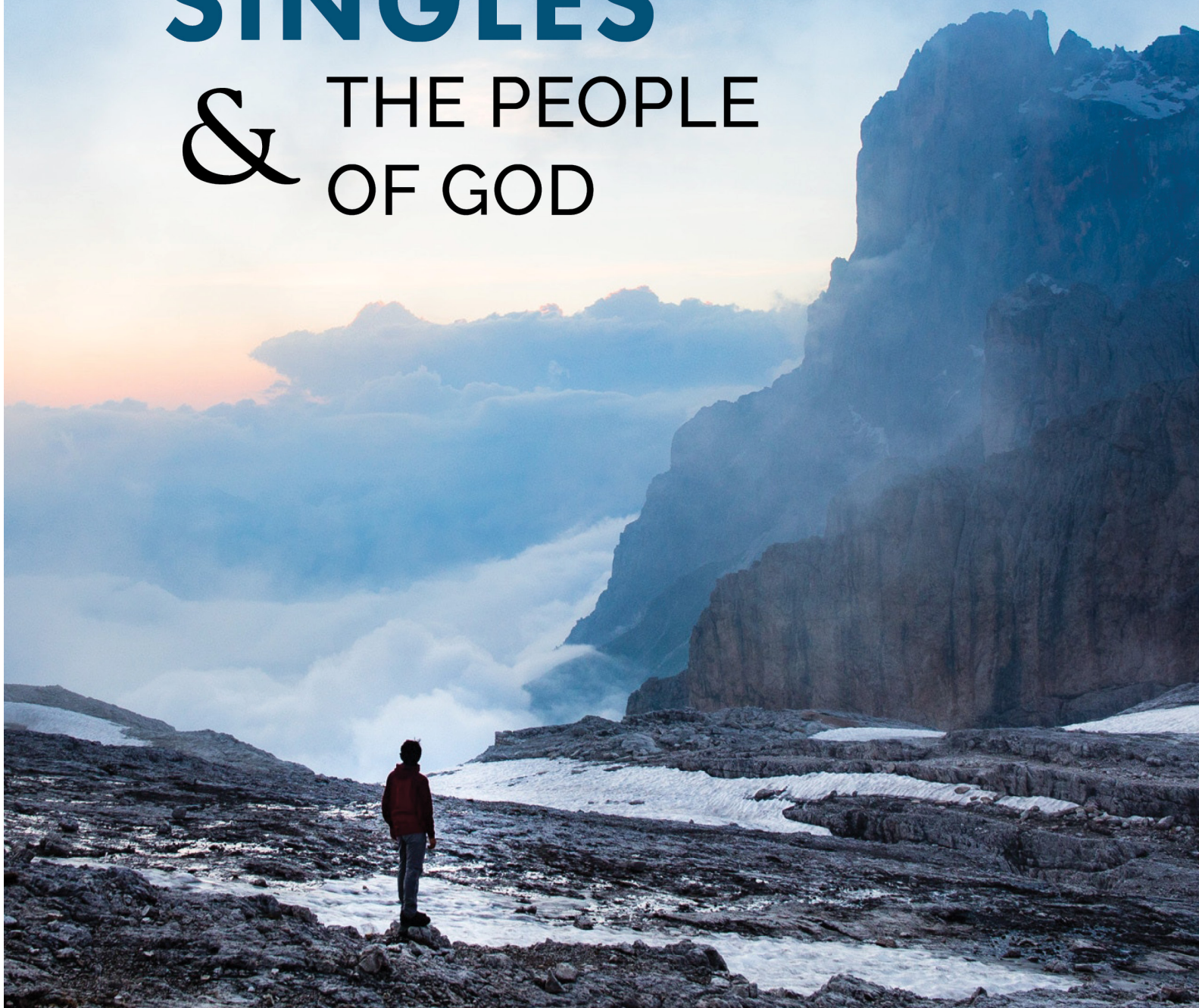


# PERSPECTIVE

MARCH 2019

## **SINGLES** & THE PEOPLE OF GOD



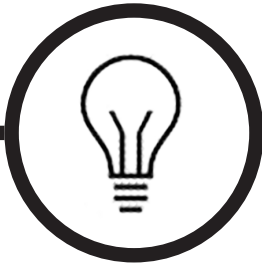
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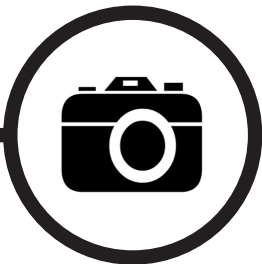
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## Singles and the People of God

When my family and I came to Mount Vernon in 2008, the church didn't know where we best belonged in Sunday School. At that time, Sunday School was divided into life-stages: singles, young married, young families, etc. We were an anomaly. We were in our late-twenties with two kids and one on the way. On our first Sunday, someone said, "You're the age of most of the young marrieds, but you have multiple young kids. You can also go to the young families class, but they're older." We settled in with young families. But for a number of reasons, it often felt like we "didn't belong."

Feelings of not belonging are often experienced when you're the minority of a group. It doesn't necessarily mean the group has done something wrong or that the person should not be part of the group. It's just the reality, and one commonly experienced by singles in a church.

For 2019, we're focusing on a culture of family ministry: "We are *one family*, partnering with parents to show the next generation the way of Christ."<sup>1</sup> We have structured our family ministry as a "family-equipping ministry,"<sup>2</sup> where the church partners with parents in their responsibility of raising their children in the way of the Lord. Thus, everyone in this *one family* has a responsibility of showing the next generation the way of Christ. What does that look like for single Christians?

Headline: Singles need the church, and the church needs singles. We all need each other's help to "walk by the Spirit" as a powerful, evangelistic, and discipling witness, showing the next generation the way of Christ.

### SOME IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

For the sake of clarity, here are a few qualifications about this article. First, this is not an article on dating. If you're thinking, "Here we go again! Another dating advice article," then let me remove that anxiety from the beginning.

Second, being single in a church is not a monolithic experience. There are young singles, older singles, widowed singles, divorced singles, and singles with the gift of singleness at Mount Vernon. Space doesn't permit me to qualify every comment based on the circumstances of being single. So not everything will be equally applicable to all singles.

Third, our relationship to God and Christ, not our marital status, is the basis of our identity. We assign labels to each other — "Have you met Tom, the tall single guy?" Or "I had a great conversation with Jill. You know, the new mom with twins." Such labels have helpful and unhelpful connotations, depending on the context. My use of them here is for the convenience of communication, not as a matter of identity. Our identity is rooted in being made in God's image and remade into the image of Christ.

### UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFICULTY OF KNOWING WHERE TO BELONG

Not every single Christian struggles with loneliness and a sense of belonging in a local church, but many do. It helps to understand the narrative they often find (or more accurately, don't find) themselves in that contributes to a feeling of not belonging.

It is still the culture's expectation that kids graduate high school, go to college, start a career, find a spouse, buy a house, and have kids. That is still our societal "normal," even within a culture that redefines gender, sexuality, marriage, and family. Thus, singles can feel like the spotlight is always on their progress in that narrative. Holidays with family include celebrating the birth of a new niece or nephew coupled with grandma asking, "So when are you going to get married?!" A trip to Target for Joanna Gaines' home decor includes driving past the "stork" parking spot (a controversial topic in-and-of-itself). As a dad with kids, I'm inconvenienced by having to walk further. But for the single girl or infertile wife, she's reminded that she "hasn't yet arrived." This highlights a single's battle with belonging according to cultural expectations.

Churches don't have the best track record either. From segregated small groups to singles ministries, from topical sermons on marriage and parenting to the "biblical dating" culture, evangelical churches haven't always made singles feel equal in value and purpose. Furthermore, unhelpful comments aren't limited to grandma. Members stereotype singles with their remarks and advice. Parents of newborns talk about better understanding the heavenly Father's love for them, an experience singles long for. One author said single Christians are "left feeling angry, disheartened, confused, or any other combination of unpleasant feelings" from their churches.<sup>3</sup> This is often why singles change churches. Churches and single Christians both bear some blame for this. Nonetheless, it's important to know this experience exists.

Then there is the Bible's story. Obviously, God's word is without error and fully sufficient for everyone's life and godliness, regardless of marital status. Yet, marriage is a central theme for carrying along God's plan of redemption. Creation begins with the institution of marriage as a fundamental building block to a fruitful society (Gen. 1:28; 2:18–24). God then promises to defeat Satan through Eve's offspring (Gen. 3:18). Later, God promises to bless all the nations through Abraham and his wife Sarah (12:1–3; 15:1–11). That promise is carried along through the drama of widowed women like Naomi and Ruth (Ruth 1:1–5, 4:18–20; Mt. 1:5–6). And what about the wisdom literature? Job is about a guy who lost his family. Proverbs was written by a father to his son. The Song of Solomon is a sensual love story of a husband and wife. So the Old Testament is full of marriage and family.

The theme of marriage and family dims but is not extinguished in the New Testament. Jesus wasn't married, so that's a big deal. But he is also the most extraordinary man to ever live. Jesus' first public miracle of turning water into wine was at a wedding, which is the best wedding story ever (Jn. 2:1–12). Jesus used marriage and children to illustrate his teaching (Mt. 18:1–6; Lk. 14:7–11). Paul says one of God's purposes for marriage was to reflect the relationship between Christ and the church (Eph. 5:22–33). John's vision of the future heaven and earth was a wedding (Rev. 21:1–9).

What's the point? Marriage and family are central themes of the biblical pattern and story. Add to it the culture's and church's expectations, and we can understand why singles, of any demographic, struggle with belonging, identity, and purpose in the church.

That struggle can turn to loneliness. Discontentment is a universal struggle; it's not a respecter of anyone's marital status. But not everyone's discontentment with life is ripe for loneliness like singleness. A single's struggle with discontentment and loneliness isn't necessarily caused by some inherent selfishness. It's just the reality of being in a culture where they don't fit the norm. It's part of learning that Christ is all-sufficient even in a community of relationships. For some singles, especially divorced and widowed, their singleness is the difficult providence God uses to sanctify them. Therefore, if we're to understand singles and the people of God, seek to know their difficulty of belonging and the pain of loneliness.

## HEIRS OF THE PROMISE TOGETHER<sup>4</sup>

Have you ever asked why marriage and family are so interwoven in the story of the Old Testament? It's, in part, because of God's promises to Abraham. It's Abraham's offspring, Jesus Christ, who brought blessings to the nations. In Galatians, Paul says those who have faith in Christ's atoning work become sons and daughters of Abraham and heirs of God's promises (3:7, 14, 29; 4:6–7). That sounds routine to us, but it was a radical assertion that exceeded any expectation of first-century Jews.

God promised Abraham numerous offspring and to bless all "families of the earth" through them (Gen. 12:2–3). This is why marriage and family carry along God's promised plan in the Old Testament. God fulfilled his promise by forming the nation of Israel and expanded on his promises through David (2 Sam. 7:12–13). This nation was distinguished from all others by faithful adherence to God's law and exclusive worship of God (Deut. 4:8). The family played a vital role in teaching the law to the next generation (Deut. 6:1–9).

But, as we know, Israel failed dismally; thus, the prophets said God would fulfill his promises through a single offspring (Is. 11:1–5). That's why Galatians 3:16 is such a radical claim to Paul's readers: "Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring." It does not say, 'And to offsprings,' referring to many, but referring to one, 'And to your offspring,' who is the Christ." Jesus, not ethnic Israel, fulfilled God's promises to Abraham. Therefore, God's promised blessings do not come through Israel's commitment to the law but faith in Jesus' atoning death on the cross (Gal. 3:10–14).

What does this mean for singles and the people of God? In the church, all the blessings are for all who have faith in Christ. In the New Covenant community, none of God's promises are contingent upon any status that gives people value and purpose. Thus, Paul said, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (Gal. 3:28–29). Add to the list single or married with or without kids. Furthermore, all members of the community have the privilege of making spiritual offspring by proclaiming those promises to the next generation. Married and singles can be equally about the task of making disciples.

Everyone has equal value and purpose in the church. One of the things the next generation needs to see are singles making a full throttle investment in a local church. I'm thankful for how singles at Mount Vernon serve. Singles are or have served in these public ministries:

- ✦ Deacon or officer of the church
- ✦ Numerous ministry teams, e.g., greeting, women's, missions, finance, etc.
- ✦ Teaching Sunday School at all age levels
- ✦ Serving in children's and youth ministry
- ✦ Helping lead worship on Sunday morning in music, singing, Scripture reading, serving the Lord's Supper, or collecting the offering
- ✦ Sharing their testimony at a Church in Conference
- ✦ Going on mission trips
- ✦ Praying and giving the devotional on Sunday evenings

The list goes on. The church needs the gifts and service of singles. The next generation needs to see them serving publicly and privately.

### WALKING BY THE SPIRIT TOGETHER

We should never underestimate the evangelistic power of opening our homes and lives before watching children. Children learn the way of Christ, not just from singles in their Sunday School class but in their homes around the dinner table. They need to see singles and their parents helping each other "walk by the Spirit."

How did Paul apply the truth that we're heirs to the promise? He exhorts us to "walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh," which are "against the Spirit." Walking by the Spirit is characterized by "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal. 5:16–22). The next generation needs to see singles and parents encouraging and holding one another accountable. Three points of instruction:

*Families, open your homes and lives to singles.*

Numerous singles at Mount Vernon have said the one thing they appreciate most is when members of all ages open up their home and lives for them. Through dinners, birthdays, holidays, special occasions, and more, singles gain a real sense of belonging like extended family.<sup>5</sup> Here's how one single at Mount Vernon put it:

"Being single has allowed me more time to spend with families [at MVBC], observing how they love, discipline, and delight in their children. I have been invited to many homes, where I have observed godly families working to glorify Christ in and through their family. I believe that married people experience this as well, but I am so grateful that the Lord placed me at MVBC before I have a family or even a spouse, so that I have the opportunity to see godly examples lived out well. Lord willing, I might have that as well one day, and the time and effort that our church family has taken to invest in my life will affect the way that I view life and family."

Praise God! As a father, we need singles like that in our lives as well. I want my children to see their love for Christ, the church, and our family. They need to hear singles thoughtfully consider future plans around dinner conversations. They need to see patience as they wait on God's plan to unfold. Candace and I need singles to help hold us accountable to being loving, gentle parents. We and our children need encouragement when others see the fruit of our parenting. And it's always fun having energetic singles yapping it up with our kids.

*Singles, befriend and disciple children, especially youth.*

The number of middle schoolers and high schoolers is growing at Mount Vernon. They need singles in their lives. Young singles particularly, you understand the current relational and moral complexities of high school better than me because your experience is more recent. You can uniquely help sophomores commit their anxiety for academic achievement to the Lord. You can help seniors navigate the culture's lies about sexuality and dating. Intentionally carve out time to fold youth into your lives, so they can learn from your instruction and example. Be intentional to show them the way of Christ because in a few years, they may be learning to navigate life like you.

*Singles and parents, give mutual encouragement and accountability.*

We often seek the advice of people in the same season or one season ahead of us. That comes naturally, and there is biblical warrant for it (Titus 2:1–8). But one of the most powerful evangelistic tools is for the next generation to see their parents have mutual encouragement and accountability with people not like them, including singles.

We need the fruit of the Spirit regardless of our marital status. Sanctification is hard. It's hard in singleness, marriage, and parenting. Our biggest problem isn't our station in life. It's not our singleness or lack thereof. It's our sin. Temptations and sin will vary depending on our season in life. But at the heart of it, we all need to "walk by the Spirit" and "not gratify the desires of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16). Singles and parents receive much encouragement and accountability from one another through discipling relationships.

If you have these relationships, praise God. If not, pray for them and seek them out. Also, keep these things in mind when you talk.

Guard against thinking "Oh you have no idea. If you only knew how good you have it!" That's for parents toward the relational freedom singles have and for singles toward the relational bounty parents have. I learned to stop saying, "Only when the kids get \_\_\_\_\_. Only when the kids get out of diapers. Only when the kids get in youth." That implies something better is always on the horizon. In turn, I failed to see God's good gifts to me now. Singles and parents can help remind each other of God's current goodness in their lives.

Lastly, for married couples and parents specifically, don't expect all your single friends to get married. For that matter, be prepared that some of your own children may never get married. Many, if not most singles I know, want to. At times, they need wisdom for how to handle their desire. God may use you to direct them to a future spouse. Yet, also know when to side with your single brother or sister in seeking contentment that God may have other plans. At that point, they need their hope in Christ's sufficiency and God's love bolstered with your encouragement and accountability.

## CONCLUSION

I'm thankful for the singles who took the time to talk with me and give me honest feedback about their experience at Mount Vernon. I wish I could share all the encouraging things they said. (Take time yourself to talk to them.) I praise God for them and Mount Vernon's investment in them. I also appreciate the honest, constructive criticism. It's helped me know how to better relate as a pastor and brother in Christ. Most of all, I thank God that everyone is of equal value and purpose in the church. May God use all of us to show the next generation the way of Christ.

– Brad Thayer

<sup>1</sup> Aaron Menikoff, "The Church as One Family," *Perspective*, January 2019. [mvpchurch.org/files/Perspective\\_January\\_2019.pdf](http://mvpchurch.org/files/Perspective_January_2019.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Kyle Gross, "Parenting with Parents," *Perspective*, February 2019. [mvpchurch.org/files/Perspective\\_February\\_2019.pdf](http://mvpchurch.org/files/Perspective_February_2019.pdf)

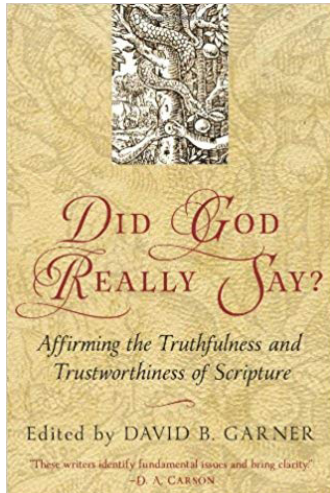
<sup>3</sup> Gina Dalfonzo, *One by One: Welcoming the Singles in Your Church* (Baker Books, 2017), 69.

<sup>4</sup> Much of this section is taken from Barry Danylak, "Good News for the Gentiles: How Abraham's Offspring Come from Jesus Along," *Redeeming Singleness: How the Storyline of Scripture Affirms the Single Life* (Crossway, 2010), 115-141.

<sup>5</sup> Jennifer Grisham, "5 Things Singles Wish Married Couples Knew." [www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/5-things-singles-wish-married-couples-knew/](http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/5-things-singles-wish-married-couples-knew/) Accessed February 21, 2019.

## Did God Really Say?

Edited by David B. Garner



Since the Garden of Eden, Satan has challenged, and humanity has doubted, the veracity of God's Word. *Did God Really Say? Affirming the Truthfulness and Trustworthiness of Scripture* is a collection of seven essays, edited by David B. Garner, that defends the reliability of Scripture through three particularly helpful arguments:

*Scripture is trustworthy because God is truth.* The Bible clearly teaches that God is truth (John 14:6) and that His Word is truth. (John 17:17). However, many attack Scripture's truthfulness by arguing that, because human authors wrote Scripture, it

contains errors. Garner and his co-authors effectively refute this argument by asserting that Scripture is foundationally and essentially divine. Thus, to question Scripture's truthfulness is to question God's sovereignty in choosing to inspire human authors to write down His words in exactly the way He intended to reveal Himself to humanity.

*Scripture is trustworthy because it is self-authenticating.* By self-authentication, Garner and his co-authors mean that Scripture needs no other authority to be justified and absolutely authoritative in what it says. Catholics frequently attack Scripture's self-authentication by arguing that the canon, meaning the books of the Bible, is authoritative because the Church declared it to be. Garner and his co-authors contest this view by arguing that Scripture's beauty, efficacy, and harmony confirm that it is from God. In other words, the early church's adoption of the canon did not make it authoritative. Rather, Scripture's canonization was just a natural and inevitable outworking of the self-authenticating nature of Scripture.

*Scripture is trustworthy because it clearly conveys God's objective truth.* Modern scholars argue that one cannot understand Scripture without special training in textual criticism and a deep understanding of historical context. Others argue that Scripture's meaning is wholly subjective. Garner and his co-authors assert that both of these views are meritless, as God created mankind in His image, so we have the capacity to understand His Word, and God's Word clearly declares its purpose: that we "may know that [we] have eternal life." (I John 5:13). Scripture's truth is objective and understandable because it comes from God.

*Did God Really Say?* is a useful tool for any Christian who wants to think more deeply about how a Christian should relate to Scripture. The only way we can combat our deep-seated temptation to doubt God is by meditating deeply on Scripture's truthfulness and trustworthiness.

– RECOMMENDED BY JAMES RULEY

### Excerpts From the Book

## 1

"History attests that the health of each generation of the church corresponds to its reverence for God's Word. As the view of Scripture goes, so goes the church; as the commitment to God's living Word thrives, God's people thrive. An unswerving reliance upon Scripture produces an active, faithful, vital, and expanding church. When the functional authority of Scripture becomes irrelevant to God's people, the church inescapably abandons its vital mission and becomes an extraneous, spiritually anemic force."

– Introduction, p. xvii

## 2

"God so associates himself with his word that rejection of that Word is a rejection of its divine author. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God's spoken prohibition relative to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they alienated themselves from God. To disobey God's Word is to disobey him. To trust God's Word is to trust him. To hear the Word is to hear him."

– B.B. Warfield's Church Doctrine of Inspiration, p.28

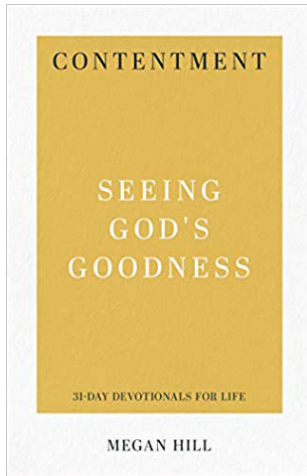
## 3

"God's enemy injects doubt about the Creator by questioning the authoritative clarity of his Word. Did he really say? Did he really mean? The wily rhetoric persuaded Adam and Eve to implement a new self-reliant hermeneutic in which they pitted their created intellects against their Creator's clear commands."

– Did God Really Say, p.159

## Contentment: Seeing God's Goodness

Written by Megan Hill



*Seeing God's Goodness.* That's the subtitle of this little book on contentment, and it's aptly named. Think about it for just a minute. God's goodness IS ever-present. God IS good. He's faithful, totally truthful, unfailingly strong, and perfect in every way. He also displays his goodness for us to see, savor, and cherish. He's constantly on the move, working his will for his glorious purposes. Yet, we often don't see it. We interact with challenges in our lives as if God isn't good, or at least like his goodness is impossible for us to see. We're often blind to God's goodness.

Megan Hill's book on contentment acts as a guided tour through different aspects of God's goodness. She aims to open our eyes to the reality of God's goodness. Through the 31 days of devotions, we are driven through the fields of theology. Hill points out God's provision for us in salvation on our left and Christ's example for us on our right. We're helped to notice the careful way God's has designed the lay of the land. Hill helps her readers to see their circumstances from a different viewpoint. The tour lasts 31 days. By the end, Hill's readers are generally in the same circumstances as when they began reading. However, a shift in perspective can make a world of difference.

This short book on contentment isn't 31 days to a better life. It couldn't be, because contentment has very little to do with our circumstances. It's a learned fruit (Phil. 4:11-13). Hill recognizes that misconception and ends every chapter of her book with a section intended to help the reader apply the theology to real life. You could read this short book and benefit from Hill's words, but the real benefit of the book comes from the helpful applications at the end of the reading for each day.

Contentment is a learned fruit. We need to know about God's goodness in order to trust it. We also need to practice seeing God's goodness in every season. Megan Hill's helpful book does those two things very well.

– RECOMMENDED BY MEG KING

### Excerpts From the Book

## 1

"Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition."

– Jeremiah Burrows - *Abundant Life* p.16

## 2

"A discontented heart denies the graciousness of God, acting as if it had not received everything from God's hand and arrogantly demanding from God as if it deserved something better."

– *I Have Nothing*, p.34

## 3

"The secret of contentment is not in having "enough" money (or status or relationships or education). Rather, the secret of contentment is placing our ultimate hope in something secure: The Lord will never leave us or forsake us; he is our help, so there is no reason to fear."

– *God's Care for Me is More Than Life's Changing Circumstances*, p.40

## 4

"Biblical thanksgiving is not merely false cheer slapped on the surface of otherwise bad circumstances. Biblical thanksgiving is our acknowledgment that God is accomplishing his eternal purposes, even when we cannot see what he is doing."

– *Thanksgiving is God's Will for Me*, p.59



# MARCH

*These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message. Take Up & Read!*

March 1	Revelation 20:11–21:8	<b>March 17</b>	<b>James 3:13–18</b>
March 2	Zephaniah 3:14–20	March 18	James 4:1–10
<b>March 3</b>	<b>Zephaniah 3:14–20</b>	March 19	James 4:11–17
March 4	Exodus 12:1–13	March 20	James 5:1–12
March 5	Exodus 6:1–13	March 21	James 5:13–20
March 6	Exodus 11	March 22	Genesis 4:1–16
March 7	Exodus 12:14–32	March 23	James 4:1–10
March 8	John 1:19–34	<b>March 24</b>	<b>James 4:1–10</b>
March 9	Exodus 12:1–13	March 25	1 Chronicles 21:18–22:1
<b>March 10</b>	<b>Exodus 12:1–13</b>	March 26	1 Chronicles 21:1–17
March 11	James 3:13–18	March 27	Genesis 22
March 12	James 1:1–18	March 28	2 Chronicles 3:1–17
March 13	James 1:19–26	March 29	Romans 11:33–12:2
March 14	James 2:1–13	March 30	1 Chronicles 21:18–22:1
March 15	Isaiah 32:1–17	<b>March 31</b>	<b>1 Chronicles 21:18–22:1</b>
March 16	James 2:14–3:18		

\*Sermons in bold

# TAKE UP & READ

# NEW MEMBERS

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**Josh & Hannah  
Black**  
Olivia (6),  
John Isaac (3),  
James (1)



**Matt & Christie  
Gerber**



**Ronnie & Patria  
Herrera**  
Abdiel (3)



**Samuel  
& Rochelle  
Soyoola**



**Melissa Vaughn**



*Mount Vernon*  
BAPTIST CHURCH