

FOR SINGLE CHRISTIAN MEN  
IN THEIR 30s

# UNFINISHED

REJECTING THE MYTH THAT YOU'RE  
INCOMPLETE IF SINGLE



TRUTH.  
PURPOSE.  
BROTHERHOOD.

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WHETHER OR NOT  
SHE EVER COMES.

# DANIEL MARVA

FOREWORD BY A FELLOW TRAVELER



# UNFINISHED

*Rejecting the Myth That You're Incomplete if Single*

A Book for Single Christian Men in Their 30s

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*For every man who has sat alone in a church pew  
and wondered if God had forgotten him.*

**He hasn't.**

*"He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord."*

*— 1 Corinthians 7:32 (KJV)*

*"It is not good that man should be alone."*

*— Genesis 2:18 (KJV)*

*"Both are true. The tension between them is where we live."*

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# Foreword

I have been in ministry for over a decade. I have been in the church my entire life.

In that time, I have sat with men in some of the most honest moments of their lives — men processing failure, men rebuilding after divorce, men who walked away from faith and found their way back, men who never left but quietly wondered if God had forgotten about them anyway.

There is one conversation I keep having. It doesn't always start the same way, because the men who need it come from very different places. Some of them have lived carefully and faithfully and still find themselves single in their thirties, confused and quietly ashamed. Some of them have lived hard — made choices they regret, burned bridges, carried weight that still shows up in their eyes when they think nobody is looking. Some of them have been divorced. Some of them have children they're raising alone or from a distance. Some of them walked away from the church for years and came back to find that not much had been saved for them.

What they share is this: they are single. They are Christian — or trying to be. And they feel like they don't quite fit anywhere.

This book was written for all of them. Not just the ones with clean records and patient dispositions. Not just the men who "did everything right." Every single man carrying the weight of an unfinished story — whatever put him there.

I wish I had this book years ago. I would have put it in a lot of hands.

Read it honestly. Let it find you where you actually are — not where you think you should be.

— *A Minister and Fellow Traveler*

## **Preface: Why I Wrote This**

I almost didn't write this book.

For a long time, I convinced myself that writing it would be an act of self-pity — a public confession of something I should have been able to fix by now. I'm in my thirties. I'm a Christian. I believe in love, in commitment, in the goodness of marriage. And yet here I am, single, writing a book about it.

The thing that finally pushed me to write was a conversation I had with a friend — a good man, a serious man, someone who had poured himself into his faith and his community for years. We were sitting in his car outside a church event neither of us particularly wanted to attend, and he said something I won't forget.

"Sometimes I feel like I'm watching my own life through a window. Like everyone else is in there, and I'm still outside with my face pressed against the glass."

I knew exactly what he meant. I had felt it too — not as a constant ache, but as a recurring one. The Sunday morning when every seat seemed filled with couples and families. The holiday gathering where the same well-meaning relatives asked the same well-meaning questions. The quiet of a Friday night that felt less like peace and more like absence.

But here's what bothered me more than the feeling itself: we had no language for it. No framework. No honest conversation happening in the church that named what we were actually experiencing without either dismissing it or drowning in it.

So I wrote this book. Not as an expert. Not as someone who has it figured out. But as a fellow traveler who got tired of waiting for someone else to say the thing out loud.

I'm saying it now. And I hope it finds you wherever you are.

# Introduction: The Waiting Room

There is a particular kind of exhaustion that comes from waiting for something that may or may not ever arrive.

It is different from the exhaustion of hard work, or grief, or illness. Those forms of tiredness have a shape to them — a beginning, a middle, and usually an end. This one doesn't. It just sits with you. Quietly. Persistently. Often disguised as something else entirely.

If you are a single Christian man in your thirties, you know this exhaustion. You may not call it that. You might call it restlessness, or frustration, or loneliness. You might not call it anything at all — just a background hum that you've learned to live alongside, the way you learn to live alongside a sound outside your apartment window that you eventually stop noticing.

But it's there.

And somewhere underneath it, if you're being really honest — which this book is going to ask you to be — is a question that's harder to say out loud than almost any other:

*"Is something wrong with me?"*

I want to address that question directly, right here in the introduction, before we go any further.

No. There is not something wrong with you.

But there is something wrong with the story you've been handed — and this book is about that story, where it came from, why it's false, and what to do with your one actual life while you figure that out.

## The Myth

Here is the myth, stated plainly: A Christian man becomes complete when he gets married. Before that, he is unfinished. He is in preparation. He is becoming the man he will eventually be, once a wife and family give him something to be that man for.

This myth is rarely stated this baldly in churches. It doesn't have to be. It lives in the subtext of sermon illustrations that always feature married men. In the small groups organized entirely around life stages that assume you have a spouse. In the well-meaning comments from people who love you — "Just wait, God has someone amazing for you" — which, however kindly meant, carry within them the assumption that your present season is a prelude, not a chapter.

Over time, the myth becomes the air you breathe. And when you breathe something long enough, you stop noticing it's even there.

## **What This Book Is**

Unfinished is an attempt to clear that air.

It is not an anti-marriage book. Marriage is good. It is a profound gift and calling, and if God brings that into your life, receive it with joy. Nothing in these pages is meant to diminish that.

But this book is not only for the man who has "done everything right" and is patiently waiting for God to deliver a wife. That man is real and his struggle is real — but he is the easy crowd.

This book is also for the man who has made a mess of things. Who has a history he's not proud of — relationships that ended badly, choices that cost him, sins he hasn't fully forgiven himself for. Who wonders if his singleness is, in some sense, a consequence. Who doesn't feel like he deserves to be in a conversation about God's faithfulness because he hasn't always been faithful back.

It is for the man who was married and isn't anymore — who carries the particular weight of divorce, who wonders what his story is now that the story he planned has ended.

It is for the man who has been in and out of the church. Who left for a season, lived how he wanted, and came back to find that the church had mostly moved on without him and wasn't quite sure what to do with the version of him that returned.

It is for the man who has children but no partner. Who is doing his best in a situation he never chose, carrying a kind of love and a kind of loneliness simultaneously that most people don't know how to acknowledge.

It is for the man who doesn't fit neatly into the "good Christian single man" template that most books on this subject seem to have in mind.

All of you. This book is for all of you.

Because the truth that you are not unfinished, not forgotten, not beyond redemption — that truth is not reserved for men with clean records. It is, if anything, most urgently needed by the men whose records are not clean. Grace is not a reward for the tidy. It is the only thing that makes any of us whole.

Let's begin.

# PART ONE

## THE WOUND

*Before we can talk about what is true, we have to talk about what hurts.  
And we have to be honest about it – not to wallow, but because unnamed  
wounds don't heal. They just go underground.*

# Chapter 1: The Lie You've Been Told

You probably first heard it at a wedding.

Maybe you were a groomsman, standing up front while the bride walked in. Maybe you were seated in a pew, watching two people make promises that seemed both terrifying and beautiful. And the pastor said something — some version of the idea that marriage is the completion of a man, the fulfillment of a divine design, the moment when two become one and everything finally makes sense.

And you thought: yes. That's what I want. That's what I'm working toward.

That's the moment the lie took root.

Not in the wedding itself — weddings are wonderful. Not in the longing — longing for love and companionship is deeply human and completely valid. The lie took root in what you absorbed without realizing it: that until that moment comes for you, you are in a kind of holding pattern. That your full life, your real life, the life where you become who you're supposed to be — that life is waiting on the other side of a ring.

## Where the Lie Lives

The lie doesn't always announce itself. It is subtle. Ambient. Here are some of the ways it shows up in a single Christian man's life in his thirties:

You delay decisions — about where to live, how to furnish your home, what traditions to build — because those things feel like "couple decisions," or because part of you doesn't want to get too settled and miss a sign.

You feel a low-grade shame at church events that are clearly designed for families, and you compensate by either over-explaining your singleness or pretending you don't notice the awkwardness.

You measure your spiritual maturity against men who are husbands and fathers, as though their roles confer a kind of authority that yours doesn't.

You have quietly, secretly wondered if your singleness is a consequence — a sign that something you did or failed to do has delayed God's blessing. As if your marital status is a spiritual report card.

These thoughts are not signs of weakness. They are signs of how deeply the lie has permeated the water supply of Christian male culture. They are responses to an environment, not indictments of your character.

## **The Source of the Lie**

Where does this idea come from? A few places.

Some of it comes from a genuine, well-intentioned reading of Genesis. God said it is not good for man to be alone. God created woman as a helper and companion. God designed marriage as a reflection of his relationship with his people. All of that is true. But somewhere along the way, the church took "it is not good to be alone" and extended it beyond its original meaning into something like "a man who is alone is not yet good." That is not what the text says. And it contradicts the testimony of the New Testament, which we'll get to in Part Two.

Some of it comes from cultural conservatism that tied Christian manhood tightly to family leadership. The good Christian man, in this framing, is the husband who leads his household, the father who raises godly children, the patriarch who anchors the community. These are beautiful callings. But when they become the only image of mature Christian manhood, they quietly exclude anyone who doesn't fit the frame.

And some of it — we should be honest about this — comes from your own heart. Because longing for love is not a lie. The desire to be known and chosen by another person is real and good. The lie is not in the desire. The lie is in what you've been told the desire means about you until it's fulfilled.

## **Naming It**

The first step to freedom from a lie is to name it clearly.

So let me ask you: in what ways have you lived as though your life hasn't started yet? In what areas have you been waiting for marriage to give you permission to fully inhabit your own existence?

Write it down if you need to. This is not a rhetorical question.

Because until you see the lie, you can't reject it. And until you reject it, you'll keep letting it run the show from backstage — shaping your decisions, coloring your self-perception, and keeping you one foot out the door of your own life.

You are not incomplete. You have just been living inside a story that told you that you were.

Time to step outside it.

## **Chapter 2: How the Church Got This Wrong**

I love the church. I want to say that before I say anything else.

I love the church because I have seen what it can be at its best — a community that shows up, that carries grief, that tells the truth, that points toward something beyond itself. I have been held by the church in hard seasons in ways I cannot fully articulate. I am not here to tear it down.

But I am here to say, as honestly as I can: the church has largely failed single men. Not out of malice. Not even out of indifference, exactly. But out of a series of assumptions so deeply embedded that they've become invisible — and invisible assumptions cause invisible damage.

### **The Family-First Architecture**

Walk into most evangelical churches and pay attention to the architecture — not the physical building, but the organizational architecture. The programs, the small groups, the sermon series, the felt needs that are assumed.

There will almost certainly be a vibrant children's ministry. A robust women's Bible study. A couples' retreat. A men's group that, if you look closely, is largely composed of husbands and fathers talking about how to be better husbands and fathers.

Where is the single man in this picture? He is welcome, of course. The church is not excluding him. But he is a guest in a house designed for someone else. The furniture doesn't quite fit. The conversation keeps returning to rooms he has never been in.

Over time, this produces a specific kind of alienation. Not dramatic enough to cause a man to leave — just persistent enough to make him feel peripheral. Like an adjective in a sentence built around a different noun.

### **The Unspoken Maturity Ladder**

Here is something else the church communicates, usually without words: there is a maturity ladder, and the rungs go — single young man, dating seriously, engaged, married, parent. Each rung represents growth. Each rung unlocks a new level of responsibility, respect, and belonging in the community.

A man in his mid-thirties who has never married is, in this framework, stuck on the first rung. No matter how much he has grown spiritually, how deeply he serves, how faithfully he shows up — he has not climbed the ladder in the way the community recognizes and rewards.

This is not always said aloud. But it is felt. Keenly and repeatedly.

I have watched men drift away from churches not because they lost their faith, but because they got tired of feeling like a work in progress in a community that had moved on without them.

## **What the Church Should Know**

Here is what I want church leaders to hear, and what I want you — single man reading this — to be able to articulate when the time is right:

We are not waiting to become real members of the community. We are real members of the community now. We have gifts, capacity, perspective, and time that married men with young families often do not have. We are not a demographic to be ministered to — we are a resource to be deployed.

We need friendship, not programming. We do not need a "singles group" that feels like a spiritual holding pen. We need to be genuinely integrated into the life of the congregation — invited into homes, included in conversations, mentored by men who see us as peers in the faith rather than projects.

We need to be allowed to be honest. The culture of Christian male stoicism — the unspoken rule that men don't talk about loneliness, about longing, about the specific weight of navigating sexuality and desire without a marriage covenant — is slowly suffocating men who need to speak and be heard.

The church got some of this wrong. And the first step toward getting it right is for someone to say so.

Consider this that someone.

## Chapter 3: The Weight of the Question

There is a question that most single Christian men in their thirties carry around like a stone in a coat pocket. It doesn't come up in casual conversation. It rarely makes it into prayer, at least not the version of prayer we perform in front of others. But it's always there, adding its quiet weight to everything.

The question is: What is wrong with me?

Or in its more theological form: What have I done — or failed to do — that has landed me here?

I want to take this question seriously, because I think the way most Christian culture deals with it — by quickly reassuring the asker that nothing is wrong and God has a plan — actually makes things worse. It short-circuits a conversation that needs to be had. It offers comfort before it offers understanding. And it leaves the man alone with his question, just slightly more ashamed that he asked it.

### The Three Versions of the Question

In my experience, the question "what is wrong with me" tends to show up in three distinct forms, each pointing to a different underlying wound.

The first form is comparative. This is the version that arrives at weddings and baby showers and Instagram feeds. You look around at men your age — men you went to college with, men you served with in ministry, men who seem, if you're being ruthless about it, no more spiritually mature or relationally capable than you — and they are married. They have children. They are in the next chapter. And you are still here. The question becomes: why them and not me?

The second form is theological. This is the darker version, the one that most men won't admit to out loud. It is the suspicion that your singleness is not random — but that it is in some way a response from God. A withholding. A consequence. And for some men, this suspicion has actual evidence attached to it. They can point to specific choices, specific seasons, specific moments where they went the wrong direction. For those men, the question isn't abstract. It feels like a verdict.

The third form is existential. This is the quietest and perhaps the most pervasive version. It is not a specific comparison or a specific theological suspicion. It is simply a

free-floating sense that something in you is fundamentally not enough. Not magnetic enough. Not interesting enough. Not put-together enough. It doesn't need evidence. It runs beneath the evidence.

## **A Word to the Man With a History**

I want to stop here and speak directly to a specific man — the one who picked up this book not because he's been patiently waiting and faithfully living, but because he's been through it. The one who made choices he regrets. Who has a past that's complicated. Who has failed people he loved, or been failed by them, or both.

Maybe you were in a relationship — or several — that went places they shouldn't have gone. Maybe you've been divorced, and you're not entirely sure whose fault it was, but you carry it. Maybe you spent years running from God and came back to find that the church had a version of you that no longer fit the man standing in front of them. Maybe you have children without a partner and you're doing the math on what your life is supposed to look like now.

The easy crowd for a book like this is the man who has lived carefully and is simply waiting on God's timing. That man deserves help too. But this book is not primarily for him. It is primarily for you — the man with the complicated story. The one who doesn't feel like he has the standing to claim the promises. The one who, when people talk about what God has for single men, quietly wonders if the asterisk at the bottom of that promise has his name on it.

It doesn't.

Grace is not retroactive permission. It is not a reward for the men who kept their records clean. It is the whole point. It is the thing that makes any of this possible for any of us. The man who has blown up his life and found himself in the wreckage is not disqualified from the conversation about wholeness — he may be the one who understands it most clearly, because he knows, without any illusion, that he cannot produce it himself.

Your history is not a verdict on your future. It is part of your story. And God is still writing.

## **Carrying It**

Most men carry these questions alone.

This is partly because Christian culture doesn't give men good tools for emotional honesty. The stoicism runs deep — we are supposed to bring our needs to God, trust the process, and project okayness to the world. Saying "I feel fundamentally unlovable and I'm afraid I will be alone for the rest of my life" is not language that fits neatly into most men's Bible studies.

But carrying it alone has a cost. The question calcifies. It becomes a core belief rather than a passing fear. And core beliefs about your own inadequacy have a way of shaping behavior — making you either paralyzed in relationships, or desperate, or quietly withdrawn from the possibility of them altogether.

## **What the Question Really Is**

Here is what I want to offer before we move on: the question "what is wrong with me" is almost always the wrong question.

Not because nothing in you needs to grow — of course it does, as it does in every human being. But because the question assumes that your singleness is a symptom — that it is pointing to a deficiency that, once located and corrected, would produce the relationship you're looking for. It assumes that the equation is: fix yourself, get the girl. And if the girl hasn't arrived, the problem must still be you.

This is not how life works. It is not how people work. And it is not, as we will see, how God works.

The better question — harder, more honest, more fruitful — is this: Who am I becoming in this season, and what does God want to do with this exact life, right now?

That is the question this book is trying to help you answer.

**PART TWO**  
**THE TRUTH**

*The antidote to a lie is not a feeling. It is a truth, held long enough to  
become a conviction.*

# Chapter 4: What Scripture Actually Says

Let's talk about the Bible.

Not the version of the Bible that gets filtered through cultural assumptions about what Christian manhood is supposed to look like. The actual Bible — the one that, if you read it carefully, says some things about singleness that most of us were never taught in Sunday school.

## Genesis 2: The Context Matters

We begin, inevitably, with Genesis 2:18 — "It is not good that the man should be alone." This verse has carried an enormous amount of weight in Christian conversations about singleness, and it deserves a closer look.

In its original context, God is looking at Adam in the garden — before the fall, before sin, in a state of pure creation — and observing that something is incomplete. The solution God provides is not a task, or a purpose, or a spiritual discipline. It is another person. A companion. A helper. And so Eve is created, and the pattern of marriage is established.

This is beautiful. It is foundational. But notice what it does not say.

It does not say that a man without a wife is not good. It says that the state of aloneness — complete isolation, without any human companionship or community — is not good. The solution to that problem is not exclusively marriage. It is relationship, belonging, community. Marriage is the primary form that takes in the Genesis narrative, but it is not the only form.

When Paul, writing centuries later, says that the unmarried man can give his full attention to the things of God — and that this is actually an advantage — he is not contradicting Genesis. He is extending and expanding the picture. The New Testament does not retract the goodness of marriage. It adds something the Old Testament only hinted at: that there is another way to live that is also fully good, fully human, fully honoring to God.

## 1 Corinthians 7: The Chapter Nobody Preaches

If you have never read 1 Corinthians 7 slowly and carefully, put this book down and do that first. Come back when you're done.

I'll wait.

Okay. What you'll find in that chapter — if you read it without the filter of what you expect Paul to say — is genuinely surprising. Paul, in no uncertain terms, says that singleness is a gift. Not a consolation prize. Not a temporary condition to be endured. A gift from God, for a specific purpose, with specific advantages.

He says the unmarried man is free from the anxieties of the married man. He says the unmarried man can be fully devoted to the Lord. He says, remarkably, that he wishes more people could be as he is — unmarried.

Now, Paul is not saying marriage is bad. He says explicitly that those who marry have not sinned. But his clear preference — expressed plainly, without apology — is for singleness, at least for those who have the capacity for it.

Ask yourself: when did you last hear a sermon that presented singleness this way? Not as a problem, not as a season of preparation, but as a legitimate and even preferred calling?

The silence in most churches on this point is deafening — and it has done real damage to real men.

## **The Completeness Question**

There is one more passage worth sitting with: Colossians 2:10, where Paul writes to Christians — all of them, married and single alike — "ye are complete in him."

Filled. Complete. In Christ.

Not in a spouse. Not in a family. In Christ. This is not a consolation offered to single people while the married ones get the real thing. This is the fundamental reality of Christian identity. You are complete because of what Christ has done, not because of what your relationship status says.

The myth of incompleteness-without-marriage is not just culturally unhelpful. It is, in the strictest sense, theologically wrong. It locates completeness in something other than Christ. And that — however well-intentioned — is a form of idolatry.

You are filled in him. Right now. Today. In your singleness, in your longing, in your confusion and your hope and your ordinary Friday night.

Full.

## **Chapter 5: Jesus Was Single**

This deserves its own chapter. Not because it's a complicated point — it's actually quite simple — but because its implications are so frequently ignored that it needs space to breathe.

Jesus was single.

Jesus — the one Christians believe was the perfect human being, the fullest expression of what it means to be made in the image of God, the man who walked this earth without sin or deficiency — was single his entire life.

He never married. He never had children. He never had a home of his own, or a family table to sit at, or a wife to come home to.

And in Christian theology, his life is described as complete. Perfect. Fully human. Lacking nothing.

### **The Implication**

If the fullest human life ever lived was a single life, then singleness cannot be a deficiency. It cannot, by definition, represent something missing or incomplete. Jesus' singleness was not a gap in his humanity waiting to be filled. It was part of his humanity — part of the life God chose for him, in which God was fully glorified.

This does not mean your life must look like Jesus' life in every particular. It means that the shape of your life right now is not evidence of something wrong with you. Jesus modeled a full, faithful, purposeful life as a single man. The church that claims to follow him should have a lot more to say about that than it typically does.

### **The Loneliness of Jesus**

There is something else worth noting. Jesus experienced loneliness.

In Gethsemane, he asked his closest friends to stay awake with him, and they fell asleep. On the cross, he cried out that God had forsaken him. In John 11, when Mary and

Martha wept for Lazarus, Jesus wept too — not because he didn't know what was about to happen, but because grief is real and human and he was fully both.

Jesus did not model the absence of loneliness. He modeled how to remain faithful in the presence of it. He showed us that loneliness is not a sin, not a sign of something broken, not something to be ashamed of. It is part of the human experience. It was part of his.

And if he walked through it — with honesty, with intimacy with the Father, with the community of his disciples however imperfectly that community showed up — then so can we.

## **Following Him Here**

To follow Jesus is to take his life seriously as a model. Not just his death and resurrection — his life. The way he moved through the world, the relationships he built, the purpose that drove him, the solitude he sought and the community he cultivated.

A single Christian man following Jesus has a template. It is not a template for merely surviving until marriage. It is a template for thriving — for building a life of meaning, depth, purpose, and connection — right now, in this exact season.

Jesus did not wait for his life to begin. Neither should you.

## **Chapter 6: You Are Already Whole**

I want to say something to you directly, and I want you to actually hear it rather than deflecting it with a "yeah, but."

You are already whole.

Not when you find her. Not when you've dealt with every pattern and worked through every wound and become the man you think you're supposed to be before you're "ready" for a relationship. Not when the circumstances line up or the timing clicks or God finally gives you the green light.

Now. As you are. You are whole.

This is not a therapeutic affirmation. It is a theological claim, rooted in what Christ has done, and it is either true or it isn't. I believe it's true. And I believe one of the most important things a single Christian man can do is to stop agreeing, intellectually, that it's true while living as though it isn't.

### **What Wholeness Is Not**

Wholeness does not mean you don't have room to grow. Of course you do — so does every married man, every parent, every pastor, every saint who ever lived. Growth is not evidence of incompleteness; it is evidence of life.

Wholeness does not mean you don't desire a companion. The longing for love is not a symptom of brokenness. It is a sign that you are human and that God has wired you for connection. A whole man can long for marriage. He just doesn't need it to function, to love, to serve, or to be loved.

Wholeness does not mean you feel whole every day. There will be days — guaranteed — where the ache is sharp and the question resurfaces and the lie whispers with unusual confidence. Wholeness is not a feeling. It is a foundation. And foundations hold even when you can't feel them.

And — this is important — wholeness does not mean you have earned it. This is where the message of this book most directly confronts one of the deepest lies that men with complicated pasts carry: the idea that wholeness is reserved for those who deserve it.

That the men who waited faithfully and kept themselves pure get to claim completeness in Christ, while the rest of them are on a kind of spiritual probation — working their way back toward something they forfeited.

That is not the gospel. The gospel is that Christ makes whole what we cannot make whole ourselves — and that his ability to do so is not contingent on the cleanliness of our history. Peter denied him three times and led the early church. Paul murdered Christians and wrote half the New Testament. David committed adultery and murder and is called a man after God's own heart. The Bible is not a record of qualified men. It is a record of God's stubborn insistence on working through unqualified ones.

You are not on probation. You are not in a spiritual waiting room, paying off a debt before wholeness becomes available to you. You are already in Christ. And in Christ, as the scripture says, ye are complete.

## **Living From Wholeness**

Here is what changes when you actually internalize this truth, rather than just agreeing with it in theory:

You stop making decisions from scarcity. When you operate from a deep sense of lack — I am incomplete, I am behind, I am not enough — your decisions reflect that. You settle for relationships that aren't right because at least they're something. You shrink yourself to be more appealing. You perform confidence you don't feel because you're afraid real you isn't marketable. Living from wholeness means making decisions from abundance — choosing well, refusing less than what's good, showing up as yourself because yourself is worth showing up as.

You start inhabiting your own life. The man who believes he's complete will furnish his apartment. He will invest in his friendships. He will commit to a church community. He will build traditions and rhythms and a life that is actually his — not a placeholder life, not a life on hold, but a real and full one. You don't have to wait for a co-author to start writing.

You become a better potential partner. This is almost an aside, but it's worth naming: the man who is whole — who is not desperately seeking a woman to complete him — is far more attractive than the man who is. Not in a manipulative way. But in the simple, undeniable way that a person who is genuinely at peace with themselves draws people in, while a person who radiates anxious need tends to push them away.

You are whole. Live like it.

# **PART THREE**

## **THE LIFE**

*Theology without practice is just ideas. This section is about building an actual life — one worth living now, not someday.*

## **Chapter 7: Brotherhood — The Friendship You're Starving For**

Let me make a diagnosis that I think is accurate for the majority of single Christian men in their thirties, and see if you recognize it.

You are lonely. Not catastrophically — you function fine, you have people in your life, you're not sitting at home staring at walls. But there is a layer of real, meaningful, honest friendship that is missing. The kind of friendship where someone actually knows what's going on with you. The kind where you can say the hard things and not have to manage the other person's reaction. The kind that feels like home.

If I'm right, you probably haven't named it as loneliness. Men rarely do. We tend to call it "being busy" or "just being introverted" or "not being a social person." These may be partially true. But underneath the explanation, the hunger is there.

### **Why Male Friendship Is So Hard**

We live in a cultural moment that is, in many ways, catastrophic for male friendship. Boys are not taught to cultivate emotional intimacy. Adolescence rewards competition over vulnerability. Young adulthood scatters friend groups across geography. Marriage — for those who marry — often causes men to increasingly orient their relational world around their wife and family, letting male friendships quietly atrophy.

And in the church, the male small group often substitutes accountability structures for actual friendship. We gather to check boxes — accountability questions, prayer requests, Bible study — without ever quite getting to the thing underneath. The men in the room know each other's prayer requests but not each other's actual fears.

This is a tragedy. And it is one that single men bear disproportionately, because they don't have a spouse to come home to. The absence of deep friendship is not softened by another kind of intimacy. It just sits there, unaddressed, in the quiet of a home where no one else lives.

### **What Real Brotherhood Looks Like**

I have had, in my life, a small number of friendships that I would call genuinely deep. They did not happen automatically. They required a decision — usually on my part, because men in their thirties don't typically stumble into soul friendship the way they

might have in college — to invest intentionally, to show up consistently, and to go first in vulnerability.

Going first is the key. Someone has to say the true thing before the other person will say the true thing. Someone has to admit the struggle before the other person knows it's safe to admit theirs. In male friendships, that initiation rarely happens on its own. But when one person decides to make it happen, the other almost always responds.

Real brotherhood is not defined by how long you've known each other. It is defined by the depth of what you've allowed each other to see. Depth takes time, but time alone doesn't create depth. Intention does.

## **Building It**

Here is practical advice that I have actually used, not theoretical best practices:

Pick two or three men. Not ten. Not a group. Two or three specific men whose character you respect and whose company you enjoy. Invest in those relationships with unusual intentionality.

Suggest a recurring commitment. Dinner once a month. A standing phone call. A shared hobby. The relationship needs a container — something that holds it and makes it predictable. Spontaneous hangouts are nice, but they don't build the kind of depth that holds when things get hard.

Go first. In the next conversation you have with one of these men, say something true that you wouldn't normally say. Not a dramatic confession — just something real. Something honest. See what happens.

I promise you: most men are starving for exactly what you're starving for. They are just waiting for someone else to go first. Be that person.

## **Chapter 8: Purpose Without a Family Title**

One of the subtle ways the myth of incompleteness damages single men is by obscuring their sense of purpose.

When you believe that your real life begins with marriage, you unconsciously postpone purpose along with everything else. You serve in ministries that feel secondary to the "real" work of raising a family. You pursue career goals without fully investing in them, because part of you is reserving energy for the husband-and-father role that's coming. You live as someone who is getting ready rather than someone who is doing.

The result is a kind of purposelessness-by-default. Not a dramatic loss of direction — just a persistent sense that you haven't quite found your lane. That you're moving, but not quite toward anything.

### **Your Purpose Is Not on Hold**

Here is what I want to push back on, clearly and firmly: your purpose is not downstream from your family role. Your purpose is now. It is here. It is available to you in this exact season, and the season itself may be part of what makes it possible.

Paul's observation in 1 Corinthians 7 was practical, not just idealistic. The unmarried man has time and energy and focus that the married man does not. This is not a consolation prize — it is a genuine advantage, one that history is full of examples of single men using to extraordinary effect.

C.S. Lewis did some of his most formative writing as a single man. Dietrich Bonhoeffer built a theological legacy that has outlasted entire denominations. The apostle Paul established the early church across the known world without a wife to come home to. These are not flukes. They are illustrations of what becomes possible when a man stops treating his singleness as a liability and starts treating it as a resource.

### **Finding Your Purpose**

I am not going to tell you what your purpose is. That is between you and God, and it will emerge in the living, not in the theorizing.

But I will tell you how to find it: stop waiting for clarity before you commit. Most men in their thirties who feel purposeless are waiting for a sense of calling to arrive fully formed before they invest in anything deeply. It doesn't work that way. Purpose emerges through action, not through contemplation.

Pick something you care about — a cause, a community, a craft — and give yourself to it completely, for at least one year. Not halfway, not with one foot out the door in case something better comes along. Completely. At the end of that year, you will know more about your purpose than five more years of waiting and wondering could ever tell you.

The man who knows what he's for is one of the most compelling and attractive people in any room. Not because he's trying to be — because there is something genuinely magnetic about purpose. About a person who is clearly going somewhere and clearly knows why.

Be that man. Not to attract a wife. To actually live your life.

## **Chapter 9: Loneliness, Lust, and the Long Game**

This is the chapter I almost cut.

Not because the content doesn't belong here — it absolutely does. But because it is the hardest chapter to write honestly without tipping into either shame-based moralizing on one side, or a breezy dismissal of the real spiritual stakes on the other.

I am going to try to walk the middle, because that is where most of us actually live.

### **Loneliness**

Loneliness, in a single man's life, is not just an emotional inconvenience. Over time, it becomes a physical and spiritual reality that shapes how you see yourself, how you relate to others, and how you relate to God.

Research consistently confirms what most single people already know: chronic loneliness has measurable effects on health, cognition, and emotional regulation. It is not weakness. It is not a character flaw. It is a consequence of unmet human need, and it deserves to be addressed with the same seriousness we'd give any other significant need.

What does addressing it actually look like? Not performing sociability. Not filling every night with activity so you don't have to sit with the silence. But genuinely, intentionally building the kinds of relationships I talked about in the last two chapters — friendships with depth, community with presence, and a relationship with God that is honest enough to include your actual feelings.

One of the most spiritually formative practices of my own singleness has been learning to pray honestly. Not the polished version. The version where I actually say what I'm feeling — including the anger, the confusion, the longing that sometimes feels like it's going to swallow me. God can handle your honesty. He prefers it to your performance.

### **Lust and the Digital Age**

I am going to be straightforward: pornography is a crisis-level issue among Christian men, and single men are among the most affected. The combination of loneliness, sexual desire, easy access, and the absence of the kind of community that would ask hard questions has created conditions that are taking a serious toll.

I am not here to heap more shame on you. If you are struggling with pornography, you are already deeply familiar with shame, and shame has not solved the problem. It has probably made it worse, because shame thrives in isolation, and isolation is exactly the environment pornography exploits.

What actually helps is not more willpower. It is more honesty, with at least one other person. Not a general prayer request — an actual confession. To an actual human being who knows your name and will still look you in the eye next Sunday. This is terrifying for most men. It is also consistently more effective than any app, filter, or accountability software that operates without relational accountability underneath it.

The goal is not just to stop the behavior. The goal is to address the loneliness and disconnection that the behavior is medicating. Treat the wound, not just the symptom.

## **The Long Game**

The long game, for a single Christian man navigating sexuality and desire, is this: learning to hold your longings without being controlled by them.

This is not suppression. Suppression doesn't work, and it produces religiously compliant men who are emotionally stunted and occasionally explosive. It is what St. Augustine was gesturing toward when he wrote, "Our heart is restless until it rests in Thee" — the redirection of desire toward its ultimate source, not its elimination.

You were made for love. That desire is good. Honor it by refusing to feed it on cheap substitutes, and by building the kind of life where real connection — with God, with friends, and eventually perhaps with a partner — is possible.

## Chapter 9½: The Man With a History

I am adding this chapter because the book needs it — and because most books like this one would quietly skip it.

Everything written so far has a kind of invisible assumed reader underneath it: the man who has been more or less faithfully navigating singleness, wrestling with longing and loneliness but doing so from within a reasonably intact Christian life. Some of you are that man.

But a lot of you are not. And if this book only speaks to the easy crowd, it fails the people who most need it.

So this chapter is for the man whose story is complicated. Not complicated in a vague, everyone-has-struggles kind of way. Complicated in specific, nameable, the-church-does-not-quite-know-what-to-do-with-you kinds of ways. I am going to name some of those situations directly — because unnamed things have too much power, and because you deserve to be seen in the particulars of your actual life, not a sanitized version of it.

### **The Man Who Walked Away and Came Back**

Maybe you were raised in the church. You knew the songs, the scriptures, the handshakes, the language. And then at some point — college, a painful experience, a slow drift, a deliberate choice — you left. Not just skipped a few Sundays. Left. You lived differently. Built a life outside the faith, or outside any faith at all. And then something happened — a crisis, a loss, a moment of clarity, or simply the quiet and relentless pull of a God who would not let you go — and you came back.

Coming back sounds like the happy ending. In the parable of the prodigal son, it is — the father runs, there is celebration, the robe and the ring and the fatted calf. But the parable ends before the morning after. Before the prodigal has to figure out how to navigate a community where the older brother is still resentful, where people remember who he was, where the new version of him does not quite fit anyone's existing category.

That is where many returning men live. You came back to faith, but the faith you came back to is different from the one you left — harder-won, more honest, stripped of the easy certainties that evaporated when life got difficult. And the church you returned to often has only one category for you: restored sinner. Which sounds like grace but

functions like a permanent asterisk. Like you are always being welcomed back, rather than simply welcomed.

And there is a specific ache in that. Because the women you encounter in church circles come with communities behind them — families, mentors, church mothers — who have opinions about who they should marry. Your gap years will come up. Your past will be assessed. Sometimes with kindness. Often with caution. Occasionally with a quiet verdict that is never quite stated aloud.

Here is what I want you to hear: the faith you have now — chosen again, after you knew what walking away actually cost — is not a lesser faith. The man who believes because he was never seriously tempted not to is different from the man who disbelieved, lived in that disbelief, and chose to come back anyway with full knowledge of what it cost him. Both are believers. Only one knows exactly what it is worth.

You do not need to earn your way back to full standing. The father in the parable did not put his son on a probationary period before restoring the relationship. He ran. He restored. He celebrated. That is the nature of the grace you came home to. Stop apologizing for still being in the room.

## **The Man Who Has Become Someone the Church Does Not Recognize**

Some men do not simply walk away and come back carrying regret. They walk away, live fully in what they found, and come back fundamentally changed — not just in behavior, but in who they are. The experiences they had out there shaped them. Stretched them. Broke some things open that may never close again. And the man who walks back into a church at thirty-five is not the same man who left at twenty-two, and pretending otherwise is a kind of violence against his own story.

Maybe you traveled. Lived in cultures that challenged every assumption your upbringing gave you. Maybe you spent years in communities — artistic, academic, activist, or otherwise — where the questions were bigger and more honest than anything you heard in church. Maybe you built a career, developed a mind, formed a set of convictions, and now you are back in a church environment where you sometimes feel like the most complex person in the room and are expected to be the most grateful.

The version of Christian manhood that most churches hold up — the earnest, family-oriented, biblically fluent, culturally conservative man who has never seriously lived anywhere else — is not you. And the gap between that ideal and your actual self can feel insurmountable. Especially in dating. Especially when you are drawn to women who

grew up in the faith, who have a simplicity and a groundedness you admire, and who look at the complexity in your eyes with something between fascination and uncertainty.

You are not too much. You are not disqualified by the breadth of your experience. The church needs men who have actually lived in the world — who can speak to it, who understand it from the inside, who are not afraid of hard questions because they have already asked them and survived. Your complexity is not a liability to be managed. It is a perspective the body of Christ needs.

Find the community that can hold you. Not every church will be able to. That is not a failure of your faith — it is a call to keep looking until you find the one that can.

## **The New Believer From Another World**

Some of the men reading this did not grow up in the church at all. They came to Christian faith from somewhere entirely different — another religion, another philosophy, a life built on foundations the church might call incomplete or mistaken — and they are now navigating what it means to be a single Christian man who does not share the cultural formation that most people around them absorbed from childhood.

The former Hindu may have spent years in genuine devotion, in rigorous spiritual discipline, in a relationship with the sacred that was real and costly. In most Christian communities, he is treated as someone starting from zero. A blank slate to be filled. What is rarely acknowledged is that his interior life is not empty — it is rich, and it is being transformed, not erased, by encounter with Christ. His questions are different. His framework for God, suffering, the self, eternity — all of it is being rebuilt from the ground up. That is one of the most demanding spiritual works a human being can undertake. It deserves to be honored, not rushed.

The former Buddhist brings a capacity for stillness, for the honest examination of suffering, for sitting with what is rather than fleeing into what should be. His questions about impermanence, about the nature of desire, about what genuine contemplative practice looks like inside the Christian tradition — these are not threats to faith. They are gifts to a church that often moves too fast and feels too much. The man who came from Buddhism and found Christ did not leave contemplation behind. He brought it with him.

The former atheist — not the man who simply drifted from church, but the one who thought carefully about faith and concluded it was false, who built his life on that conclusion, and who then encountered something that dismantled it — brings an intellectual seriousness that is genuinely rare. He came to faith not by default, not by

cultural inheritance, but by conviction. Against resistance. His faith is chosen, with full awareness of the cost and the alternatives. That kind of belief does not break easily.

All of these men face a specific challenge in Christian dating culture. The woman raised in the church — whose family has generational faith, who has the vocabulary and the reference points and the community relationships — may look at a man who found Jesus at twenty-eight after years of something else entirely and feel genuine uncertainty. That uncertainty is understandable. It is not the final word.

What matters in a life partner is not the length of their faith history but the depth and the direction of it. The man who came from Hinduism or Buddhism or atheism and has thrown himself into Christ with everything he has is not a riskier partner than the man who has attended church since birth out of cultural habit. The deliberateness of his faith may make him more reliable, not less. The right woman will see that. It may take longer to find her. She is worth the wait.

## **The Man Who Had Relations He Is Not Proud Of**

This is the section most Christian books on singleness would never write. I am writing it because the men who need it deserve to find it somewhere, and silence on their behalf is its own kind of failure.

Some of the men reading this have a sexual and relational history that goes beyond the standard pre-conversion struggles the church has a ready-made category for. These men often carry a specific kind of shame — the kind that whispers that their particular history puts them in a category where grace does not quite reach. I want to name several of these situations directly.

The man who was involved with someone who was married. Maybe you knew going in. Maybe you found out later. Maybe it started as something else and became something you never planned. However it happened, you now carry the weight of having participated in something that threatened a covenant that was supposed to be sacred. That weight is real. The potential harm — to a spouse who did not know, to a family, to yourself — was real. Acknowledging that honestly is not self-punishment. It is integrity.

And it is not the end of your story. When the scribes and Pharisees brought the woman caught in adultery before Jesus in John 8, they wanted him to use her sin as her verdict. He refused. He did not pretend nothing had happened — he told her to go and sin no more. But he also refused to let her accusers define her future by her past. That same refusal is extended to you. The sin was real. The forgiveness is realer.

The man who has had homosexual relations. I want to write this with the care it deserves, because the men in this situation are carrying something the church has historically handled with either condemnation that leaves no room for grace, or a cultural accommodation that skips honest discipleship. Neither serves a man who is genuinely trying to follow Christ and work out what faithfulness means for his sexuality.

If you are a man who has had same-sex experiences — whether as part of a season of searching, a longer relationship, or an ongoing struggle with attraction that you have acted on — you are not uniquely beyond the reach of grace. You are not the single exception to the truth that God meets people where they are and walks with them forward. You are a man, made in the image of God, loved by him, being called toward something. What that something looks like in your specific life is a conversation worth having honestly — with God, with trustworthy pastoral guidance, and with a community that has room for complexity.

What you do not need is more shame. Shame has not helped you and will not. You need the same thing every man in this book needs: truth strong enough to bear the weight of your actual life, and grace wide enough to cover your actual history.

The man who was in a relationship defined by money and power. The sugar daddy arrangement — where you were the older party, spending on a younger woman in exchange for companionship and intimacy. Or the reverse — the man who was kept by an older woman, financially supported in a relationship that was transactional beneath its surface warmth. Or the man who became entangled with a cougar dynamic — older woman, younger man, a particular power arrangement that felt exciting until it felt like something else.

These arrangements leave a specific residue: a confusion about what you are worth, about whether what passed between you was real or purchased, about what genuine intimacy looks like when money and leverage are not part of the equation. They often reveal, underneath the transaction, a hunger — for security, for validation, for connection — that was not being met in legitimate ways. The arrangement was a shortcut to something real. Shortcuts always cost more than they appear to at the moment of entry. You know that now.

The work ahead is learning to find security and worth from a source that does not require you to trade pieces of yourself to access it. That work is available to you. It is also the most important work you can do before you try to build something genuine with someone else.

## **The Divorced Man**

If you have been divorced, you are not simply single. You are single after having made promises in front of God and witnesses that did not hold. That carries its own particular weight — questions about fault, about what it says about you, about whether God is done with your story or simply reorganizing it.

The end of a marriage is a grief. It deserves to be treated as one — with time, with honesty, with actual mourning and not just momentum toward the next thing. Too many divorced men skip the grieving and go directly to rebuilding, and then wonder why the foundation of what they build next feels unstable. Grieve it. Completely. Not forever — but fully.

And then: you are not disqualified. Joel 2:25 says the LORD will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten. He was not speaking only to people whose losses were not their own fault. He was speaking to his people. That includes you.

## **The Man Raising Children Alone**

If you are a single father — by divorce, by a relationship that ended before becoming a marriage, or by circumstances outside your control — you are navigating a form of singleness that compounds every challenge in this book.

You are not just single. You are single and responsible for people who depend entirely on you. Your longing for a partner is not only about your own needs — it is entangled with your children's needs, with what you believe they deserve, with your guilt and your hope held simultaneously. Your dating decisions are not only about you. That weight is real.

So is this: the love you are giving your children in this season — imperfectly, exhaustedly, in the ruins of a life that did not go as planned — is not a consolation prize. It is a calling. Among the most demanding and most holy work any human being can do. You are not a failed family. You are a man doing the work. That matters enormously — to them, to God, and it should matter to you.

## **The Common Thread — and the Common Grace**

All of these men share one question beneath all the others: does grace actually cover this specific thing? Not grace in the abstract. This specific thing. This particular history. This exact story.

The answer is yes. Not a cheap yes — not one that bypasses the real work of repentance and reckoning with what choices cost yourself and others. That work is real and there are no shortcuts through it.

But after that work, or in the middle of it, the grace is there. Unrationed. It does not run out on the men whose histories are the most complicated. The whole arc of the gospel suggests it runs most powerfully toward exactly those men.

The tax collectors. The woman at the well who had five husbands and was living with a sixth. The demoniac in the tombs. The thief on the cross with only minutes left to speak. Jesus was not cautious about which sinners he went to. He was deliberate. He went to the people the religious community had written off, and he offered them the same thing he offered everyone else.

Himself.

That offer has not expired. It is not tiered by severity of history. It is on the table for you — wherever you have been, whatever the specific weight of your particular story.

## **On Dating With a Complicated History**

How does a man with a history like this approach the possibility of a relationship with a woman whose history is simpler — or who comes from a community that values a certain kind of track record?

Honestly. That is the only answer that works long-term.

Not on a first date — wisdom governs timing. But in the process of genuinely knowing someone, your history is part of who you are. Concealing it is not protection. It is a foundation for a relationship built on a version of you that does not fully exist. The woman who can receive your actual story, hold it with grace, and still choose you — she is the one worth building something real with.

Some women will not be able to do that. Some communities will not. And that will hurt. It is allowed to hurt. But it is also information. The goal is not to find someone who never learns your history. The goal is to become the man whose history — all of it — is legible as evidence of the grace of God. And then to find the person who can read it that way.

That person exists. She may live outside the community you are currently in. She may take longer to find. But she exists. And you — the real you, full history and all — are worth waiting for her.

## **Chapter 10: Dating Without Desperation**

We need to talk about dating. Specifically, the way that the emotional weight of single Christian life in your thirties can quietly poison the dating process.

When a man has spent years feeling behind, incomplete, and vaguely ashamed of his marital status — and then he meets a woman he's genuinely interested in — the stakes feel enormous. Not because she is necessarily the right person, but because she represents the possibility of finally resolving the problem. Of reaching the rung on the ladder. Of shutting down the questions.

This is desperate energy. And desperate energy is, among other things, very difficult to hide.

### **What Desperation Looks Like**

Desperation in dating doesn't always look like needy texting or moving too fast. Sometimes it looks like staying in a relationship that isn't working because the alternative feels worse than the relationship. It looks like overlooking genuine incompatibilities because you're tired of starting over. It looks like performing a version of yourself that you think will be more attractive rather than showing up as yourself and letting that be enough.

It also looks like avoiding dating entirely because the vulnerability is too much — because another experience of things not working out feels like more confirmation of the lie, and you'd rather not risk it.

Both patterns — anxious pursuit and avoidant withdrawal — are responses to the same underlying fear. And that fear is what we're actually trying to address.

### **Dating From Wholeness**

The alternative to desperate dating is not detached dating. It is not performing indifference, or convincing yourself you don't want what you want, or going on dates with your arms crossed and your heart behind glass.

It is dating from a place of genuine wholeness — which means showing up as yourself, being honest about who you are and what you're looking for, holding the outcome

loosely, and treating the person across from you as a full human being whose value is not determined by whether they want to date you.

This kind of dating is, paradoxically, both more vulnerable and more peaceful than desperate dating. More vulnerable because you're actually showing up. More peaceful because you're not trying to control an outcome that was never in your control to begin with.

## **A Word on Apps and Modern Dating**

Dating apps deserve a specific word, because they are now the primary mechanism through which many single people meet, and they have a particular effect on single Christian men.

Apps commodify attraction. They reduce the early stages of connection to swipes and quick judgments, which tends to exaggerate the worst impulses on both sides — the over-evaluation of appearance, the abundance mindset that makes it feel like there's always someone better one scroll away, the disposability of people who don't immediately sparkle.

None of this means apps are wrong or that you shouldn't use them. But go in with clear eyes. Use them as a tool, not as an oracle. Take breaks when they start to make you feel like a product rather than a person. And don't let the gamification of attraction convince you that something is wrong with you just because the swipe rates aren't what you hoped.

Real connection is still possible. It happens in real life, through shared community and shared experience and the slow accumulation of actual time spent together. Apps can initiate. They can't substitute.

# **PART FOUR**

# **THE CHURCH**

*We do not have the option of giving up on the church. But we do have the responsibility of being honest with it.*

## **Chapter 11: What We Need You to Know**

This chapter is addressed primarily to church leaders — pastors, elders, small group leaders, anyone who has some responsibility for the life of a congregation. If that's not you, read it anyway. It might give you language for a conversation you've been wanting to have.

### **We Are Here**

The single men in your congregation are present. They are showing up on Sunday mornings. They are putting money in the offering. They are serving in the nursery and on the setup crew and in the worship team. They are present. They are faithful. And many of them are quietly, persistently lonely in ways they would never say out loud in a church context.

The first thing I want you to know is: we are here. We are not a fringe demographic. We are not a transitional population waiting to graduate into the real congregation. We are the congregation. And how your community treats us — consciously or not — is shaping whether we stay.

### **Preaching and Illustration**

When every sermon illustration about a faithful man features a husband and father, single men absorb a message: the fully formed Christian man has a family. This is probably not what you intend. But intention does not determine impact.

I am not asking for a quota of single-man illustrations. I am asking for awareness. When you are reaching for an example of mature faith, of purposeful living, of Christlike manhood — sometimes let that example be a single man. It is not a theological stretch. Jesus was one.

### **Small Groups and Community Structure**

If your church organizes community primarily around life stages — young marrieds, parents of toddlers, empty nesters — single men in their thirties will not fit cleanly anywhere. And the solution is not a "singles group" that functions as a holding category for people who don't fit elsewhere.

The solution is genuine integration — inviting single men into the full life of the congregation, including into the homes of married couples and families. One of the most formative experiences of my faith has been being welcomed into the households of married friends — eating at their tables, knowing their children, belonging to their lives. That kind of integration doesn't happen automatically. It requires intentional invitation. And it is worth more than any program you could design.

## **Mentorship**

Most single Christian men in their thirties are operating without a significant male mentor. The men who might naturally fill that role — older, married, established men in the congregation — often don't think to reach across the experience gap. And the single man often doesn't know how to ask.

If you are a church leader, consider doing something simple and uncommon: pick a few single men in your congregation, and invite them into your life. Not as a program. Not as a ministry initiative. Just as people you have chosen to invest in. That investment will return dividends you cannot predict.

# **Chapter 12: How to Belong When You Feel Peripheral**

This chapter is for you — the single man trying to figure out how to actually belong to a church community that sometimes feels designed for someone else.

I want to begin by pushing back on a posture that I have taken myself, and that I have seen many single men fall into: the posture of waiting to belong until the church gets it right.

The church is not going to get it completely right. Not this side of eternity. And a posture of grievance — however justified — keeps you on the outside of a community that, for all its failures, is still the body of Christ in your city. It is still where your people are. It is still worth fighting for from the inside rather than criticizing from the outside.

## **Contribute Rather Than Consume**

One of the most reliable paths to belonging in any community is contribution. Not passive attendance — active, visible investment in the life of the community.

Serve in something. Not because it will earn you belonging — you already belong — but because service is the fastest way to build relationships, and relationships are what make a community feel like home. The man who shows up early to help with setup and stays late to help with takedown knows more people by Christmas than the man who arrives at 10:58 and leaves at noon.

Use your specific freedom. As a single man in your thirties, you likely have more time and flexibility than most of the families in your congregation. That is not a consolation prize — it is a resource. Offer it. Show up when others can't. Be the person who fills gaps. This is not martyrdom. It is stewardship of a season.

## **Build Your Own Table**

If the church is not yet creating the community you need, consider creating it yourself.

Host dinner. Open your home. Invite people — not just other single people, but couples, families, older members of the congregation. Be the hub. Be the connector. The man who gathers people is never peripheral to a community. He becomes its center.

This has been one of the most significant decisions of my single life: choosing to be a host rather than a guest. It changed how I related to my church community in ways that no amount of attending and hoping would have produced.

You don't have to wait for the church to include you. You can include yourself — and bring other people with you.

**PART FIVE**  
**MOVING FORWARD**

*This is not the beginning of the end of something. This is simply the middle of your one, actual, unrepeatable life.*

## **Chapter 13: Whether or Not She Ever Comes**

I want to address the fear that sits quietly behind much of what we have talked about in this book.

The fear that she never comes.

That you build this whole life — the friendships, the purpose, the rootedness in community, the wholeness — and you do it alone. That you don't get the wedding. That you don't hold your own children. That you love God faithfully and serve well and become genuinely good, and still — the desire goes unfulfilled.

This is a real fear. It deserves a real answer.

### **The Honest Answer**

The honest answer is: I don't know whether she comes for you. Neither do you. Neither does anyone.

I know that's not the answer you might be hoping for. But I think you're tired of false promises, and I'm not going to make you one.

What I do know — and believe with everything I have — is this: a life built on the foundation we've been talking about throughout this book is a good life. A full life. A life that matters and contributes and loves and is loved, whether or not it includes a romantic partner.

I know men who are single in their forties and fifties and who are, by any honest measure, more alive, more purposeful, more relationally rich than many married men I know. Their lives are not consolation prizes. They are the real thing.

### **Holding the Tension**

I also want to say this: you are allowed to want marriage. Deeply. Persistently. Without apology.

Wanting marriage is not evidence of insufficient faith. It is not a sign that you haven't learned the lesson yet. It is a legitimate human desire that God himself declared was good, and you don't need to spiritually bypass it in order to be a mature Christian.

The goal is not to stop wanting. The goal is to want without being owned by the wanting. To hold the desire in an open hand — genuine, honest, present — rather than clutching it so tightly that it becomes the thing your peace depends on.

That is hard. It may be the hardest spiritual practice of your life. But it is also the practice that produces the kind of man who, if marriage does come, will enter it from strength rather than desperation. And if it doesn't, will still have lived a life worth living.

## **A Different Kind of Hope**

Christian hope is not optimism. It is not the confident expectation that things will work out the way we want. It is something stranger and stronger: the conviction that God is good and sovereign and present, even in the seasons that do not go the way we planned, and that nothing — not singleness, not loneliness, not unfulfilled desire — can separate us from his love.

That hope is available to you right now. Today. In this exact season.

Hold onto it.

## **Chapter 14: The Man You're Becoming**

There is a man on the other side of this book — not a fictional one, but the actual you, shaped by time and decision and grace — and I want to spend this last chapter thinking about him.

Not the you who finally got married, or the you who figured out the formula, or the you who resolved all the tensions we've talked about. Just the you who lived faithfully in the season you were given, and became something in the living.

### **Character Is Built in Seasons Like This**

There is a kind of depth that is only forged in seasons of unresolved longing. I don't say this to be poetic. I say it because it's true, and I've watched it happen in men I respect.

The man who has learned to sit with unfulfilled desire without being destroyed by it has developed a capacity for patience, for hope, for honest self-knowledge that is genuinely rare. The man who has built friendship without the social scaffold of a family unit has learned to initiate, to invest, to show up — skills that will matter in every relationship for the rest of his life. The man who has built a purposeful life without a family title to organize it around has found out something essential about who he actually is.

These things do not happen in spite of your singleness. They happen through it.

### **What to Do With the Rest of This**

Close this book and do one thing. Not ten things. One.

Pick the chapter that landed the hardest and identify one concrete, specific action it calls for. Then do that action. This week. Without waiting for more clarity or more readiness or more of anything.

Call the friend you've been meaning to call and say the true thing. Sign up for the thing you've been circling. Open your home. Show up early. Go to the counselor. Confess the thing. Start the project. Commit to the community.

Don't wait for your life to begin. It already has.

## **A Final Word**

You are not unfinished.

You are a man — a whole, made-in-the-image-of-God, filled-in-Christ, unrepeatable man — living a real life in a real season that will not come again.

There are people in your world who need exactly what you have to give. There is work that is yours to do. There is a community that is better because you are in it. There is a God who has not forgotten you, who is not withholding something from you out of negligence or cruelty, and who is closer to you in this season than you probably know.

Live accordingly.

## **Conclusion: Finished**

I chose the title Unfinished for this book because it named the lie I spent years believing.

I am ending the book with a different word: finished.

Not finished as in over. Finished as in complete. As in whole. As in the work that needed to be done in you — through this season, this struggle, this honest and imperfect and fully lived life — is being done. Is being finished. By the one who promised to complete what he began.

Philippians 1:6 says: "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." Not when you get married. Not when you finally arrive at the life you thought you were supposed to have. Now. In progress. Already underway.

You are a work in progress in the best possible sense — not incomplete, but being completed. Not waiting, but becoming. Not on hold, but very much alive.

Go live that way.

## **A Note to Church Leaders**

If this book found its way to you — a pastor, elder, ministry leader, or anyone with responsibility for a community of people — thank you for reading it.

I want to make three practical requests:

First, survey your community architecture. Look at your programs, your small groups, your sermon series, your assumed audience. Ask honestly: where does a single man in his thirties fit? If the answer is "not obviously," begin the conversation about how to change that.

Second, identify three single men in your congregation and invest in them personally. Not through a program. Through relationship. Through invitation. Through the simple, radical act of treating them as peers in the faith rather than projects in progress.

Third, let your preaching reflect the full range of Christian calling. Not just the married-with-children version of faithful manhood. The single version. The celibate version. The version modeled by Jesus himself. Your congregation will be enlarged by it — and the single men in your pews might finally feel like they belong.

# Discussion Questions

For use in small groups, men's groups, or personal reflection.

## Part One: The Wound

1. In what ways have you absorbed the message that you are "incomplete" as a single man? Where did that message come from?
2. Have you ever felt peripheral to your church community because of your marital status? What did that feel like?
3. Which of the three versions of the question (comparative, theological, existential) do you relate to most strongly?

## Part Two: The Truth

4. What is your honest reaction to Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 7 that singleness is a gift? Does it feel true to you? Why or why not?
5. What does it mean to you that Jesus was single? How does that change — or not change — how you see your own season?
6. What would it look like, practically, to live as though you are already whole?

## Part Three: The Life

7. Who are the two or three men in your life with whom you have — or could build — genuine depth of friendship? What would it take to invest more intentionally in those relationships?
8. Where do you feel most purposeful? Where do you feel most adrift? What is one area where you could commit more fully?
9. How has loneliness shaped your behavior — in dating, in community, in your relationship with God?

9½. For the man with a complicated history: In what ways have you treated your past as a disqualifier? What would it look like to let God's grace be as big as the scripture says it is?

## Part Four: The Church

10. What do you wish your church understood about the experience of being a single man in your thirties?

11. What is one way you could contribute more actively to your church community in your current season?

### **Part Five: Moving Forward**

12. What would it look like to hold the desire for marriage in an open hand — genuinely present, but not controlling?

13. What is the one concrete action this book is calling you to take?

# Acknowledgments

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To the men who have let me into their real lives — who have said the honest things, asked the hard questions, and trusted me with the weight of their actual experience: this book exists because of your courage. You know who you are.

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To everyone who read early drafts and told me the truth: thank you for caring enough to be honest.

And to the God who is closer than the air in my lungs — even when I forget, even when I doubt, even in the quiet of a Friday night: thank you for not letting me go.

## About the Author

The author is a single Christian man in his thirties who got tired of waiting for someone else to say the thing out loud. He lives, works, serves, and — on his better days — thrives in a faith community that he loves and occasionally argues with.

Unfinished is his attempt to give language to an experience that too many men are carrying in silence.

He believes you are not behind. He believes you are not broken. He believes the life you are living right now — this one, today — is worth showing up for completely.

So show up.