



SINGLES' SUNDAY

CULTURAL RESOURCES

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I. Historical/Cultural Context

While many churches have a *Singles' Ministry*, typically these groups are oriented around the 18–35 never-married demographic. However, the term *single* is inclusive of all persons who are not legally or ceremonially bound to another individual. This includes, but is not limited to:

- the not-wed who are not interested in being wed;
- the not-yet-wed but looking to wed;
- the not-yet-wed and unsure about whether they want to wed;
- the not-yet-wed matter-of-fact I'm too old to start trying to live with somebody—how about we just keep company;
- the once-wed looking to wed again;
- the once-wed and swearing to never wed again;
- the once-wed and looking to wed again—have not been in the dating game in years and is realizing 'Toto, this is not Kansas anymore';
- the grave-parted who wish to find another life partner for what remains of their life;
- the grave-parted who are still grieving and can't fathom anyone but their beloved deceased;
- the grave-parted who consider themselves too old to look for a mate; and

- the grave-parted who will lose financial support should they choose to remarry.

However, by design, the Singles' Ministry in most churches reaches for one group of people. But within this group is an assortment of individuals with myriad desires at different seasons of life with the main common denominator being they are not relationally bound to another person.

Throughout history, being unwed has often been viewed as a less-than-ideal state of living. However, I'm not sure this notion is authentic to the African American experience. While theologically we believe that it is not good to be unpartnered, historically, in our 400+ years of life in the Americas, only 100 of those years show solid two-person household figures. This is not to imply that African Americans do not marry but to state that our narrative is one that is marred by external factors that have left us with a normalcy of single-person households.

The most significant debate regarding the history of African American families—and hence, the history of singles—was sparked by a sociologist and Senator from New York, Daniel Patrick Moynihan.¹ Drawing on the work of sociologist E. Franklin Frazer, Moynihan blamed what he saw as the disintegration of poor, urban black families squarely on slavery. He said slavery had developed a “fatherless matrifocal pattern” within black families. Men, he claimed, did not learn roles of providing and protecting, and this shortcoming passed down through generations.

In response to the Moynihan Report, historian Herbert Gutman undertook an extensive study of African American families. His book titled The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750–1925 was published in 1976, and it argued that if Moynihan was right, then there should have been a prevalence of woman-headed households during slavery and in the years immediately following emancipation.² Gutman found that at the end of the Civil War, most families of former slaves had two parents, and most older couples had lived together for a long time. He attributed these findings to resiliency among African Americans who created new families after owners sold their original families apart. Combatants to this argue that Gutman's research is inconclusive of the fact that most freed slaves immediately set out to search for their lost family members. Also, do note that Gutman was publishing before data could be collected of the current social influences affecting the African American family that was developing while he was researching. During the next great impacts on not only the African American family, but on the traditional structure of families in America as a whole, two revolutions—the sexual revolution and the women's liberation movement—showed that single life presented both advantages and disadvantages.

With the rise of the sexual revolution came a more relaxed view of sex before marriage. Not that sex is a reason to get married, but let's be honest, there are plenty of marriages that began under the premise of now we can get down and dirty! With the stigma of premarital sex relaxing, so was the driving impetus to wed at a very young age.

The driving force behind the sexual revolution was the distribution of the birth control pill. The pill allowed young women an opportunity to further their education and take on full-time careers without the fear of an unwanted pregnancy.³ As a consequence, however, the pill and the freedom it provided to women are often blamed for the transgressions that followed. Since the sexual revolution, out-of-wedlock births, sexually transmitted diseases, teen pregnancy, and

divorce have all risen considerably. Since the '60s, marriage has declined by a third and divorce has doubled. During the 1960s there were only four big STDs, but now there are twenty-four. Since the sexual revolution, children living in single-parent families have tripled.⁴ Let's be clear: women are not the sole carriers of this blame, for we were not out there getting it on by ourselves.

Since our churches are predominately African American, then the statistics that affect us as a whole are the same statistics in effect in our pews. According to the United States Census Bureau in 2011, African Americans in the 18–65 age range: 31.2% were married with a spouse present, 6% were widowed, 12% were divorced, and 44% were never married. In the 65 and above age range, 38% were married with a spouse present, 33.5% were widowed, 15.3% were divorced, and 7.7% were never married.⁵

Conversing with the Data:

- The term single is encompassing of various individuals who do not all have the same long-term relationship goals.
- The history of Africans in the Americas has not been one that has been fully graced with a long legacy of partnered peoples.
 - With this, we may want to consider whether there are external factors affecting the psychological and emotional desire to be partnered.
 - **We must develop respect for the choice to remain single, but encourage partnering with individuals of like mind who can accompany us on our journey of life.**
- We cannot ignore sexual desires amongst this demographic. We need neither to promote or demonize, but to minister to the whole person and acknowledge that sexuality is a part of being human. It is very easy to tell a 20-something you should wait for marriage to have sex. But it is slightly insensitive to tell a 60-something living off their deceased spouse's pension that they should wait for marriage to be sexual again.
- Note that the 60+ demographic has people who deal with illness and disability. Speak partnership to them as well.

II. Songs That Speak to the Moment

In the songs selected, you will find themes of life-filled satisfaction with God, desire for more of the Divine, availability to God, and value in what and where God has placed the single life. The hymn “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing” speaks to the desire to have one's heart “tuned” to God and away from the world. In the two contemporary songs, “Happy” by Tasha Cobbs and “Smile” by Jonathan Nelson, the echo of the singing heart is contentment and great joy. In the final song, “It's My House,” Diana Ross sings of pride for one's peaceful place and standards for entering into that space.

Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing

by Robert Robinson

Come, thou Fount of every blessing,
tune my heart to sing thy grace;
streams of mercy, never ceasing,
call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet,
sung by flaming tongues above.
Praise the mount! I'm fixed upon it,
mount of thy redeeming love.

Here I raise mine Ebenezer;
hither by thy help I'm come;
and I hope, by thy good pleasure,
safely to arrive at home.
Jesus sought me when a stranger,
wandering from the fold of God;
he, to rescue me from danger,
interposed his precious blood.

O to grace how great a debtor
daily I'm constrained to be!
Let thy goodness, like a fetter,
bind my wandering heart to thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
prone to leave the God I love;
here's my heart, O take and seal it,
seal it for thy courts above.⁶

Happy

by Tasha Cobb

You make me happy
You make me whole
You take the pain away
I'm so in love with you [Repeat 4 times]

Everything about you is right
It covers all my wrong
Your life saved my life [Repeat 2 times]

With you is where I belong
I belong to you Lord [Repeat 3 times]

You make me happy
You make me whole

You take the pain away
I'm so in love with you [Repeat 3 times]

Everything about you is right
It covers all my wrong
Your life saved my life [Repeat 3 times]

With you is where I belong
I belong to you Lord [LEAD repeat 3 times}
So in love with you
Can't make it without you
I live to worship you
Forever me and you [Repeat 4 times]

Forever me and you [Repeat 6 + times]

Forever me and you
Forever me and you
Forever me and you
Everything about you is right [LEAD]

Everything about you is right
Everything about you it is right
Everything about you it's so right
And it covers my wrong.⁷

Smile

by Jonathan Nelson

Here's my worship
Take joy in it
Make it your dwelling place
I wanna put a smile on your face
I present my heart to you, I present my life to you [x4]

Here's my worship smile
Here's my life lord smile [x4]
Smile... I wanna make you smile [x3]
I wanna make you smile [x6]

Better is one day in your courts
Better is one day in your house
Better is on day in your courts
Than thousands elsewhere [x2]

Better is one day [Leader first then choir x4]

Better is one day in your courts
Better is one day in your house
Better is on day in your courts
Than thousands elsewhere [x2]

Oooo Let me make you Smile [leader repeats 2x choir x4]

I wanna make you smile [x6]⁸

It's My House

by Adrian Misiewicz, Nickolas Ashford, Valerie Simpson, and Thomas Reichold

It's my house and I live here
(I wanna tell you)
It's my house and I live here

There's a welcome mat at the door
And if you come on in
You're gonna get much more
There's my chair
I put it there
Everything you see
Is with love and care

It's my house and I live here
(I wanna tell you)
It's my house and I live here

On the table, there sits a rose
Through every window
A little light flows
Books of feeling on the shelf above
'Cause it was built for love
I was built for love

It's my house and I live here
(I wanna tell you)
It's my house and I live here

There's a candle to light the stairs
Where my dreams await someone to share
Oh, there's music on the radio
And good vibrations won't let me go
I put my name on the ceilin' above

'Cause it was built for love
It was built for love, ooh
You say you wanna move in with me
You say you wanna move in with me
Got to follow the rules to get me
Got to follow the rules to get me
You wanna visit my house
Say you wanna drop by
Wanna visit my house, yeah
To see me sometimes

There's a welcome mat at the door
And if you come on in
You're gonna get much more
I put my name in the ceilin' above
'Cause it was built for love
It was built for love

It's my house and I live here
(I wanna tell you)
It's my house and I live here⁹

III. Visual Aids of Singles



IV. Making It a Memorable Learning Moment

- Celebrate “Strange Freedom” for singles without children or with self-sufficient adult children. Perhaps plan an outing or tourist trip to another state.

- Organize a Vision Board/Bucket List crafts project. Because singles are not monolithic and come with different end goals, this project will help them to dream and visualize self-fulfilling lives that may or may not include partnering in matrimony.
- Sponsor a sex-awareness Sunday. As seniors continue to widen the breadth of the Singles' Ministry, we have to consider that they may engage in sexual activity again. They may be completely unprepared for sex in the 21st century. There is a good chance that back when they were growing up, the worst thing sex could bring was an out-of-wedlock baby. Now, however, with sex comes an entire genre of diseases. So while they may forego protection since fertility is not an issue, they still need to protect themselves against disease. Offer free HIV/AIDS testing and get the younger generation to counsel the older generation about *sexpectation*. Also, focus on the emotional responsibility of entering a sexual relationship at any stage of the life cycle. Whether you advise waiting for matrimony or waiting for a committed relationship, just talk openly about sex and the issues that come with the terrain of sex.
- Offer a talk-back session. For the singles in your congregation who have identified that they would like to be partnered in the future, create sessions where married men can have an open and candid conversation with the unwed men in your church. Create the same intimate conversation among married women and unwed women. Be sure to know the mental and emotional status of your facilitators. Get people who are licensed and well-trained marriage and family counselors who are familiar with African American populations and the Church. These talks can hopefully serve as a guidepost to those of us on the journey toward matrimony.

Notes

1. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action," 1965. Online location: <http://www.dol.gov/oasam/programs/history/webid-meynihan.htm>
2. Herbert G. Gutman. The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750–1925 (New York, NY: Vintage, 1977).
3. Online location: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sexual_revolution_in_1960s_United_States.
4. Mary Parke, CLASP Center for Law and Social Policy, Policy Brief, Couples and Marriage Series, Brief #3, p.1, May 2003.
5. Online location: <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam/cps2011.html>.
6. "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing." By Robert Robinson. African American Heritage Hymnal. Chicago, IL: GIA, 2001. #175
7. "Happy." By Tasha Cobb. Online location: <http://www.lyricszoo.com/tasha-cobbs/happy/> (accessed 14 May 2013).

8. "Smile." By Jonathan Nelson. Online location: <http://www.elyrics.net/read/j/jonathan-nelson-lyrics/worship-medley:-smile-,-better-is-one-day-lyrics.html> (accessed 14 May 2013).
9. "It's My House." By Adrian Misiewicz, Nickolas Ashford, Valerie Simpson, and Thomas Reichold. Online location: <http://www.sing365.com/music/lyric.nsf/It%27s-My-House-lyrics-Diana-Ross/9BF4D3795501B6094825693F0010969D> (accessed 14 May 2013).
10. Image: <http://freedomcrusader-generationx.blogspot.com/2013/01/africa-where-black-is-not-really.html>
11. Image: <http://www.helpingwithwholeness.com/10-assets-for-single-black-women/>
12. Image: <http://match.dwighthall.org/group.php?id=64>