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Thrive

THE SINGLE LIFE AS GOD INTENDED

Thrive:

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All You Need Is Love: Finding True Love in Christ

I remember my first crush. I was in the seventh 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 only 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.

**IF LOVE IS all a person
needs, then the single
Christian has a big problem.**

Whether you're in the seventh grade (I hope you're not reading this book if you're in seventh grade), or just turned seventy, 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.

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 then 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 seventh-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 five attitudes to embrace in order to thrive, and I've covered four 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 out 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 dos 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.

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FINDING TRUE LOVE IN CHRIST

You can't love someone you don't know. I thought I loved my seventh-grade crush, but all I had was the dreamy-eyed fantasy of a thirteen-year-old hormonal nerd. My mind took on a life of its own but had no basis in reality and led to great disappointment and utter failure.

Christ's love is different. It is real. It is lasting. It is abundant life. And it is everything you're looking for in your life and more.

God's desire for every single Christian is a thriving relationship with Him through the perfect love of Jesus Christ. It is only as you understand Christ's love for you and start drawing from it that you will truly thrive. The best way to understand Christ's love for you is by getting to know Him and by understanding His unchanging character.

**YOUR PROBLEM is not that you
don't know the Lord Jesus Christ
and His love, but that you've
forgotten all about it.**

The story of Christ's love for you is a simple story that you may or may not have heard before. God loved you so much that He sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, to be born of a virgin named Mary. He lived perfectly for thirty-three years until He was unjustly crucified on a cross. It was horrible, but it was the whole reason for His coming to earth in the first place. God knew that man was separated from God because

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of sin and needed a Savior. So He sent His Son to earth as God incarnate with one purpose in mind: to die on a tree for your sin and mine. As unjust as His crucifixion was, it was done for you. It was done to give you eternal and abundant life. And it was done because of love. It was Christ's death on the cross that purchased your forgiveness.

If you're looking for true love, you don't need to look any further. Whether you've heard the facts before or if this is the first time you hear them, now is the time you receive them. Why don't you stop reading right now and pray this prayer:

Father, I know I'm a sinner and desperately need a Savior. I believe that You sent Your Son to die for my sin. I believe that Christ lived a perfect life and died without cause, simply to take away my sin. I receive this free gift You've given me and accept your gift of love. From here on out I want to trust You as my Savior and Lord, and I give You my life. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

If you just prayed this prayer, then you've turned a whole new page in your life. You just took your first step toward thriving. In fact, you may want to go back and read this book all over again. It will make a lot more sense to you now.

Most of you who picked up this book have already accepted Christ's love into your hearts. But somewhere between accepting Christ's love and waking up single, your love for Christ has waned and your trust in Him has wavered. You're disillusioned by God, and you're not sure why you pray since God never seems to answer. Christ on the cross

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was perfect for your salvation but seems to have little effect on your day-to-day life.

Your problem is not that you don't know the Lord Jesus Christ and His love, but that you've forgotten all about it. You need a basic reminder of who Christ is. I'm not suggesting a superficial knowledge. Think back to my seventh-grade crush. I could pick out the love of my life in a crowd, but I had no idea who he really was. In order to really know someone, you've got to get to know that person's character. A person's character describes the essence of that person.

Your love for Christ will grow as you understand God's character and hang on to it with all of your might, especially in your time of need. God's character will be your anchor as you seek the life that thrives. I'd like to give you four aspects of God's character that will help you thrive.

TRUSTING GOD'S CHARACTER IS NECESSARY FOR THRIVING

The apostle Paul is an amazing example of a thriving single Christian. But he didn't start out that way. Earlier in his life, Paul was this guy who thought he was living well. He was highly educated and greatly respected. He was religious and rich. He was a force to be reckoned with by his peers, but he was far from thriving.

One day, as he was headed to Damascus to kill more Christians who trusted in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Messiah, Paul had a life changing experience. A great light appeared to Paul, and he saw the risen Christ. Paul immediately recognized Christ as Lord. His first words to Christ were, "Who are you, Lord?" (Acts 9:5).

Paul's life was radically changed. He gave up his career, his friends, his family, his religion, and became the strongest and most respected leader in the early Christian church. By the time Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, he had been a follower of Jesus Christ for a few years and his love for Jesus Christ was still red-hot and blazing. His love remains contagious to us today.

What was Paul's secret for his transformation from chief of all sinners to chief of all saints? How did Paul radically embrace the life that thrives?

The answer has nothing to do with Paul and everything to do with Jesus Christ. From the moment Paul met the risen Christ, he had a clear vision and understanding of Christ's character that would set the tone for the rest of his life. No matter where Paul found himself – in prison, being beaten, or in the midst of a shipwreck in the worst storm of his life— Paul hung on to God's character with a fierceness that would do us good to emulate.

The result for Paul was a life that thrived. He thrived like no one else did. He flourished and blossomed and was fully satisfied, and this greatly magnified God. Margaret Clarkson has said this about singleness: "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."²⁸

Paul exemplified such a Christian life. Here was a man who understood that happiness and fullness of joy come not from marriage but from an understanding of who God is.

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Here was a man who grasped the truth of God's character, allowing him to live a contented, self-controlled, and holy life of undivided devotion. Here was a man who refused to allow self-pity and bitterness to creep in, who shunned idols, and turned to Christ alone in his loneliness, making him the best model of a single Christian you could ever have.

HIS GOODNESS overflows into your life even when you don't recognize it.

I'd like to give you four aspects of God's character that Paul hung on to, allowing him to thrive in the most difficult circumstances:

1. God Is Good

Eve fell for it in the garden of Eden, so there's no reason to think that you won't too. Near-perfect Eve had everything: great looks, a great body, an amazing and hardworking husband who didn't hog the TV remote, and no in-laws. If anyone was set up to thrive, it was Eve. But there was one thing she couldn't have: the fruit. So naturally, the fruit became the one thing she couldn't get her mind and eyes off of. Day after day after day, she circled the tree and wondered about the forbidden fruit. But it's the way that she finally fell that should surprise us the most.

Satan knew exactly how to get Eve. All he had to do was convince her that God simply wasn't good. If God were good, He wouldn't hold anything back from Eve, would He? And poor Eve fell for it. Next thing you know, she's stuck with a

lifetime of clothes shopping and epidurals.

Most of you read the story and think that this could never happen to you. You're smarter, savvier, better. Yet the story for many single Christians is exactly the same. The one thing you yearn for is not yours. But instead of hanging your hat on God's goodness, the same God who gave you every single blessing in your life, you choose to assume that God's goodness has skipped you, and just like Eve, you fall so quickly that you're not sure what hit you.

Underline the next sentence in your book: God is good all the time. It is His nature to be good. His character is good. He only does what is good. His goodness extends to you, even when you don't see it. His goodness overflows into your life even when you don't recognize it. He is good even when you don't feel it. Psalm 84:11 says: "No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly."

Believe it. It's who He is.

2. God Is Always in Control

One of my favorite things about God is that He is always in control. He is the ER doctor who calmly brings the kid back to life without breaking a sweat. He is the surgeon who can stop a bleeding aorta without a single word. He is the president facing a war who quietly claims the victory.

But He's even more than that. He rules over evil. He controls the outcomes of every single situation in every single place. He is simply running the universe with His feet up.

He is not surprised by your singleness. He knows if you're ever going to get married and to whom.

God is always in control, no matter what seems to be

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happening around you, and no matter how long you've been waiting. Nothing happens in your life without God allowing it. You can stop trying to make it to every singles meeting in the hopes of finally running into "the one"; you can cease striving, and rest. God is in control. You can breathe now.

3. God Is Always Faithful

By now you know a lot about me. You know I'm far from perfect, so you can imagine how thankful I am for God's faithfulness. I am who I am today because of His faithfulness. Another favorite verse of mine is in 2 Timothy 2:13. Here's what it says: "If we are faithless, he remains faithful."

Can you get a hold of this truth? It's pretty incredible, given the mess you and I make of our lives. If you've been married before, you're probably acutely aware of the places in your life where you've failed. Even if you've never been married, it doesn't take long to see how often and how far your faithlessness extends. It's easy to lose hope and slowly drift away from the Lord.

What's amazing about God, among many things, is His utter faithfulness to us even when we don't deserve it.

WHAT'S AMAZING about God, among many things, is His utter faithfulness to us even when we don't deserve it.

I've been a follower of Christ for a long time now. I accepted Christ as my Savior when I was seven years old. It hit

me one day that I've sinned a whole lot more since Christ came into my life than before He did. You can see where I'm going with this. It's easy to let guilt accumulate. Sinning when you don't know any better is one thing, but the longer I've walked with the Lord, the worse my sin feels because I ought to know better.

Over the years, I've been tempted to refuse God's faithfulness to me, not because I don't believe I need it, but because of the depth of my own depravity and faithlessness. How could I accept God's faithfulness knowing how often I'd already asked for forgiveness and fallen repeatedly in the same areas of sin? The last thing I want to be is a hypocrite. So sometimes, instead of running toward God's faithfulness, I've isolated myself and basked in my own shell of faithlessness.

You must stop believing the lie that God's faithfulness only reaches you as you improve. God wants you to come to Him just as you are. He is the One who cleanses you. You can't start the cleaning process yourself. That's His job. Your job is to humbly admit your need for Him.

God's faithfulness is complete and persistent toward us, even when we are faithless. Nothing will give you a greater sense of freedom than grasping the truth that God is faithful to you—all the time.

Now that's a truth to thrive on.

4. God Knows You Perfectly

I'll end with this fourth unbelievable character trait of God. He knows you inside and out. He knows you perfectly!

The fancy word for this trait is *omniscience*. God knows everything. He knows everything about you. He knows every

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thought you've ever had. He hears every unspoken prayer you've ever not uttered. He sees you. He knows you. He loves you.

I love Psalm 139. There are two verses in it that blow my mind away. The first is verse 4: "Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether." The second is verse 16: "Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them." God formed you and made a plan for your life even before you became a zygote. He planned every aspect of your life. He knows you completely.

As a single Christian, nothing fills me with a greater sense of joy than understanding that I am known and loved completely by Jesus Christ. Satan wants you to believe the lie that if God really knew you and understood your needs, He would have provided a marriage partner for you.

Satan is a liar, and He only speaks lies. God's truth is clear: He knows you completely and He still loves you.

God's character is the anchor that allows every single Christian to thrive. Are you holding on to His character? You may have found true love in Christ when you accepted His gift of salvation. It's time for you to start trusting His character as you walk daily with Him.

As you hold on to God's character, you will be able to embrace the attitudes God wants you to live by and jump over the obstacles He so lovingly wants you to avoid.

Now that you know who God is, I think it's time you know God's plan for you.

GET ON GOD'S PROGRAM

You're on the road to discovering true love in Christ. You started with an understanding of Christ's sacrificial love for you. You then learned the truth about who God is. The truth of His character will carry you through your life, day in and day out. But God has even more for you to thrive.

God created you for relationship. The most important relationship is your vertical relationship with God through the perfect love of Christ. But that's not the only relationship God has given you. He has a perfect plan for every single Christian to grow in love and to thrive as you embrace His plan for your life.

I truly believe that this is where most single Christians get stuck. You get the God part down. You trust the Lord for salvation and hang on to who He is, but you have trouble understanding why God would have you live the rest of your life isolated and alone.

How could a God who says He loves relationship leave you on your own?

But God hasn't left you to live life alone. Life alone may be more comfortable and easy, especially on major family holidays, but it isn't God's plan for you.

Community and Relationship

God's plan for you is horizontal relationships with other people, within the context of the local church.

Whaaat? That's all you got?

I'm not sure when the single Christian community became disenchanted with the local church, but it's not an un-

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common sentiment. Some of you may be disappointed when you hear that God's solution to your horizontal love needs is found in the local church, but that could be because of your past experience with the local church.

I think it's time you get a biblical perspective on this issue.

The thing about Paul writing to the church in Corinth is that he knew all about the church: the good, the bad, and the ugly. But Paul also understood that God's plan for His people is fellowship and relationship within Christ's bride, the church.

GOD'S PLAN FOR you is horizontal relationships with other people, within the context of the local church.

Let's go all the way back to Acts 2:42–47. Peter had just preached the sermon of his lifetime. After 3,000 people turned to Christ, Peter got them together and a church was birthed. The first church had four elements that would feed the soul of believers, helping them to thrive:

1. They grew in their knowledge of God by studying His Word.
2. They maintained uncommon community through breaking of bread and prayer.
3. They developed meaningful relationships with each other through generosity and hospitality.

4. They worshiped God by lifting their voices in praise.

The early church in Acts didn't have singles groups and married groups and male and female groups. It didn't seek to accommodate the consumerist needs of its people. There was no mention of separation of people by demographics, geography, or hobbies.

The early church was primarily concerned with worshiping Jesus Christ and was known for its unity and sense of uncommon community.

The Corinthian church had deviated from the early church model and Paul had to address the need for unity throughout his letter to the church. The early church model was the context that Paul wanted to bring back to the church in Corinth. And it is the context that every single Christian must strive toward in order to thrive.

Perhaps it's time you admit your disappointment with the church and let go of the growing chip on your shoulder. Get back on to God's program for you. God's people are not perfect (except for you and me, of course), but they are the family that God has given you. Love them and serve them for the sake of Christ.

WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN TO THE SINGLE CHRISTIAN?

Shortly after I broke off my first engagement and was nursing a broken heart, I moved to a new city, took a new job, and had no friends.

I was Christian enough to find a good Bible-teaching

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church, but I lived forty minutes away from that church. It was a dark time in my life for a while. I felt alone and broken.

It didn't take long for me to understand that God loves the brokenhearted. In the darkness of my apartment, God met me in ways I didn't see coming. In Hosea 2:14–15, God says this: “I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. And there I will give her her vineyards and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.”

I was thrown into a wilderness but the Lord found me. I was in the valley of trouble and I was given hope. Brokenness is the best place to be if you're looking to thrive. I was broken, but was well on my way toward the life that thrives.

Now all I had to do was figure out how to fit into my local church. Sunday after Sunday I showed up to church, sat in the third row, and left without as much as a word to anyone. My faith was growing as I fed on God's Word. My love for the Lord was burning, but I couldn't understand His people. Not only did I not connect with the church at large, but I didn't connect with the singles group either.

So I floundered for a few months. I questioned the Lord. I felt pretty sorry for myself. I thought of changing churches. I spent a lot of time scoping out churches on the web. I joined eHarmony for the first time.

**NOT ONLY DID I not connect
with the church at large,
but I didn't connect with
the singles group either.**

And still I felt alone and isolated in a church designed for couples.

One day, as I sat in my room and prayed, a funny thought crossed my mind. *What if instead of waiting for others to talk to me at church, I took the initiative and talked to them? What if instead of being ministered to and led, I took it upon myself to minister to others?*

I certainly knew the Lord well enough to serve in His church, and I was slowly but surely learning to trust His unwavering character. What did I have to lose?

The next Sunday I did it. I actually talked to the person to my right. I participated in the Sunday school class. A few weeks later I shared my testimony in a Bible study. Next thing I knew, I was being asked to teach a tiny (five people) women's Bible study.

Me? Teach a Bible study? I was the least likely person qualified to do it. Yet God often reminds me that His plans are way different than mine but they're always for my best!

I did teach the class and to everyone's surprise, and mostly to mine, it was good. It wasn't long before I felt God calling me to full-time ministry. Fifteen years later, here you are, reading my story.

I went through my story all over again to tell you this: there will come a time in your life as a single Christian when you must stop looking to be ministered to and start ministering to others. There will come a time in your life when you must intentionally and prayerfully forget about your program, and get on to God's program instead. That may mean it's time for you to join a Bible study. It could also mean that you speak up and get authentic with fellow Christians. It

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could even mean doing something so completely out of your comfort zone, like starting a new ministry with little experience and knowledge and absolute dependence on the Lord, and seeing Him bear fruit.

It could mean simply loving someone in need.

God's program is for uncommon community with other believers. Uncommon community is not perfect, but it is Christlike in its authenticity and grace. The answer to your relationship needs is not for God to magically provide the perfect partner for you, although He could do that in a heartbeat.

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 on to 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.

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