

“Research indicates that young adults today hope to have successful, long-term marriages, but for many reasons they are not sure that such relationships are possible. The Rodgers’ get to the root of these concerns and provide hope and encouragement for those singles who seek to develop healthy and loving relationships on the pathway toward marriage.”

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Center for the Family, Pepperdine University

“Drs. Tom and Beverly Rodgers have written an authentic, empowering guide for singles that addresses the many reasons individuals are hesitant to marry. It includes a bevy of suggestions, Scriptures, and resources to encourage and uplift during the inevitable soul-searching this book will bring about.”

—ERIC AND JENNIFER GARCIA, cofounders,  
Association of Marriage and Family Ministries

“Drs. Tom and Beverly Rodgers have left no stone unturned in researching *The Singlehood Phenomenon*. Their findings and real case studies throughout the book should encourage skeptical singles to confront their fears and misgivings about marriage and to believe that love and marriage can become a realized dream.”

—FREDA V. CREWS, DMin, PhD,  
TV host and university dean

“*The Singlehood Phenomenon* is a phenomenon in and of itself. The way in which Drs. Tom and Bev Rodgers candidly address the reasons why singles are opting out of getting married is both informative and refreshing. It is imperative to know where singles stand if we are to offer them anything that will take them beyond the mundane and into an understanding of marriage that exceeds the norm.”

—PHIL WAUGH, executive director,  
Covenant Marriage Movement

“Today’s singles grew up learning more about how relationships end than how they can be sustained. Drs. Beverly and Tom Rodgers offer life-changing insight and helpful instruction for those who find themselves unintentionally single.”

—JEN ABBAS, author of *Generation Ex: Adult Children of Divorce and the Healing of Our Pain*

# The Singlehood Phenomenon

10 Brutally Honest Reasons  
People Aren't Getting Married

Beverly Rodgers PhD and Tom Rodgers PhD



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Finally, we want to thank NavPress for publishing this material, and our editors—Andrea Christian, Reagen Reed, and Cara Iverson—for fine-tuning this manuscript and inspiring us with your tireless energy.

## Introduction

**T**he marriage rate in the United States has dropped drastically in the last decade. As a result, we have the oldest and largest singles population in our nation's history. This has created concern both among social scientists who feel that marriage is the foundation of culture and society and among theologians who believe that marriage is the earthly replication of the spiritual relationship between humanity and God.

That being said, we don't believe there is anything wrong with being single. Some people stay single because they do not feel like they need a partner to be fulfilled. This is a healthy move, and we support singles who are content. However, there are many people who desire to be married, but are reticent because of fears and concerns that stand in their way and the stigma about marriage that permeates our society.

Traditional marriage is under attack—to such an extent that many singles question the relevance of matrimony. Many social scientists now believe that the weakening of marriage is a genuine social crisis. Michael Craven of the National Coalition for the Protection of Children and Families says, “Across America the institution of marriage is being assailed, reduced to nothing more than a sentimental ceremony between consenting adults, radically redefined, or simply abandoned altogether.”<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, there are valid reasons for society to be down

on marriage. The high divorce rate in our country is perhaps one of the main ones. Some statistics show that in the last decade the nation's divorce rate hit 56 percent before it pulled back. It now hovers around 50 percent. One in two marriages ends, and this statistic does not include those who are unhappy and feel trapped in their marriages. Everyone seems to know a couple with marital trouble. Today's singles wonder if marriage is all it is cracked up to be and are turning instead to alternatives such as cohabitation, nonmarried coparenting, and common-law marriage.

Many singles have pushed dating way down on their list of priorities. Some have grown cynical; others have given up all together. If you are one of these singles, this book is for you. The information contained in these pages will help you uncover unconscious beliefs, unhealthy behaviors, and toxic relationship patterns that could be sabotaging your love life. We also address the growing *singlehood phenomenon* in our culture and the top ten reasons why singles aren't getting married. But don't despair! We'll give you practical and biblical ways to overcome these reasons. If you are working with singles as a pastor, mentor, or counselor, this book will be a valuable resource as you guide singles to establish healthy relationships and challenge them to see marriage, as well as singlehood, in a more positive light.

My husband, Tom, and I have been married for twenty-nine years and Christian relationship counselors for twenty-six years. We have helped hundreds—if not thousands—of singles, couples, and families learn to develop healthy, lasting, and godly relationships. The work we've done in our own marriage and the insight we've gained from counseling led to the development of a model of relationships called the *Soul Healing Love Model*. Tom and I never set out to develop a model; we simply wanted to heal our own wounded marriage. Our personal and professional experience has taught us that we all suffer from emotional and

physical pain that affects our ability to have healthy relationships. We have dedicated ourselves to determining what makes relationships work and what causes them to fail. Our search for answers and for healing led to what we consider the culmination of our life's work.

The Soul Healing Love Model integrates biblical and psychological principles to help people deal with the wounds they have received in life, particularly in childhood. The Soul Healing Love Model will give you practical tools and techniques designed to bring about awareness and insight, enhance empathy, and foster forgiveness so that you can be the healthiest person possible. Healing your soul wounds will allow you to break free from unhealthy and sometimes unconscious patterns, which may be hindering your ability to have healthy relationships. Most importantly, we'll show you how God's unconditional love can heal your woundedness so that you become a healing agent to those around you and, eventually, your spouse.

The Soul Healing Love Model has helped countless singles find true and lasting love. It is not easy; it involves a soul searching that you may find uncomfortable and even, at times, painful. We'll challenge you to look at past hurts and determine how they have affected you as an adult, particularly in intimate relationships. We've found that singles who take this journey develop a renewed faith in love, marriage, their future, and even God. Some have made peace with their current stage in life; others have found their soul mates. Throughout this book, you'll find stories of these successful singles. We hope you will get to know them, relate to them, and that their stories will encourage and inspire you.

As you read the pages of this book, you will see that it is written from my (Bev's) perspective. However, Tom was a part of the manuscript every step of the way. You will often read the words *we*, *our*, or *us*. This is because we are a team, both in

marriage and in ministry. The concepts in this book are a result of years of conversations, lecture preparations, books, articles, and case studies.

Our prayer for you is that you will learn to be the healthiest, happiest single person you can be, but also that you will learn, with God's help, to overcome your fear of marriage and the reasons that keep you single.

R E A S O N # 1

## Skepticism About Love and Marriage

*I'd rather be alone than in a bad marriage*

**L**isa was an attractive, athletic, twenty-six-year-old paralegal who attended law school at a very prestigious university. She was pretty, stayed in shape, and had plenty of friends. Lisa truly lived the good life in her uptown condo with her loyal Labrador retriever, Buddy. Lisa attended church regularly, participated in an accountability group, and went to a singles Bible study every week. She seemed to have everything going for her, but despite her success and a perpetual flurry of activity, she was frustrated and lonely. Her life was filled with friends, school, church, and family, but something was missing. Lisa wanted a companion, someone to walk beside her through life's struggles.

Lisa came to counseling after hearing us speak on a local radio station about why singles are afraid to marry. At first, she was skeptical about marriage and wouldn't even acknowledge that she wanted a husband. We found that Lisa did not let herself want a husband because she couldn't take the disappointment and pain of not getting one. It was easier for her to indulge in skepticism about the institution of marriage.

## THE GROWING SINGLES POPULATION

Lisa's story is all too common these days. The growth of the singles population supports that she is not alone in feeling down on love and marriage. According to the United States Census Bureau, the number of singles has more than quadrupled in the last thirty years. In 1970 there were only 21.4 million singles, which constituted only 10 percent of the population. In the 2004 population study, that figure rose to a staggering 88 million (42 million men and 46 million women),<sup>1</sup> equaling 31 percent of the population. As the singles population grows older and larger, skepticism about love increases. People like Lisa are not just ever-increasing numbers on a demographics chart—they are real people who desire a healthy marriage but do not know how to achieve their goal. We can empathize with the nation's singles because there are so many valid reasons for their skepticism.

## REASONS FOR SKEPTICISM

**Fear of Making a Mistake.** Almost everyone knows a couple in a difficult or even miserable marriage. Today's singles are afraid that they will pick the wrong mate. We often hear, "I'd rather be alone than in a bad marriage."

**The High Divorce Rate.** Marriage has stopped being "for keeps." Singles do not want to be trapped in a bad marriage, but they do not want to divorce either. Half of Generation X (those born between 1965 and 1978) suffered through the divorce of their parents, and adult children of divorced couples are often afraid to get married because they do not want to go through the pain their parents suffered. They're also aware of statistics showing that children of divorce have a higher divorce rate in their own marriages.

**Relational Insecurity.** Children of divorce often feel

inadequate and somewhat handicapped when it comes to establishing intimacy, because they do not have role models to teach them. Tom and I call this *relational insecurity*. Jen Abbas, in her book *Generation Ex: Adult Children of Divorce and the Healing of Our Pain*, speaks of this when she writes,

Even though I was successful academically and professionally, I found myself becoming more insecure each year about my emotional abilities. As I began to see my friends marry, I started to question my ability to successfully create and maintain intimate relationships, especially my own future marriage. . . . I was paralyzed because what I wanted so desperately was that which I feared the most.<sup>2</sup>

Those whose parents are still married also feel inadequate when it comes to making marriage work. The changing roles of men and women have caused traditional marriages to seem obsolete, and without a blueprint, singles feel as though they are floundering. To avoid feeling inadequate or insecure, they often focus on the areas of their lives where they feel more capable of succeeding, such as work, church, education, or physical fitness.

**Fear of Getting Hurt.** Love relationships can be painful. Many singles have been wounded and now equate dating and mating with hurt and pain. Their fear of getting hurt causes them to stop looking for a soul mate. Some have stopped believing in a soul mate and think the concept was developed by the media to promote “chick flicks” and romance novels.

**The Narcissistic Culture.** The “me” mentality of our culture has fed the psyches of many singles who believe marriage will force them to give up their personal freedom. Many see marriage as confinement and constraint, rather than an opportunity for connection and belonging.

**Consumerism.** Singles in our focus groups tell us that some of their skepticism about marriage is related to the societal trend toward consumerism. Our culture tells you that with the click of a button, you can get anything you want, in any color, shape, or size. To quote one man in a focus group, “Just look at the supermarkets today. There are a million choices in foods, hygiene products, and soapsuds. I have trouble choosing toothpaste. How can I possibly choose the right mate?”

**Fear of Acrimonious Disputes.** Singles fear that marriage will lead to emotional suffering and social shame. Divorce settlements are often hostile and very public, causing singles to turn away from their God-given desire to marry.

## **THE DISAPPEARANCE OF MATRIMONY**

Because of the reasons listed above, matrimony is disappearing in our culture. Much of the contemporary sociological research of our day focuses on the growing trend of singleness in our nation. At Rutgers University, the National Marriage Project dedicated an entire issue of its 2002 *The State of Our Unions Report* to the study of why so many men are not getting married.<sup>3</sup> The Centers for Disease Control’s July 2002 report featured statistics on the current trends in marriage and cohabitation, which showed that the marriage rate is dropping.<sup>4</sup> In 2004, *The State of Our Unions Report* studied patterns of single men in order to determine “who’s the marrying kind” and found that men are marrying later, if at all.<sup>5</sup> A *Time* magazine cover showed a single mom with her son and a caption reading, “The New American Family.” The article explored the growing cultural trend of single-parent families. Even our government has become concerned that the nation is giving up on the idea of matrimony and has allocated federal monies to promote marriage.

## **SINGLES ARE GIVING UP**

Because of their skepticism about marriage, many singles like Lisa tell us that they have stopped going to singles groups. They don't date. Some don't even socialize with members of the opposite sex. They go to work and attend church, then go home and watch television.

Because she did not date, Lisa started to believe that there was something wrong with her. She asked us, "Why am I still single? I always meet every goal that I set, but I am really afraid that I can't meet this one. I can't help thinking that something must be wrong with me."

Singles like Lisa often feel rejected, unacceptable, or unworthy as they grow older. This feeling causes them to become critical of themselves. Lisa blamed herself for being single and focused on all of her shortcomings. Her self-talk was extremely self-deprecating, and as her confidence waned, she gave up on dating.

Giving up on dating and mating only reinforces feelings of unworthiness. Singles who find themselves discouraged or hopeless need to seek the Lord and prayerfully ask Him to guide them as they do a healthy soul-searching and self-evaluation. An honest, God-inspired look inside should bring about insight and understanding. It should never result in self-blame and self-deprecation. We have a maxim in the Soul Healing Love Model that states, "In order to find a healthy soul mate, you must first find the healthy soul mate within you." As you read through the pages of this book, we will help you facilitate such introspection.

## **FEAR OF WANTING**

We challenged Lisa to look inward and she found that there might indeed be internal reasons why she was still single. Lisa

saw that not only was she afraid to want a husband, she was also afraid to tell anyone in her circle of single friends about her heart's desire for a mate. She was scared to share her feelings because she did not want to appear desperate or needy. "It's like this unwritten rule in our group that you should not show that you want a mate," Lisa confessed. "If you do, others will think you are unfulfilled or weak. I feel guilty for wanting a man in my life—like I'm not independent or self-sufficient enough."

Our society's emphasis on independence can make you feel weak for wanting a mate and leave you with the expectation that you should be happy with your autonomy.

Most of the material on singleness in the Christian world focuses on being content. Supporters of this belief quote Philippians 4:11, "I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content." If singles are not content, they often feel like bad Christians. Of course, you should strive to be content as a single person, but this does not mean that you should hide your God-given desire for a mate under a facade of self-sufficiency.

## **REACTION FORMATION**

In psychological terms, concealing or minimizing a deep (and very normal) longing is known as *reaction formation*. Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, coined the term to describe a defense mechanism in humans in which we do and say the *opposite* of what we are feeling in order to hide our true desires. His classic example was the temperance worker in the early 1920s who secretly imbibed liquor in the closet. A desire for alcohol was masked by an overt and rather vehement protest against it.

Many singles use the defense of reaction formation to conceal their hidden longing for a mate. Writer Christina Nehring saw evidence of this while reviewing the plethora of singles books

available today. In the January 2002 issue of *Atlantic Monthly* she writes,

While many singles report that they try to hide their interest in this genre, these books draw astonishing numbers of readers. Many of these doubtless consider themselves ironic or atypical; but ironic audiences are often the most faithful of all. In fact, the assumption in literature is not pleasure seeking but desperate; not confident, adventuresome, and looking for tips on how to have a good time, but frightened and looking for hints on how to avoid disaster.<sup>6</sup>

### **WANTING A MATE IS NORMAL**

These “ironic or atypical” singles should not have to hide what is normal. Our culture tries hard to portray contentment and independence as the main goals of the single life, but the desire for a mate is God-given. In Genesis 2, the creation story, the only thing God declared “not good” was that man was alone. The first man, Adam, saw that he was alone and wanted companionship and intimacy. Because of his need, God fashioned a helper suitable for him. Adam was hardwired for love; in fact, all humans are.

Rose Sweet, in her book *Dear God, Send Me a Soul Mate*, shares the story of Eliezer, Abraham’s servant, who was given the daunting task of finding Abraham’s son Isaac a mate. Eliezer took his job seriously and prayed that God would guide his every move. The hand of God guided Eliezer and he finally found the beautiful, caring Rebecca, who was the perfect partner for Isaac. Sweet writes,

From the beginning of time, God has called us to Himself. Our deepest desires for intimacy, love and belonging, our

desire for a soul mate, come from Him, and ultimately they are for Him. God does not always give you what you want. He does give you everything you would want if you could see what He sees and know what He knows. Don't deny your desire for a soul mate, and don't demand that God provide one for you immediately. Instead, share it with your Heavenly Father and ask for His special blessings. Put your hand in His, and let Him teach you wonderful things.<sup>7</sup>

### **LISA'S HEALING**

God had many things to teach Lisa as she started to deal with her skepticism about marriage and acknowledge her desire for a soul mate. Lisa saw that one of the biggest reasons she was skeptical about love was that she did not think that she (or anyone, for that matter) could do the hard work to make it last. "Why can't it be easier?" she lamented. "Why do love and marriage have to be so hard?" We shared with Lisa that "happily-ever-after" often takes conscious, arduous effort. You cannot take two different people from two different families and merge them together without work. However, God would use this challenge to help her and her future husband become the people He wanted them to be.

### **THE "US" OF MARRIAGE**

We believe that each person has a divine destiny or call, but a couple has a divine destiny as well. Marriage is a hallowed crucible where couples grow together into oneness and establish the divine "us." This is the combination of two people who together, with God's help, find the purpose for which they were created.

Tom and I have found our "us" and developed it for the past thirty years. We know that what we are able to accomplish as a

couple is greater than what we could have accomplished on our own. Finding our purpose as a couple has been one of the most rewarding things we have done in our lives.

### **LISA'S HAPPY ENDING**

Eventually, Lisa was ready to take the next step in her journey. Fueled with a lot of faith, she started going to a large singles group in her area where she made several friends, both male and female. They invited her to attend the social functions they sponsored: cookouts at the lake and evening baseball games. Some of the group members were planning a square dance at their church and Lisa volunteered to help publicize the event. The group had given so much to her that she wanted to give something back.

Lisa received a call from Scott, a reporter for a local neighborhood newspaper who wanted to do a story about the dance. She met him for coffee and excitedly told him about the group and the events they were planning. Assuming Scott was married, she was totally herself in the interview. Lisa was never nervous around married guys, but if they were single, good-looking, and available she often got tongue-tied. He was obviously relaxed with her too, because he asked her out right on the spot! It was not until that moment that she realized he was single. Lisa accepted the date, which at one point would have been out of her comfort zone.

Lisa and Scott started the process of getting to know each other, and a great friendship began to bloom. As time passed, their friendship turned into romance. They came to several sessions of relationship counseling and attended a Soul Healers Couples Weekend, a fifteen-hour intensive workshop where couples learn how their past has affected them and how to build a healthy, godly relationship.

Lisa and Scott have been married for two years and they've discovered that part of their purpose as a couple is to do missions work. They've taken many trips to South America and plan to adopt a child from there and start a family. Lisa is overflowing with happiness that she was able to overcome her skepticism about love and marriage and, in the process, found that God is indeed faithful.

## **MAKING IT PRACTICAL: WHAT ABOUT ME?**

At the end of each chapter are questions for reflection and beliefs from Scripture that will help you to interact with the material. You can use this section for personal reflection or group study. Take a few minutes, get in a quiet place, and prayerfully and honestly answer the questions. You may want to keep a separate journal to record your thoughts, insights, and prayer requests.

What about you? If God is telling you that He wants to help you overcome your fear or distrust of marriage, read on. There is hope. Just wait and see.

## **FOR FURTHER THOUGHT**

1. Did reading this chapter uncover any skepticism you feel about marriage? Which of the reasons for skepticism do you most relate to?
2. Sometimes acknowledging a need that is unmet can be painful. Have you, like Lisa, ever used the defense of reaction formation to conceal your longing for a spouse?
3. Often, we're so focused on society's negative view of marriage that we forget marriage is intended to help us become who God has called us to be. Is there a couple you know whose marriage you admire? What do you observe about their purpose as a couple?

## **G****ROWING YOUR FAITH**

- Humans are hardwired for love. My desire for a mate is normal and I do not have to hide it.

And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him." (Genesis 2:18)

- God is in control of my future and will guide me as I select a mate.

"For I know the plans that I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope." (Jeremiah 29:11, TLB)

- I can surrender my skepticism about love and marriage to God because He is trustworthy.

"In those days when you pray, I will listen. You will find me when you seek me, if you look for me in earnest." (Jeremiah 29:12-13, TLB)