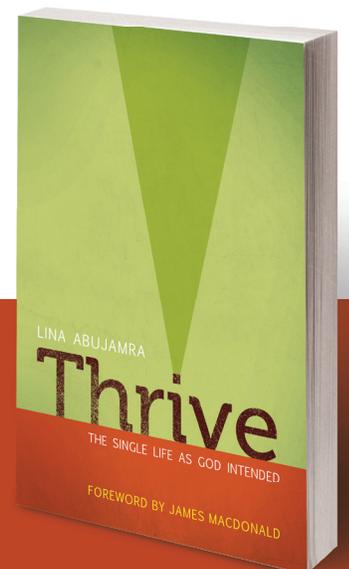


Take the 7-Day Challenge

Are you a satisfied single?

Thrive

THE SINGLE LIFE AS GOD INTENDED



Are you a satisfied single?

Take the 7-Day Challenge

So you're single. Big deal. So is 45% of the American population today. The problem is, you're not sure you like it. You're not sure you're living God's best for you. You're not sure you'll be able to be all you can be for Christ.

I've written a book called *Thrive: The Single Life as God Intended* to show you that life as a single Christian is great. You can and you will thrive. You are not living out plan B for your life. God has not forgotten you. You, my friend, are on your way to finding all you need in Christ.

I've put together this 7-day challenge for you to help you evaluate how satisfied you are in your single life. I believe you will find it helpful in navigating your best life yet as a single Christian.

Each day is an excerpt from my book with a brief introduction asking you to assess how you are doing in your single life today and how you can live the thriving single life that God intends for you today.

Today is the first day of the rest of your life. Enjoy it.

Know Who You Are

I have a feeling you never planned on still being single. You didn't set out to live life alone in a culture made for twos. One of the biggest problems the single Christian will face is the confused sense of identity in a society made for couples. You will never be satisfied as a single Christian until you know exactly who you are in Christ. Let me help remind you of your true identity in Christ. Your ability to thrive may hinge on knowing who you are.

The single life is a good life. When God created the world in Genesis 1, He looked at each day He created and said that it was good. It was well done. It was perfect. The word good is a good word. I'm not much of a cook, but I appreciate good food. When I taste something good, not only am I pleased with it in the moment, but I look forward to tasting it again – the sooner the better! When I see a good movie, chances are I'll want to rent it on video or buy it for myself.

Good is good.

So when Paul describes the single life in I Corinthians 7:8, it's fitting that he uses the word good. Here's what he says:

*"To the unmarried and the widows I say that **it is good for them to remain single** as I am."*

The single life is a good life. No more wondering if God has given you second best. No more asking why everyone has been more blessed by God while you keep on waiting. No more misinterpreting God's word and His ways.

You have been given a good life. Is it permanent? Is it irrevocable? Are you doomed to a life of eternal virginity and aloneness? As you flip the pages of this book, I hope to answer every one of your questions. For now, settle it in your mind

that God is big enough and wise enough to give you the best life possible – the life that thrives.

So stop wasting it. Stop wishing it away. Stop complaining about it and praying that it would change soon, and start believing the truth of God's word.

You have been given a good life and it's yours by design. Do you believe it?

IT'S A PURPOSE DRIVEN LIFE

Not only is the single life a good life, but according to Paul in I Corinthians 7, it is a life of purpose. Do you ever wonder what God wants you to do with your single life? Do you ever wonder what your purpose is as a single Christian without a husband to care for, or kids to nurture?

Stop wondering and listen to Paul's words in I Corinthians 7:32:

*"I want you to be free from anxieties. **The unmarried man is anxious** about the things of the Lord, **how to please the Lord.**"*

I hope you picked up on what Paul is saying. Your purpose in life is to please the Lord. Your life will thrive when you become obsessed with pleasing the Lord. Later on in the book we'll

further explore the meaning of this freedom that Paul alludes to and how every single Christian can take full advantage of it. We'll also talk about undivided devotion to God and how to get it.

But for now, suffice it to say that your purpose as a single Christian is to please the Lord. You cannot please the Lord when you're nursing a grudge about your singleness. You cannot please the Lord when you're questioning His judgment and criticizing His will. You cannot please the Lord when you place your desires higher than His purposes for your life.

Your purpose in life has not been botched by your singleness. You are not a mutant in God's design for marriage. God created you for the sole purpose of knowing Him and making Him known. Your singleness is God's perfect place for you to thrive. You don't have to wait for your knight in shining armor to start living. You can know the Lord fully and serve Him wholly right here right now.

What you've forgotten is that you do have a knight, but he didn't come on a horse. He was born in a stable. He developed calluses on his hands, and died on a cross to call you His own. You were created to know Him and make Him known.

Are you living out God's purpose for your life?

IT'S A HAPPIER LIFE

Good is good, and having purpose is good, but sometimes good is just not good enough. I'm not a fan of average. I like chocolate, but I much prefer a chocolate explosion desert. And I like strawberries, but give me a chocolate covered strawberry anytime.

I may settle for good, but I'm looking for great.

To call the single Christian life a good life is a place to start, but this book isn't about settling for good. It's about looking for great. It's a book about thriving. When I think about thriving, I can't help but picture a lush green tree with plenty of fruit for picking. Or I picture a wound that's healing well with plenty of granulation tissue and healthy pink blood tinged skin forming around the edges. Ok, that was unnecessary but you get the point.

Paul of all people understood the tension that single Christians face. And if you know anything about Paul, he was not a man who settled for average. The guy was passionate full throttle all the way. So Paul finishes his thesis on singleness in I Corinthians 7:40 with just one more little nugget, one more blessing, not to be overlooked.

Yes, singleness is good. And yes, the single life has purpose. But now Paul makes one more astounding statement. Here's what he says:

*"Yet in my judgment **she (the unmarried) is happier if she remains as she is.** And I think that I too have the Spirit of God."*

Did you catch it? I can hardly believe it. Every time I read this verse my jaw hits the floor. I know that theologians argue about whether verse 40 was divinely inspired or simply Paul's words, but I'll take Paul's words over my own opinion on any given day. I also believe that God has allowed this verse to remain in His word specifically to encourage every single Christian who is convinced that true joy is beyond grasp. It's not! Paul in this unbelievably bold verse settles every question about singleness you may ever have.

Life is happier as a single follower of Jesus Christ.

I can already see you putting words in my mouth. I'm not attacking marriage. I believe that

God loves marriage, and uses it as the primary example of the union between Christ and His bride, the church. But I cannot read Paul's words in I Corinthians 7:40 and not come to the simple conclusion that the single Christian life is a happier life.

The most obvious question that comes to my mind then is this: **if the single Christian life is happier, why don't more single Christians feel happy?**

Many reasons come to mind. It could be because single Christians have embraced the lies of our culture and society about love and sex. It could be because of a lack of knowing and believing God's word. Or maybe your story is much more painful than I can ever imagine.

Here's what I do know: God's word is alive and active, and God uses it to help you discern the truth about your heart. So as you turn the pages of this book, I've prayed that God will reveal Himself to you in your point of pain. I've prayed that the Spirit of God will convict you where you need to change, and I've prayed that God will help you overcome in the areas where you need victory.

My prayer for you is not only to understand what it means to thrive, but to know how to live the life that thrives, but then by the grace and strength of God, to do it.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT:

1. *What are the 3 characteristics of the single life according to 1 Corinthians 7?*
2. *What do you believe God's purpose for you as a single Christian is?*
3. *Are you happy as a single Christian? Why or why not?*

Accept Your Gift

For as long as I can remember, I've heard pastors and Bible study teachers tell me that singleness is a gift. My initial instinct is to punch a wall. Seriously? Singleness, a gift? But as I've studied God's word, the truth is that singleness is in fact described as a gift. As you begin day 2 of the "are you a satisfied single" Challenge, ask yourself whether you have ever accepted your singleness as a gift from God. Then be willing to own up to the answer. It could be your secret to thriving as a single Christian.

I once wanted a blender for Christmas really really badly. Every time I came across a recipe, even though I don't cook, I seemed to think that it absolutely needed this particular stainless steel and glass blender. Every time I felt thirsty, I dreamed of the wonderful drinks I could make with that specific blender. So I did what every smart woman would do: I made sure I told the right people what I wanted, and when Christmas morning finally came around, I acted delighted and appropriately surprised when I unwrapped the package and saw the beautiful blender that was everything I thought it would be and more. My dream had come true.

Two years have gone by since I received that perfect gift, and I'd like you to take a moment and try to guess how many times I've used my blender so far. Go ahead. Write it down. Are you ready for the answer? If you guessed twice, you are correct.

Now allow me tell you about another Christmas gift on another Christmas. It was finally my turn to open my present. I held the package and wondered what could be so big and so fluffy. I hadn't asked for anything that year, and certainly for nothing quite so big and quite so fluffy. I tentatively opened the package, carefully

watching my facial expressions. By the time I processed that what I held in my hands was a big and fluffy red blanket it was too late to hide my dismay. A blanket for Christmas? Who would give such a – how can I say this politely – "useful" gift to anyone? I took my blanket home with little plans to use it and started making up a list of folks I could re-gift it to.

Little did I know that that red blanket would become a family and personal favorite, and the saving grace to my very cold basement for years to come. I can't keep track of the friends who have snuggled beneath the warmth of the fluffy red blanket and wondered as to its softness. The blanket that I would have never chosen turned out to be this girl's best friend and the best Christmas gift I have ever received.

It's a funny thing about gifts. The gift you think you can't live without ends up sitting unused on a shelf somewhere in your home, while the gift you initially can't stand turns out to be the one item you can't live without.

The truth is that, most of the time, you and I have very little concept as to what we truly need in our lives. Our desires are affected by what we see on television and what advertisers tell us we

need, or by what our friends have. Our wants are often molded by our backgrounds, upbringing and culture. They are influenced by the last movie we watched or the latest book we read. Most of us give only a passing regard to what God deeply desires for our lives.

It shouldn't surprise us then that we apply the same rules when it comes to our singleness.

Singleness, a gift? The very idea is appalling. Who would ever give anyone such a, how can I say it politely, "useless" gift? Weren't we made for marriage and sex and kids and car seats?

If you're single you know exactly what I'm talking about. Singleness is the gift that you never wanted, never planned on, and wish you'd never opened. Surely there's been a mistake. Surely this is not your gift to keep forever and happily ever after?

But a careful look at God's word reveals that your gift is no mistake. We've been talking about I Corinthians 7, and if you'll read verse 7 you'll see that it was Paul who brought up the concept of singleness as a gift. Here is what he says in I Corinthians 7:7:

*"I wish that all were as I myself am. **But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another."***

Wait – say that again? Singleness - a gift? Why in the world would anyone consider singleness a gift? It sounds more like a curse to most people. And if it is a gift, who then is "lucky" enough to have it? Or if I may make it even more personal: do you have the gift of singleness?

I believe the best way to answer this question is to consider some basic characteristics of this so-called gift.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GIFT

When discussing the gift of singleness, there are three characteristics of the gift that you must observe from I Corinthians 7:7.

First, it is a personal gift. The word "each" insinuates the idea that this gift is personal. God gives each person a gift. It is the perfect gift because it's given personally to each individual with great thought and care.

Second, it is a unique gift. To further emphasize his point, Paul reminds us that this isn't a grab bag white elephant gift exchange. The word of God says that each person has his *own* gift. This gift has been uniquely given to each person by the Lord. It is a unique gift.

Thirdly, it is a gift from God. The most amazing thing about this gift of singleness isn't just that it was designed specifically with you in mind, but that the giver of the gift is God Himself. He fashioned the gift. He made it perfectly and uniquely and personally for you. God gave you the best gift possible knowing everything there is to know about you and your life. That's pretty amazing.

Your gift is not an accident. It's not a mistake. It's not a joke. It is for real. It doesn't get much better than that!

FOOD FOR THOUGHT:

1. *What do you think of the idea that singleness is a gift?*
2. *List the 3 characteristics of the gift of singleness. How do you feel about the fact that God has given you the gift of singleness at least for today?*
3. *Surrender is accepting something even if you don't fully want it or agree with it. Are you willing to accept the gift God has given you even if you don't like it?*

Get Over Sin

We live in a sex-saturated culture and we're told that without a great sex life we will never be satisfied. Every single Christian must make a decision: listen to the culture and live a life that lacks in true satisfaction, or heed God's word on the topic and live fully satisfied in him. In today's devotional, let's talk about how to live satisfied in Christ. The best way to do it is to get over the sin in your life! If you're like me, you can't wait to start. So let's hit the ground running!

It's no secret that single Christians like to talk about sex. They like to think about sex. They like to whine about sex, and they like to idolize sex. In case you haven't picked up on it yet, this is the obligatory sex chapter.

The thing about sex is that it reminds me a little bit of scabies. Not many Christians like to talk about it openly. It's easy to catch, and once you get it it's harder to get rid of than you think. And it's extremely contagious.

Yet in order to thrive, every single Christian has to understand how to manage his or her own sexual impulses. Whether you've had multiple sexual partners or you're still a virgin, chances are that you're carrying your own set of sexual baggage that needs to be measured against God's word. You can blame the culture, or you can blame God for it, but the bags are yours until you figure out what to do with them.

Paul's basic premise to the unmarried followers of Christ was this: exercise self-control or get married. I'm not making this stuff up. Here's exactly how Paul said it in I Corinthians 7:8-9:

"To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. **But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry.** For it is better to marry

than to burn with passion."

That should be no problem, right? If you're like me, you're probably a bit miffed at Paul's seemingly simple solution. Get married? Like I haven't tried that one! I've been engaged twice and just recently found myself on three separate internet dating sites with absolutely no luck. Easy for you to say, Paul!

How then must the single Christian immersed in a sex inundated culture face this battle with self-control? For many single Christians the problem is too big to handle. You have unchecked desires, unmet needs, and unfulfilled longings. Your passions seem too big to manage, but there is no one around for you to hurry up and get married to.

Instead of growing in self-control, you find yourself with little or no control whatsoever. Instead of purity, you know you're full of lust. Instead of thriving you find yourself ashamed and hiding, afraid of being found out.

**LIES SINGLE CHRISTIANS
TELL THEMSELVES ABOUT LUST:
A little bit won't harm me.**

Patients will sometimes ask me how much poison will kill them. The answer I give them is

obvious: stay away from all poison! The Christian who dabbles in lust is like a peanut allergic kid who tries just a lick of peanut butter to see what happens. It doesn't matter how you dress it up, he's still ingesting peanuts and could die from anaphylaxis. Lust is not a diet you can control. It is a sin that must be cut off.

It's not that big a deal.

You may be thinking that Paul is just a little too dogmatic for your taste, a little too legalistic. Surely he isn't being literal in his advice to singles in the church. Surely the church in Corinth didn't have the same lame singles group you find yourself stuck in. You tell yourself that it must have been easier to exercise self-control before the advent of television and the internet. You lie to yourself and convince yourself it's no big deal, until you're caught with your hand in the cookie jar, or in an internet chat room with someone you know. What starts as an innocuous habit to relieve stress soon morphs into a self-destructive drug that won't let you go. Pretty soon you hardly even recognize yourself. You're a shell of the person you used to be. Trust me, friend, uncontrolled lust is a big deal every single time.

No one will ever find out.

Ask the 5 year-old who was just busted for stealing a cookie, or the pastor whose affair just exploded in the face of his congregation: secrets have a way of becoming known. God says it like this in Numbers 32:23: "be sure your sins will find you out." You may have heard the slogan "what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas". Wrong! God's presence reaches even to Vegas. I don't care what you did last night, God knows exactly where you were and how far things went. Check this verse out in Jeremiah 23:24:

"Can a man hide himself in secret places so that

I cannot see him? Declares the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth?"

Both of these questions are rhetoric in nature. The answer to the first question is: "No. You can not hide yourself from God." And the answer to the second questions is: "Yes, God does fill the heaven and the earth." God knows everything. He sees everything. Your secret sin will eventually be made public, and when it does, it will affect everyone around you. I'm not telling you this just to scare you, but because there is a better way to live.

Everyone is doing it.

This lie is so juvenile you used it back in the 1st grade but it still seems to work because you're still using it. You figure a little bit of passion is ok, because everyone else is doing it, too. Furthermore, your unrestrained passion is far less X rated than that new guy you just met in your Small Group. Call it what you will, you're still lying to yourself. Even if everyone else is doing it, when it comes to your sin, God is only interested in you.

No one else struggles with this.

The last lie you will tell yourself is the one that will keep you in the dark the longest. You convince yourself that you're the only Christian you know who struggles with lust. Perhaps out of shame, you choose the safety of silence rather than the freedom of confession and persist in your lust. If you believe no other Christian has ever struggled with lust to the extent that you're struggling, I'm pretty sure you haven't read the Bible too carefully yet.

Look - I'm a 40 year-old virgin and I know what it feels like to struggle with lust and poor self-control. I also know that God has made a way out

for every single Christian, and until you choose self-control, you have no chance of thriving as a Christian.

SO HOW DOES THE SINGLE CHRISTIAN DEVELOP SELF-CONTROL?

Get down on your Knees

Before you do anything else, you may need to take some time alone with the Lord and repent. If you've felt a sense of separation from the Lord and a lack of intimacy with Him, it could be because you're harboring sin in your life. In Isaiah 59:2 it says that "your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear."

You won't feel close to the Lord until you repent. Repentance involves agreeing with God about your sin, and turning away from your sin. It literally means making a 180 and choosing a different direction for your life. The amazing news is that despite our many failures, God is still willing to grant us His mercy and forgive us by His grace. In I John 1:9 He tells us that "If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness". That's great news! **Get rid of the Garbage**

If you're serious about overcoming the sinful habits that control you, you need to get serious about getting rid of the garbage in your life. Romans 13:14 says: "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires."

When God says make no provision for the flesh, He means it. Get rid of everything that promotes your sinful habits. For some of you, it will mean getting rid of your Television, or the internet. I

know a guy who struggled with pornography on his cell phone and was so serious about getting rid of sin that he switched back to a flip phone. That's radical, but that's what "making no provision for the flesh" means.

Guard your Heart

My patio door is protected by a screen. The screen serves as a barrier sheltering my home from big animals and mosquitos. The best way to protect a home from unusual animals and insects is to keep the screen door tightly closed.

In the same way, your mind is the gateway to your soul. The best way to protect your soul from dangerous animals is to screen the doors to your mind. Jesus said it like this in Matthew 15:18: "But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander". That's why the Bible tells us to guard our hearts, for out of it proceed the issues of life (Proverbs 4:23).

It's no laughing matter. It's time to get serious about self-control. Your mind is the gateway to your soul. Guard it. Protect it. Be careful what you allow to come in it.

Get a Godly Friend

Accountability is an interesting phenomenon. It's Biblical. Most Christians agree with it. But few people really practice it.

I've found that accountability is not natural but it becomes easier with time. And it's absolutely necessary for you to thrive God's way. If you can't think of anyone in your life right now you're comfortable being this authentic with, start praying that God will provide that person. That's what I did, and God did provide. If you're serious

about victory, I know God will make a way for you too.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT:

1. *Have you ever struggled with the area of lust as a single Christian?*
2. *Identify some of the lies you have believed about sin in your life.*
3. *What practical steps can you take to overcome sin in your life?*

Live with Focus

We're on day 4 of the "are you a satisfied single?" challenge. Nothing will bring you greater satisfaction than living your life with single-minded focus. The apostle Paul understood it and I hope that by the end of today's devotional you will too. Life is short. It's time to quit wasting your time on what will not satisfy and live the life that thrives in focus.

No one understood the importance of single-minded focus like Paul did when he wrote I Corinthians 7:35:

*"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.**"*

I'd like to remind you of Paul's story. He was a man who was hell bent on killing every follower of Jesus Christ when the Lord appeared to him and saved him. Paul's meeting with Christ on the road to Damascus not only radically changed the course of his life, but he never got over the impact of that meeting.

Paul's conversion resulted in his world turning upside down. Everything about his life changed. He high tailed the caravan headed to Damascus and embraced a lifetime of devotion to the Lord. Paul wrote about how other Christ followers responded to Paul's conversion in Galatians 1:23-24. Here's what he said:

"They only were hearing it said "he who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy". And they glorified God because of me."

If anyone understood the meaning of undivided devotion, it was the apostle Paul. Have you ever

wondered why some people seem more devoted to God than others?

Luke 7:36-50 may help you answer that question. Jesus was at a party at the house of Pharisee named Simon when a woman of the city - otherwise known as a prostitute - suddenly showed up and broke an alabaster flask of ointment on Jesus' feet in worship and adoration of Him. Simon was appalled. How could Christ allow such extravagant emotion and from a whore nonetheless? Jesus looked Simon straight in the eye and told him a parable. In the parable, Jesus describes two people who were forgiven a debt: one guy was forgiven 500 denarii, while the other 50. Jesus asked Simon which man would he suppose was more thankful? The answer was obvious even for Simon: the guy with the bigger debt was more thankful. Jesus then makes his final point and concludes with this: "Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven - for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." (Luke 7:47).

Here was Paul, a man known to murder Christians, going along his merry way when God stopped him in his tracks, forgave him every one of his sins, and gave him a completely new life. Oh, Paul never got over the Lord Jesus Christ. He was a man who understood what it meant to be forgiven much, and his devotion to the Lord was

total and complete.

If you're a single Christian, you're probably tracking with my thoughts on undivided devotion, but may be wondering what the connection between Paul's depth of forgiveness and your singleness is.

Good question. The only answer I have for you is this: single-minded focus.

Paul's focus was single minded because he never forgot what Jesus Christ had done for him. The result was his undivided devotion to the Savior. In the same way, the single Christian's interests ought also be undivided, with a focus so narrow on Jesus Christ that the result is the same undivided devotion that Paul had.

Sadly, my life tends to be a little more like a Chinese food menu. I get easily lost in the options. Despite the pages and pages of menu, I still never know what to order, and always end up ordering something that doesn't quite look as good as I thought it would based on the picture I had in my mind.

Do you ever feel that way too?

I find myself easily distracted and out of focus. I start with a strong sense of purpose, but before long I catch myself preoccupied with lesser things, things that I was never meant to focus on. I get sidetracked with my own agenda and tend to forget what my life was really all about. My vision for my life is easily blurred.

Helen Keller once said: "Worse than being blind would be to be able to see but not have any vision."

Do you need clear vision for your life?

If Paul knew one thing, it was vision. He knew what it meant to be intensely focused on

knowing Jesus Christ as Lord with undisputed and undivided devotion. Paul was a man who looked on his singleness as a blessing for one reason only: the opportunity to offer his life in absolute devotion to the Savior who had delivered Paul, the chief of all sinners, from an eternity in hell.

And Paul thrived. Boy did he thrive. No matter where life found Paul – in prison, in the church, on a journey, in a boat – this man understood that location was simply a place, and that the life that thrives hinges only on the understanding that Christ is our all in all.

But maybe you're not trying to be some super Christian like Paul. You'd be happy with just average. Unfortunately, average is not an option with Christ. The brand of Christianity you're looking for is not on the menu. In Matthew 13:44, here's what Christ said about your walk with Him:

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."

Not dramatic enough for you? Try Luke 9:62:

"Jesus said to him: "no man who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

This last verse is one of my favorites, but follows closely Christ's words in Luke 9:23-24:

"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it."

Christ's call for you, regardless of your marital status, is straightforward. His is a call that demands your absolute surrender in every area

of your life. You cannot selectively choose which parts of Christianity meet with your approval and which you will postpone until you're retired and have more time. Christ demands your undivided devotion today.

The blessing that you have as a single Christian is that you can pursue this undivided devotion with more focus and more energy than the married person. That's because as a single Christian you've been freed from the anxiety of always trying to please your husband, and the anxiety that married life and a family bring along with it.

In other words, your entire purpose and goal, single Christian, if you call yourself a follower of Jesus Christ, is to be utterly and completely devoted to the Lord.

Instead of undivided devotion, many single Christians accumulate clutter that blurs and diminishes the vision. Instead of a pure love for the Lord, lesser loves creep in, and instead of a life that thrives in intimacy with the Lord, a greater sense of isolation and separation from God is felt.

So ask yourself: what stands in the way of your undivided devotion for the Lord, and what does undivided devotion to the Lord look like?

FOOD FOR THOUGHT:

1. *Try to describe in a few words what a life with single-minded focus looks like.*
2. *If someone were to look at your life for a week, what would they conclude is the focus of your life?*
3. *What stands in the way of your undivided devotion to the Lord?*

Stop Living in the Past

You should be well on the road to the satisfied life that thrives by now! One of the toughest steps for the single Christian to overcome is to quit looking at the past and wonder what could have been. It's time to stop living in the past. It's time to get over self-pity and make the jump into the life that thrives. Are you ready to do it?

I have a talent few people know about. I can go from happy go lucky to pity party faster than a racecar can go from zero to sixty.

Yes, I'm an expert in self-pity, I guess you can call me a professional of sorts, which makes me the perfect person to tell you about the first obstacle that you need to overcome in order to thrive as a single Christian.

Self-pity. It's a human condition. It's a bit of a curse, a definite downer, and until you learn to recognize it in your life and allow God to defeat it, you will remain miserable.

I like this quote on self-pity: "Self pity is easily the most destructive of the non-pharmaceutical narcotics; it is addictive, gives momentary pleasure and separates the victim from reality."

Too many Christians are held captive by the toxic emotion of self-pity. Too many Christians have found themselves wounded on the sidelines of life, waiting to be picked up and tended to, unable to overcome this seemingly insurmountable mountain.

I remember the first time I felt the weight of self-pity as a single Christian. I had just moved to a new town to start my fellowship in Pediatric Emergency Medicine. It was the summer after I had ended an engagement to a wonderful young man who simply wasn't the one. I like

to add that I broke off the engagement just two weeks before the wedding and make it a little more dramatic, but the break up wasn't as Kardashian worthy as I'd like to think. One day I was engaged, and the next day I wasn't. When most people hear about my story, they often comment on my courage but also assume that the event had ripped my heart to shreds. The truth is far different than that.

The truth is that I had fallen in love with someone else, my best friend of 10 years.

Unfortunately I'm a late bloomer in every way, and by the time I finally figured out what people had known for years before, I was engaged to someone else, and two weeks away from my wedding day. Most of you are much smarter than I am, so you know that life is not a Hollywood movie, and I didn't get the happy ending I thought I would. By the time I woke up to the fallen state of my heart, my best friend had moved so far down a different road that there was no way I'd ever catch up.

By the time I had settled into my new apartment, in my new town, to start a new venture in Pediatric Emergency Medicine, I was ripe for the taking. I was alone, depressed, and confused. Not only was my dream of happily ever after destroyed, but I had lost my best friend all in

one fell swoop. That summer the movie “My best friend’s wedding” came out, and I tortured myself in the theater while quietly watching my life played out in on the big screen, feeling myself fall just a little bit deeper into the pit of self-pity that I had already dug for myself.

I had a 2-bedroom apartment by the beach at that time. I moved into one, and self-pity moved into the other.

I recall vividly coming home after a long shift in the ER and simply sitting in the middle of my living room waiting for the sun to set, too depressed to turn the lights on. It all sounds very Meryl Streep as I now write it, but I suppose I do like my share of drama. My only company during those nights was the sound of the night and the chirping of crickets in the man made pond outside my apartment as I’d rehearse the voice in my head over and over again saying things like:

“You asked for this. If only you hadn’t gotten engaged. Where’s God now? I thought you said God was the one who told you to end the engagement? Huh? You deserve better than this. Nothing’s ever gonna change for you. Prayer? What good did prayer do for you last year, or the year before? If this is love, are you sure you want it? Where is God right now? I bet he’s forgotten all about you. If He cared about you, you wouldn’t be in this mess.”

Are you familiar with this conversation? You may have had a similar version of it at some point in your life. You probably know that it doesn’t take long for self-pity to turn to defeat and then to despair while Satan dances around in glee watching our hearts bleed slowly and steadily while our faith deconstructs one little brick at a time.

Self-pity is a toxic emotion that must be

defeated if you intend to thrive. Let me give you a definition for self-pity. Self-pity is a self-indulgent attitude about your own difficulties and circumstances. Ironically, though self-pity seems to be the cry of the weak, it is actually rooted in pride.

I eventually overcame the obstacle of self-pity. But once in a while I still have a tendency to visit the pit of self-pity for old times sakes, but God’s mercy never lets me stay there for too long.

My pastor, James Macdonald has a great saying about God’s love. He says that “God’s love is not a pampering love, it’s a perfecting love.”

I never fully understood what he meant until the summer after my first big break up. At first I wouldn’t even turn the lights on when I came home from work. I took secret joy in the darkness. It became a salve for my wounded heart. Outwardly I still did the things I was supposed to do. I went to work. I went to church. I was too well trained to skip church but I made sure I didn’t talk to anyone at church. I was happy in my misery.

There is a verse in Isaiah 49:15 that goes like this:

“Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me.”

What I hadn’t taken into account, deep in the pit of my self-induced and self-focused despair was that several years before, when I was just a child, I had been adopted by the King of Kings. My name had been imprinted on his hands – forever.

I was His for better or for worse. It didn’t matter how dark my pit had become, the darkness was

simply not dark to God. It didn't matter that I didn't know my way out of my pit, because God had just pulled me out of it.

The next morning, I was ready to hear God's voice again. I opened the Bible and landed on Isaiah 43: "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you...because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you." God had just wrecked me with His love.

That fall I made my way through the minor prophets and fell in love with my Savior all over again. What Satan had intended to destroy me, God used for my good. That following year, I sensed God calling me to the ministry of teaching the Bible to women. It would take another decade for that story to fully play out, but God had plucked me out of the pit, and set my feet on a rock.

You may be in the pit of self-pity as you read my story. The same God who pulled me out of my pit is pulling you out of yours. Life as a single Christian is not easy. The temptation to give up on God is too great. It's easy to feel forgotten and alone in a world of independence and greater isolation than ever. But God is closer to you than you think.

The life that thrives is the life that is fully surrendered to the Lord. The life that thrives trusts that today's pain will be used for God's glory tomorrow. I don't know about you, but I'm through with self-pity. Are you?

FOOD FOR THOUGHT:

1. *When are you most prone to self-pity?*
2. *Have you ever been tempted to blame God for the mistakes of your past?*
3. *Think about God's love for you. Write down some tangible ways that God has demonstrated His love for you.*
4. *Are you willing to let go of your past and trust the Lord with your future? Write down a prayer telling him your heart and asking him for forgiveness.*

Love Jesus with All Your Heart

We were made for love. The issue isn't whether you should love someone, but whom you should love! Our hearts were created with a hole in them that can only be filled by God. It doesn't matter if you stay single the rest of your life or find yourself married by the end of this day: in order to live the satisfied life, you're going to have to love Jesus with all of your heart. The good news is that you will find in Him everything you need to thrive!

I remember my first crush. I was in the 7th grade, wore braces, had a bad perm, and talked way too fast. He was tall, blond, and perfect, a regular Adonis. His eyes were a deep sea blue and his smile a mile wide. And he had absolutely no idea who I was. That didn't change the fact that I wanted to marry him and bear his children, or that my heart rate beat out of my chest every time I eyed him on the other side of the playground.

I was in love, and baby, I knew that it was a matter of time before the object of my love would wake up and figure out that I was the perfect girl for him.

He never did. A few months later, he and his family packed everything up and moved from Beirut to the United States of America and I never heard of him again. My heart was broken. Life would never be the same. I recently even tried finding him on facebook but found no vestige of him, thus making him forever the one who never would be.

Whether you're in the 7th grade (I hope you're not reading this book if you're in 7th grade), or just turned 70, you know exactly what I'm talking about. You and I were made for love. We want love. We seek love. And we're disappointed

when we don't fall in love. The Beatles crooned their lyrics "love is all you need" mesmerizing a lost world desperately in search for love and convincing us that the answer to all of our problems in life is to fall in love.

If love is all a person needs, then the single Christian has a big problem to resolve.

Why would God create you to love and not provide an object for your love?

What kind of God would place in you a longing for oneness with another being, and leave you hanging?

The tension that single Christians face is palpable. The questions loom, becoming whispered prayers but are rarely spoken out loud.

Can the single Christian thrive without love? It is a question that demands an answer. If love is necessary for your soul to thrive, then where in the world do you find love? Surely God's perfect plan for the single Christian extends beyond a life of unrequited love and unfulfilled longings reminiscent of my 7th grade heartbreak!

If you're still reading this book, I'm going to venture to guess that you're really interested

in the life that thrives. So far I've given you 5 attitudes to embrace in order to thrive, and I've covered 4 obstacles that you must overcome to thrive.

But I've left out a missing link, the secret sauce so to speak. It's time to uncover the secret to the life that thrives. It's time to talk about what makes thriving possible. It's time to give you the key to executing the life that thrives.

I'll quit with the drama and simply lay it for you clearly: Love is the missing link that makes it all happen. Love is the Holy Grail, the magic bullet, the oil that makes the engine run. And this love is freely available to every single Christian who will accept it through the Lord Jesus Christ.

God's plan for your life is not a series of do's and don'ts intended to defeat you. God's plan for you is not to robotically and systematically become a better version of yourself by trying really hard to put on the right attitudes and getting rid of the wrong ones, though that may be part of the process. God's plan is better. His plan works because it begins and ends with love. He made you to love. He made you for love. He made you in order to demonstrate His love for you. And He's done it through His son Jesus Christ.

Here's how He explains it in Romans 5:8:

"God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

That kind of love is pretty incredible. You can have all the head knowledge in the world and still shrivel up without love. Don't you think it's time we move beyond head knowledge, and tackle the heart part?

I'd say it's time for every single Christian to reclaim true love. Your relationship needs are first met in Christ, and then grown as you live your

life in true fellowship with other believers. That's where you will find relationship. That's where you will find accountability. That's where you will find victory. Are you in fellowship with other believers? I know the church is not perfect, but for better or for worse, it's Christ's bride, and it's God's plan for your life today.

If you want to know what love is, you must start with finding true love in Christ, but you must then quickly move onto loving others no matter how much or how little you may like them. Without Christ's love filling you and guiding you, you cannot thrive. But when you draw on Christ's love, everything else will come.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT:

1. *Why would God create you to love and not provide an object for your love?*
2. *Describe when you found true love in Christ.*
3. *List 3 character traits of God that cause you to love him more.*

Make it Happen

Hey we're on day 7 of the "Are you a Satisfied Single?" challenge and I trust you're finding this resource beneficial to help you live the life that thrives. I'd like us to finish strong today with a clear sense of purpose and commitment. People joke that single people can't commit. I don't agree with them. I believe every single Christian commits to what he/she finds worthy of commitment. The life that thrives is what we're after. By God's grace and together, let's make it happen.

People always want to know how hard it was for me to break off my engagements. They admire my boldness and courage. They want to know my secret. It's easy, I tell them. Once I made up my mind, the secret was in acting quickly and firmly before I changed my mind.

Most people talk about doing something but rarely take action. By the time they muster the courage to do something, they find that it's too late, and the feeling has passed. I vividly remember the first broken engagement, my ex-fiance walking out of my apartment, diamond ring in hand, leaving me in the wake of the aftermath.

I put personal feelings aside, got on the phone, canceled the caterer, florist, chapel, then called key people who would be flying into town 2 weeks from that moment and broke the news gently but firmly to them. I was thankful for answering machines on that surprisingly sunny fall morning in Houston. I then walked down to the office of my apartment complex and after telling the nice Texan lady that I wouldn't be needing the 2 bedroom apartment any longer, finally broke down into tears.

If there's one thing I've learned in life it's that

feelings are terrible leaders, but they make excellent followers. Change happens when you know exactly what you need to do, and in an act of your will take a step of action whether you feel like it or not. It is only then that you will see the pieces falling into place.

God's plan for every single Christian is to thrive. No more languishing in self-pity. No more rotting in bitterness. No more loss of self-control, and no more haphazard holiness. You were made for more. That doesn't mean that you won't get married, or that you should give up on the notion of getting married. It just means that God's will for your life exceeds marriage as we know it. You were made for more.

I also hope that by now you have a clearer understanding of God's love for you, and for His plan for your life. Now it's time to determine by an act of your will to do something about all the things you've learned, or you'll be just another single Christian who's read a relatively decent book on singleness with lots of references to sex in it.

In other words, it's time to hit the road running. It's time to take action. Let's first spend a few

moments looking at the lame excuses you will face as you proceed on the road to thrive.

Killing your lame excuses

Excuses, excuses, excuses. You have bags full of excuses. Instead of suffocating under the weight of your excuses, it's time to identify and kill some of the most common excuses that you will come up with to keep from thriving.

Sometimes patients come into the doctor's office overweight, with high blood pressure and high cholesterol and a history of smoking. They know they have a problem but they have no idea how to fix it.

A good doctor will not tell patients to just forget about it because the problem is too hard to fix. That's dumb. No, a good doctor will instruct the patient to pick one thing, any thing, do it, and then do next thing. You don't have to do it all in one day. Break it down into achievable goals. Make a list. I love lists. You won't see immediate results right away, but you will eventually see results.

There is an old Chinese Proverb that says: "the journey of a thousand miles begins with one step." I agree. The Christian life that thrives is not a race to be run in a day. It is a life long journey of increasing growth and dependence on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Your road to thriving will depend on where you've been and where you're headed. As a child of God, you're hopefully headed heavenward. And though every child of God is ultimately headed to the same place, the road you're on will not look exactly like my road. As a now middle-aged twice engaged virgin, the bags I've got to work through will look drastically different than yours if you're an 18-year-old right out of high

school prom queen.

And that's ok.

I love the passage in Luke 13:6-9. The passage is a parable that Jesus tells the Galileans. Read it with me please:

"A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, 'Look for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?' And he answered him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

You may be wondering what this parable has to do with the single life that thrives. I'm about to give you 4 principles from this parable that will help you as you're executing the life that thrives:

It's never too late to thrive. In this beautiful parable, the man and the vinedresser are looking at the same fig tree, but they see two different things. The man sees a dying tree ready to be cut down. The vinedresser with ever-patient eyes sees a tree with huge potential for thriving. If you haven't picked up on it yet, the vinedresser in the parable is a picture of our Lord. He never gives up on us. It's never too late for us to thrive. If you've counted yourself out because you can't see the figs on your branches, just wait. Thriving isn't about you. It's about the expertise of the vinedresser. Give the vinedresser room to do His work, and pretty soon, you'll see that you too will bear fruit and thrive.

Thriving takes time. The vinedresser promises figs, but he needs a year to produce them. Too many single Christians want immediate results,

and if you don't see it right now, you quickly want to give up. This parable is a reminder that fruit grows over time. I'm not much of a gardener, and I've been tempted to give up on my plants way too soon. God, the vinedresser, is a perfect gardener, and He knows exactly where to prune you and what to purge in order to produce a life that thrives. Are you willing to give Him the time to do His best work in you?

It's not the number of figs but the presence of figs. The way you can tell whether a fig tree is thriving is by the presence of figs on the tree. Consider 10 different fig trees. Some of them may have 5 figs on their branches, while others will have 10 figs on them. It's not the number of figs but the presence of figs that indicate that a tree is thriving. It's the same way with your life, single Christian. Your fruitfulness, and your thriving, will look differently from your friend's. So stop judging your life by how others are doing. What the vinedresser cares about is increasing fruitfulness. Give him time, and don't judge your life too soon.

Thriving demands you use your manure. My favorite part in this parable is the part where the vinedresser tells the man to put manure on the dying tree. Whatever you think stinks most in your life right now is the very thing God will use to grow your tree. If you feel like you have a lot of manure in your life, don't worry. God will use that manure to bring forth much fruit. Do you need more figs on your tree? Be willing to allow God to use your manure. That's a little known secret of the life that thrives. Trust me, I know all about manure. My life has been full of it, but God is using every bit of it for His glory.

And I praise Him for it! Remember that if you're in Christ, you're headed heavenward, but how you get there is up to the vinedresser.

Are you ready to kill your lame excuses in order to live the life that thrives? Are you ready to get on with your life expecting much fruit? Are you ready to hit the road Jack?

I hope you are, because whether you know it or not, if you're in Christ, you are on the road to thrive.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT:

1. *Do you want to thrive as a single Christian?*
2. *On this last day of the "Are you a Satisfied Single?" challenge, what's keeping you from thriving?*
3. *What excuses have you used to keep from thriving? Isn't it time to kill them?*

Life as a single Christian is good. Despite what many people think, singleness is not a disease. It's not the lesser option. Singleness is God's gift to you today.

In *Thrive*, Lina AbuJamra will show you how to make a difference in life right now instead of sitting around waiting for something to happen. If you're tired of answering the same old questions about why you still haven't found the perfect match, this book is for you. *Thrive* will help you figure out what the Bible has to say about singleness instead of basing your opinion on what a celebrity tweets.

Isn't it time you get excited about your life in Christ and quit falling back into the same old pattern of thinking? Freedom. Joy. Abundance. Hope. All these are yours the moment you embrace all that God has for you right here, right now. Go ahead—It's ok to smile!

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