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single adults: SIGNIFICANT AND GROWING

IF YOU'RE READING this book, chances are you're either single or know someone who is. More than four of every ten American adults are single—92 million Americans.¹ In fact, the United States has more single adults than any other nation in the world except China and India.²

Of course, it wouldn't be accurate to lump all single adults into the same group. There are at least five very different categories of single adults. The largest numbers of singles are those who have never been down the aisle (those to whom this book is largely directed), but the other four groups also command our attention. Here are the five groups:

1. *Never married.* Age eighteen and older, this group is 49 million strong.³ The median age of a first marriage has risen to twenty-five among women and twenty-seven among men. This means that, in the general population among people eighteen to twenty-four, almost four out of every five (78 percent) have never been married.⁴

2. *Divorced.* Today, at any one time, 10 percent of all adults are divorced.⁵ Over time, however, many more married adults suffer through a divorce. Within five years of the wedding, 20 percent of all marriages end in divorce. Within ten years, one-third of all couples will be divorced, and within fifteen years, 43 percent will be divorced.⁶

3. *Separated but not divorced.* These are individuals who are still legally married but no longer live under the same roof. In lifestyle they are more single than married. The separated status, however, is temporary. These individuals will either reconcile with their spouses

or go on and formalize their separation by legal divorce. Research indicates that 97 percent of white women (and 75 percent of non-white women) who separate from their husbands end up divorced within five years of the separation.⁷

4. Widowed. Widowhood is definitely gender biased. Four out of five adults who are single because of the death of their spouse are females. Nearly half of all women sixty-five and older are widowed, compared to only 14 percent of men over sixty-five.⁸

5. Single parents. One hundred years ago, fewer than 1 percent of adults was a single parent of a child under eighteen. Today there are more than twelve million single parents with children under eighteen in their care—almost one out of every three families.⁹ Obviously, many single parents are also divorced. But a growing number of single parents have never been married. Among those who are single moms, 40 percent were never married to the father of their children.¹⁰ Thus a growing number of never-married singles are also single parents.

DIVERSE YET UNITED

Clearly, single adults are a very diverse group of people. However, they are still united by those factors that hold all of us together as humans. Everyone wrestles with values, morals, relationships, and meaning. If you are a single adult, just like everyone else, you're seeking to understand yourself and your place in the world. At the heart of these pursuits is the need as an unmarried person to give and receive emotional love.

No matter which category you may or may not fall into, as a single adult, you want to feel loved by the significant people in your life. You also want to believe that others need your love. Giving and receiving love is at the center of every single adult's sense of well-being. If you feel loved and needed, you can survive the pressures of life. But without love, life can become exceedingly bleak.

THE MAN WITH THE METAL HALO

I first met Rob on one of my trips to the Grand Canyon (one of nature's most beautiful portraits). On the south rim of the canyon, somewhere near the Bright Angel Trail, I spotted Rob and two older adults. He wasn't hard to spot, because he was wearing a back brace with a metal halo that circled his head. I gave him a friendly nod and a smile, my way of saying hello.

Rob responded, "Hello, I hope you're having a good morning." His inviting smile beckoned me into conversation. I discovered that he had suffered spinal injuries in a hiking accident. The older couple were his mom and dad.

The three had planned a family trip to the Grand Canyon two years earlier. The first year money was a problem, so they postponed their dream. Then Rob had his accident and they couldn't leave home. Now that Rob was doing somewhat better, they had come to see the canyon. When the family originally planned the trip, they intended to hike to the foot of the canyon. Their dream had been altered but not destroyed. So they planned to spend the week enjoying the sights of the canyon.

Rob wheeled his chair into position for a great view of the trail and canyon, and he and his parents were soaking in the fabulous view. I commended them for not giving up on their dream and wished them well.

My son and I continued our week together exploring the canyon. Toward the end of the week I ran into Rob in the lobby of the Bright Angel Lodge. Because of our earlier encounter, it seemed I was seeing an old friend. We ended up talking for two hours. Rob shared his story about the fall that resulted in his injuries and the determined efforts of the rescue workers who flew him out by helicopter. He told me about the pain and the emotional struggle of those early days when he wasn't sure he would ever be able to walk again. He had a number of brushes with depression, had lost a new job opportunity, and spent many weeks in physical therapy.

When I asked what had enabled him to come through that

experience and still have such a vibrant spirit, his answer was simple. “Love,” he said. “That’s the only way I could have made it. Mom and Dad were with me through the whole thing, and I had a girlfriend ... not a romantic relationship, but a close friend who came to see me every day in those early weeks. I don’t think I would have made it without her. She brought me hope. She encouraged me in my therapy, and she prayed with me. I had never had a girl pray with me before. There was something about the way she talked to God that gave me hope. Her words were like rain on my parched emotions.

“We’re still good friends. Her love and the love of my folks brought me through.”

Then Rob added, “I hope someday I can help someone else the way they have helped me.”

THE POWER OF LOVE

Rob is a living example—both of the power of love and the single adult’s deep need to love and be loved. Love is the fundamental building block of all human relationships. It will greatly impact our values and morals. I am also convinced that love is the most important ingredient in the single’s search for meaning.

That is why I feel compelled to write this book on the five love languages. What you will read in the following pages has the potential to enhance every area of your life. Reading this book will require time, but I assure you that it will be time well invested. You have likely invested time in learning the language of technology, right? Things like text messaging, searching the Internet, and social networking through Facebook. If so, you have reaped the benefits. Unfortunately, most single adults (and most people in general) know more about these things than they do about love. The reason for this is obvious: they have spent more time perfecting technology and less time studying love.

SOMETHING’S MISSING

I agree with Professor Leo Buscaglia, who said:

Psychologists, psychiatrists, sociologists, anthropologists and educators have suggested in countless studies and numerous research papers that love is a “learned response, a learned emotion.”... Most of us continue to behave as though love is not learned but lies dormant in each human being and simply awaits some mystical age of awareness to emerge in full bloom. Many wait for this age forever. We seem to refuse to face the obvious fact that most of us spend our lives trying to find love, trying to live in it and dying without ever truly discovering it.¹¹

I have invested the past thirty plus years of my life in helping people discover how to emotionally connect with each other—how to actively give and receive love, not passively wait for it to somehow magically happen. I can say with confidence to all singles—whether never married, once married, or married several times—that if you will read and apply the information given in the following chapters, you will discover how to give and receive love more effectively. You will discover the missing ingredient in some of your past relationships, and you will learn how to build wholesome, supportive relationships by learning to speak other people’s primary love language and better understand your own primary love language.

Much of the pain in broken relationships in our world stems from the truth that many of us in Western culture have never been serious students of love. We haven’t really taken it seriously enough to learn how it actually works. In the following pages you will meet dozens of single adults from all categories and all ages who have discovered that a proper understanding of love really does have the potential to change the world—and, more succinctly, to change individual relationships.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. To what degree do you feel loved by the significant people in your life?
2. In a time of need, have you experienced the love of a friend

like the one Rob described: “I don’t think I would have made it without her”? If so, how did your friend show his or her love?

3. Have you been a friend to someone in need? How did you express your love?
4. How successful have you been in giving and receiving emotional love?
5. How interested are you in studying the nature of love and learning new ways to express love?

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this is it:

THE KEY TO YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

WE ARE RELATIONAL creatures. All humans live in community, and most people seek social interaction. In Western culture, isolation is seen as one of the most stringent of punishments. Even hardened criminals do not generally aspire to solitary confinement.

It is safe to assume that everyone reading this book has relationships. The question is: What is the quality of these relationships?

Positive and affirming relationships bring great pleasure, but poor relationships can bring deep pain. I would be so bold as to suggest that life's greatest happiness is found in good relationships, and life's deepest hurt is found in bad relationships. If you feel loved by your mother, then the maternal relationship brings you a feeling of comfort and encouragement. On the other hand, if your relationship with your mother is fractured, you probably suffer feelings of abandonment. And if you were abused by your mother, you likely feel hurt and anger, maybe even hatred.

OUR PARENTS

Lack of love from parents often motivates children to go searching for love in other relationships. This search is often misguided and leads to further disappointment. For a number of years my son, Derek, has worked with "street" people. A few years ago he said to me, "I've never met anyone on the street who had a good relationship with his or her father."

Whether you want them to or not, all of your relationships spring from the relationship you have with your parents. The nature of that