what ways was the man in this parable foolish?

a high-risk segment of the market, but he didn’t really know the importance to his employer of the assets he was managing. To him, the assets were merely one of the components allowing him to play an exciting game.

Unfortunately, he didn’t count on an earthquake in Japan destabilizing his market. He tried to adjust, but

he was a gambler, and the only thing a gambler does well is gamble. By the time he gave up gambling he had lost some serious change—like about a billion dollars. His little mismanagement fiasco destroyed a 300-year-old bank, the bank that had once held the first mortgage on the Louisiana Purchase. Oops.

Nicholas Leeson never really understood the value or purpose of the assets that had been entrusted to him. What can we learn from Nick’s debacle? First, don’t get so caught up in what you’re doing that you lose sight of why you’re doing it. And second, you can squander your assets if you don’t understand and use them well.

What do I mean by assets? Simply, those parts of our life and situation that we can choose to use for God’s glory—or for other things. Every season of life provides certain assets. When I was four years old my assets were adorableness (so my mother says) and the fact that I didn’t take up a lot of space in the family car. As a teenager my assets were plenty of energy and...well, that’s probably it. Do you see the assets in your life that come from your singleness? Equally important, do you understand them and use them wisely?

I believe the most overlooked asset of singleness is flexibility. The average single adult has available to him or her a wonderful mix of time, energy, and resources with which to build a lifestyle overflowing with ministry impact and spiritual growth. Yet so often the choices made by singles rob them of this valuable gift of flexibility. How do we maximize our flexibility?

One key aspect of flexibility is time. A single woman once characterized her singleness as “drowning in time.” Have you felt this way? The single life can seem heavy on time, and ways to randomly fill that time are expanding daily. How can our free time become “impact time”? Leland Ryken advises us well: “Time is the arena within which all human quests run their course. It is within time

**Meditate on  
Ephesians 5:15-16.**

Are there any ways that you can make better use of your time?

**3** Suppose your work or school gave you your birthday off. Whatever you want to do for eight hours, it's paid for! What would you do with your day?

that the issues of life are contested and sometimes resolved. Without making one's peace with time, a person will not solve the question of how to find the good life."<sup>14</sup>

How do we "make our peace with time?" Do you steward your time, including your free time, or do you let outside influences determine how you use it? I am a slacker by temperament, but I've learned to schedule my time so that my slacker tendencies don't eat my life whole. My objective in time management is not to get as much done as possible, but to try to make sure that I end up doing what is best for me to do.

For example, I tend to over-commit my evenings. So, I schedule every one, even if it is simply a "reading night" or an "off night." Then if something comes up, I have some options on how to handle it—it doesn't just infect my schedule like the flu, throwing off everything else in my life until I can regroup. I've also come to recognize how I can blow time (like in front of the tube), so I make a special effort to discipline myself in those areas.

I encourage the single folks I know to take regular overnight personal retreats—to break from the routine, be before the Lord, and just assess life. Let me encourage you to do the same. Use those times to set goals for progress, not perfection. Study the scriptural principle of the Sabbath, then apply what you learn. If you do things like this, will every moment become an impact moment? No. But impact will likely emerge "all by itself" from the ordered use of the time you do have.

Your flexibility will also be affected by your approach to work. As a single adult you are highly prized in the

employment world for the sheer number of hours that can be sucked out of your life for the sake of the bottom line. Money, perks, travel, "opportunity," and promotions are all used as lures to get single folks to carry the time load no one else seems to want. Don't bite. This is the hook of the world lurking under the bait of career. Whether you work for yourself or for someone else, don't let career or job define you. Work hard, but work as unto the Lord. God is your boss, and in the end his advancement plan is the only one that counts.

Another potential snare is possessions. I knew a

“ This is the only measure of our application to any worldly business...it must have no more of our hands, our hearts, or our time, than is consistent with a hearty, daily, careful preparation of ourselves for another life.<sup>15</sup>

”  
 — William Law

Christian single woman who always seemed to be moving from one place to another. Was she an irritable person, unpleasant, hard to live with? No, she just had too much stuff. She always needed a large area in which to store her accumulated possessions, most of which weren't in use and could

have easily been replaced if needed. But she had a false sense of security in her possessions. Her stuff had become her treasure, and in a sense she worshiped it. She passed up some great living opportunities because she thought it more important to protect her stuff than to be available for the adventure of God's purpose. As Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Mt 6:21).

The less stuff (car, house, music collections, etc.) we have to manage, the less chance our heart will attach to it, and the greater will be our flexibility for God's purpose. I'm not saying "stuff" is inherently bad, but we must recognize that our sinful nature will always tempt us to worship it.

**Meditate on**

**2 Thessalonians 3:6-**

**15.** How does this passage speak to you about your employment goals?

**4** You are anonymously given \$100,000 (tax free, of course). The only requirements are that you may not invest or save any of it, and you must use it in six different ways. What would you do with your money?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_

One of my joys in pastoring single adults is learning second-hand how well they manage their asset of flexibility. I love to hear, "Did you know that so and so..." followed by a testimony, for example, of how some single brothers spent all morning shoveling snow from the walkways and driveways of single sisters in the church. Or how a group of single women have opened their home to anyone in the church who needs a place to hang out on a Sunday afternoon. These are just a couple of the ways single men and women in our church have learned to creatively manage the assets of their singleness for real impact. If only Nick Leeson had understood his assets and managed them with the same care.

**Nothing reaches people like the aroma of the presence of God in our lives.** I used to live in a house with many international students. Most of

“ Why singleness? That the works of God might be made manifest in the deepest recesses of our beings. To declare God’s glory in a fallen world. To show that God is enough for the human heart. To demonstrate to earth and hell the triumph of the life of God in the soul of man.<sup>16</sup>

”  
— Margaret Clarkson

us were Christians, but we often had people living with us who were totally ignorant of Christianity. Keiko, a young Japanese woman, was among them. Keiko had never heard of Christ. She was in the United States alone, and knew no one but the folks in our house. She understood very little English and rarely had any meaningful conversation

with the rest of us in the house.

Keiko thought all Americans were Christians. That was not good, because her experience with Americans was anything but Christian. “Christians” who had promised to house her if she came to the States never followed through. She had taken a job working for a “Christian,” only to be harassed and eventually let go without pay. To top it all off, a woman who cleaned our house and claimed to be a Christian robbed her of the little money she had left. If anyone had reason to reject Christianity, it was Keiko.

Imagine my shock when she came up to me one day and announced in second-language English, “I have asked Jesus into my heart.” I was blown away. “You can’t,” I thought, “I haven’t told you how!” There was no earthly reason why she should have come to Christ. The only witness she had experienced taught her the opposite of what Christianity was about. I knew from her blank expressions during our house Bible studies that she hadn’t gotten any usable information from us. Yet here she stood, clearly a changed woman. My desire to hear her story was not so much to rejoice with her as it was to figure out the mystery.

“Many people tell me they are Christian, they want to tell me about Jesus,” she whispered through tears. “But here I meet Jesus, in you and your friends. I want people to meet him in me.”

The Scriptures tell us that we are letters from Christ, written with the Spirit of the Living God on the tablets of our hearts (2Co 3:3-4). What a wonderful, encouraging picture! We don’t simply deliver the message, somehow the message is printed in us for others to read. Paul describes us as the “aroma of Christ” (2Co 2:15) and as “jars of clay” (2Co 4:7) carrying the treasure of Christ.

**Meditate on**  
**2 Corinthians 5:17-**  
**19.** Are the people around you aware of God’s appeal to them through your life?

**For Further Study:**

Read Ephesians 2:4-10. What is it that God desires to display through us to others?

How many times I get discouraged at my lack of motivation to serve, at my flirtatious friendship with the world, at the reality that my witness is more often bland than bold. Yet daily I am reminded that it is God at work in me and through me that matters. He is the vine, I am the branch. My job is to bear fruit, not to start my own little orchard.

Does this mean I just “let go and let God?” How could I? If God wants to work through me, I want to do all I can to cooperate with the process. Do I need to root out some worldly weeds? Get me a backhoe and I’ll dig up the whole field. Do I need to develop my tools? Teach me how. But

““ The world is desperate for a faith that combines two things: awe-struck apprehension of unshakable divine Truth, and utterly practical, round-the-clock power to make a liberating difference in life.<sup>17</sup> ””

— John Piper

mostly I want to draw close to my Jesus, to be more like him, to let his light be my light. I want the aroma of the smoke from God’s fiery presence to envelop me. I want to smell like Jesus.

Charles Spurgeon once said, “He lives most and lives best who is the means of imparting spiritual life to

others.”<sup>18</sup> We are the means, Jesus is the life. Let your single life be one rich in impact—a full life poured out in Christ, by Christ, and for Christ. ■

**GROUP DISCUSSION**

1. In what ways can worldliness creep into the lives of Christians?
2. What challenges have you faced trying to be “in the world, but not of it”?
3. Describe a time you achieved something you had been dreaming about or working hard for. What was the feeling like? How do you view that achievement today?
4. In your line of work, what is the definition of success? What would you have to sacrifice to obtain it?
5. What spiritual gift do you desire? Why do you desire this gift?
6. Describe a time when you experienced Christians functioning well as a body.

7. What is the greatest current limitation (besides work or school) on your complete flexibility to serve the Lord?
8. What possession in your life would be most difficult to part with, and why?
9. Think of a person who to you most reflects the love of Christ. What is it about his or her life that you find most inspiring?

**RECOMMENDED  
READING**

*Money, Possessions, and Eternity* by Randy Alcorn  
(Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1989)

*Experiencing God* by Henry Blackaby and Claude King  
(Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994)

*Pleasing God* by R.C. Sproul (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1988)

**NOTES**

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18. Charles Spurgeon, *A Good Start* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1995), p. 309.