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One By One: Welcoming The Singles In Your Church



Synopsis

There are now more single adults than married adults in the United States, yet the evangelical church continues to focus primarily on serving couples and families with ministries geared toward their particular needs. This can lead, however unintentionally, to the marginalization of adults who are single by choice, divorce, or death, or who are simply not yet married. Families are a good thing, but so are all of God's people, and singles long to be lovingly integrated into the Body of Christ. In *One by One*, Gina Dalfonzo explores common misconceptions and stereotypes about singles, including the idea that they must be single because something is wrong with them, and the subtle (and not-so-subtle) ways they are devalued, like when sermons focus overmuch on navigating marital relationships or raising children. She shows how the church of Paul, who commended those who remained single, became the church where singles are too often treated like second class Christians. Then she explores what the church is doing right, what unique services singles can offer the church, and, most importantly, what the church can do to love and support the singles in their midst.

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Customer Reviews

"With humility and goodwill, Dalfonzo seeks to expose the shortcomings of many churches' relationships with single people by humanizing the experience of so many of us, taking the single person from a caricature to a crucial member of the body." --Christianity Today
"In *One by One*, Gina Dalfonzo capably explains the many challenges that singles face in participating in local Christian communities and lays out some ideas on how churches can do better in this important

area." --Mere Orthodoxy

You may be ignoring the fastest-growing demographic in your community. There are now more single adults than married adults in the United States. Yet the evangelical church often focuses primarily on serving couples and families. As a result, singles may feel undervalued and underserved, causing them to look elsewhere for spiritual nourishment and community engagement. Through fascinating personal testimonies from a wide variety of single believers, Gina Dalfonzo shows that serving singles well is not difficult--and it benefits everyone. She gives church leaders and lay members alike a rare glimpse into the challenges many single adults face and offers practical ways to involve singles in the life of the church. "Here's a book on singleness that won't tell you how to score a spouse nor condemn a growing generation of unmarried Christians. Instead, Gina Dalfonzo shares her own story along with many others', enriching our understanding of the stereotypes they face and the faith they live by."--Kate Shellnutt, Christianity Today

"One by One is full of practical wisdom that a congregation of any size can use to create a culture of welcome for every member of the body of Christ."--Michelle Van Loon, author of Moments & Days: How Our Holy Celebrations Shape Our Faith

"Without preaching or shaming, Gina Dalfonzo tells the church what we need to know--that is, the experience of the singles in our midst (or, perhaps, of the singles who can't stand to be in it!). With sometimes hilarious and always warm and wise insights from her life, as well as the lives of other single people, Dalfonzo shows us ways to fully love and welcome our single brothers and sisters."--Caryn Rivadeneira, author of Known and Loved: 52 Devotions from the Psalms

"One by One is a desperately needed book just now for churches serious about honoring the inherent dignity of all who enter their doors. I hope it gets the wide reading it deserves."--John Stonestreet, president, the Chuck Colson Center for Christian Worldview

Gina Dalfonzo is the editor of BreakPoint.org, as well as an occasional writer for BreakPoint Radio. She is the editor of Dickensblog and a columnist at Christ & Pop Culture. Her writing has been published in The Atlantic, Christianity Today, First Things, National Review, The Weekly Standard, Guideposts, Aletheia, The Stream, and OnFaith, among others.

I married young at 22, and my church attendance and involvement was touch and go for most of my college years, so I didn't truly experience adult singleness within the context of the church. Because of that, I was eager to read Ms. Dalfonzo's take on the issue. I hoped it would open my eyes and help me tune in to those with perspectives and experiences different from my own. It did not disappoint. With a blend of traditional research and personal experiences, Dalfonzo presents the

problem (social stigmas/stereotypes associated with singleness within the church), the causes, and the potential solutions with page-turning finesse. Reading this book was a convicting experience. I cringed as I read words I myself have said to my single friends with good intentions, seeing how hurtful they were within the other person's context. I found myself identifying with singles as I noticed similarities between the stigmas and stereotypes they face in the church and those experienced by childless/infertile couples. I feel like this book helped me cultivate a new layer of empathy for my brothers and sisters in Christ. If you, like me, married young and missed out on the experience of being single after college and beyond, please read this book. It is so important to understand this perspective.

Here is a book that not only puts a good perspective on the issues, but offers constructive ideas on how to address the concerns. This book is an honest, frank assessment on how singlehood is (or isn't) handled within the church. Every pastor, elder, associate minister should read this book for a current perspective.

great book

With *One by One*, Dalfonzo goes where few dating books have even tiptoed in the past. With refreshing boldness and clarity, she weaves together interview responses, family history, classic texts, online articles, and personal anecdotes to create a tapestry detailing where we are, where we could go, and how we could get there. But for Dalfonzo's book to make a mark, we have to first acknowledge a foundational truth: Many churches are proudly family-centered, and while this purpose aligns well with the American dream, it does little to welcome those of us who don't fit the same mold. We have built a church whose programming and language seek to include the six-year-old son of a busy mother at Bible study while extending no invitation for the single woman who teaches his Sunday school class. We have married pastors planning the few events for singles, often mixers designed to marry us out of the singles' class. We try to fix singleness with indiscriminate advice like "God will bring someone when you stop looking" or "Maybe you need to put yourself out there more." We throw around clichés instead of offering comfort, and we rarely allow room to acknowledge the suffering that comes with longing to be married. Dalfonzo discusses all of these issues and more, and she does so in a way that engages those on the outside—church leaders, pastors, married friends, and others who may have forgotten, or never known, the struggle of being single. She describes the various ways people

minimize our experiences or overlook our accomplishments because they aren't traditionally accompanied with a shower of some kind. (Perhaps, as Dalfonzo suggests, they should be.) She offers a peek behind the curtain of what it's like to be single in today's church—to mingle about during coffee hour with no one to speak to, to be seated at the physical and metaphorical children's table, to be expected to serve with every free second because that's the perk of not having a husband and kids, right? Toward the end of her book, Dalfonzo writes, "So maybe single Christians and married Christians can help each other learn to live counterculturally in a world where we often find ourselves on the outside. But in order for this to happen, single Christians need to be allowed more of a voice in the church. If you're looking to take time and listen to the trials and fears that come with being an unmarried woman in a marriage-centric church, *One by One* is an excellent place to start."

As the tagline for this book says, there are now more single adults than married adults in the United States. But you might not think that from looking at typical evangelical churches, because many still seem to cater primarily to couples and families. I can attest to this, as a member of the "Focus on the Family" generation, and having spent several years in the church as a single adult. The first section of this book shares a lot of stories from singles in the church, and corrects some unfortunate stereotypes that many singles have encountered (some of which are perpetuated by the church), such as the idea that single people have something terribly wrong with them, that they're not "real adults" yet, or that they're "projects" for others to "fix." The second section tries to take a look at "how we got here," while the third focuses more on what the church does right, as well as practical ideas for welcoming the singles in our midst. Dalfonzo does a fair amount of critiquing in this book, and it may give off a negative vibe because of that, though I think she works to counter that in places. She emphasizes that her criticisms only exist because she loves the church, and believes it should be a place where everyone's voice should be heard equally. She isn't afraid to call out (rightfully, I think) certain celebrity pastors who have made disparaging comments about singles, or have elevated marriage to a place that casts singles, by contrast, as "broken" or troublemakers. I thought this book was valuable for giving the perspective of a female Christian who has been single all her life, but desired marriage and family. One section I appreciated was in section 2 where she attempts to answer the question of "how we got here," by sharing some critiques of the "courtship culture" (and popular books it produced) that exploded into evangelical churches in the late 90s. She argues that this left many

people even more obsessed with marriage, while also even more confused about how to get there. I mostly concur with her evaluations, and I think probably a whole book could have been written about just that subject. In section 2 she also covers "gender wars," which was interesting, but probably the chapter I understood the least. I think the strongest section for me was in section 3 where Dalfonzo talks about loneliness and illuminates just how much of a driving force our fear of loneliness can be. As a single Christian who believes that celibacy outside of marriage is what she is called to, this would make her feel very isolated without the church there as a family to love her. This is a good wake-up call to the church to make sure the singles in their midst have a voice, and aren't getting pushed away by a family-centric approach. Disclosure: I received this book free from Baker Books through the Baker Books Bloggers program. The opinions I have expressed are my own, and I was not required to write a positive review. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255

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