



Jesus Fellowship/
Jesus Army
Celibacy Inspirational
Newsletter

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'A costly choice that frees me for others'

"DJs, actors, footballers, politicians, people who really make it in life have made great sacrifices. So, too, with those who make a choice for celibacy", says Phil Mercer.

Phil, now 21, was brought up in Christian community and, although he always believed in God, could not see its relevance to his life. Reaching mid-teens, he went on what he called 'a mad one' - raves, drugs, acting, girls. He started sorting out a career until eventually he allowed two Christian friends to pray for him.

From then on, Phil began to find a slow and radical turnaround that lasted 18 months during which he found his way to God and in late 1993 he was baptised.

Phil did not find a natural drawing to celibacy. In fact, at first he found himself resisting the idea but a few of his young friends had meanwhile become celibate. 'I got to know one or two celibates and saw what they had given up. Through watching them I learned they had gained a lot through sacrifice. I knew if they were married they would not achieve half so much.'

He became involved in a church planting with his friend, Steve, in Bournemouth, and, in the midst of this work, he found a greater and greater desire to commit himself to celibacy. This was largely because he wanted to give himself totally and unreservedly to the work which he felt God called him to do. Over a period of three years he made his decision. He started a year's probationary testing of this choice.

'I had no far-out dream or vision,' Phil joked. 'I chose it, I knew it was right. It was not a glamor-



ous choice, I found it quite daunting!' Phil waited until he was 21 (the normal practice in the Jesus Fellowship) before he made a final commitment after 'testing the water.'

'Being single,' said Phil, 'means I can devote myself to something for life. I can say to my friends, 'I'm here for you.' People outside the church are impressed by that commitment. In fact some of the people I see when I go evangelising in the clubs have said, 'If I ever see you with a girl or smoking or drinking, I'd be gutted.' They need me to be strong for them. It says more than a thousand words.'

'Celibacy is not always easy. It's not plain sailing. There are lots of temptations and it's only a gift that works if you're very honest with yourself and those you trust.'

Phil sees both marriage and celibacy as a calling from God. 'I'm for marriage, too,' he said. 'You need married couples for church planting, as well. It needs real consideration whichever calling you choose. It's a question of the right people finding the right calling!'

'Being single, means I can devote myself to something for life'

Celibacy and the Jesus Fellowship

CELIBACY is a gift and calling spoken of by Jesus (Matthew 19:12) and recommended by Paul (1 Corinthians 7:25-35).

Around 300 men and women in the Jesus Fellowship nationwide have made the choice of staying single. They include single parents, the divorced, widows and widowers as well as single people of all ages and sexual orientation.

From the
Editor ...



'Fast, Free and Flowing!'

THAT'S HOW one commentator described the new 'Millennial Generation' of young people in the UK wanting action and commitment. This "all or nothing" group of young men and women who are emerging in our nation have turned their backs on hypocrisy and tepid 'churchianity'. They've tried so much, experienced the extremes and want to live life to the full. But they are still unsatisfied.

Tired of being targets of media manipulation, self-righteous antagonism and politicians' lies, they are disillusioned with their parents' failure to find solutions to the problems of the world.

Yet they are also tolerant of beliefs and crave reality in relationships. In such a searching and open culture, the call to be sold out for the cause of Jesus is gaining a wider appeal. They are prepared and ready to rise to the challenge of living sacrificially for Jesus.

Celibacy grows naturally in such a soil of passion and devotion. A new generation is straining at the leash, wanting to hear and respond to the words of Jesus, the supreme celibate: *there are those who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven* (Matthew 19:12).

'It's a new way of loving'

'CELIBACY IS a being in love with God, an eminently fulfilling, joy-bringing way of life, a new way of loving other men and women warmly and humanly.'

(Thomas Dubay: *And you are Christ's*)

Pathfinders!

Past and present heroes and heroines of celibacy

Teresa of Avila

(1515-1582)

'DUENDE' IS THE SPANISH word for a certain type of quality, that mysterious characteristic found in gypsies, bullfighters and flamenco dancers. It is a tempestuous, fiery energy with hot-blooded inspiration running wildly through it! It cannot be held down! It cannot be tamed! Teresa epitomised this rare Spanish quality. 'Duende!'

Teresa, born in Avila in central Spain, to a noble family, grew up in a time when the whole of Europe was embroiled in religious upheaval. By the end of her life she would see vast tracts of Europe overthrowing the old Catholic order and embracing the new fledgling Protestantism.

As a young woman, with much of the passion she would exhibit in later years, she threw herself into evangelising and healing the divisions between Catholics and Protestants. She entered the Carmelite Order in 1536, where she committed herself to lifelong celibacy, poverty and obedience.

Always a Catholic, Teresa developed an abhorrence of the hypocrisy and double standards of Christians in her native Spain. With fiery hot-blooded zeal she took to the highways and byways and began a reform movement which would stretch the length and breadth of Spain. She established and reformed Christian communities, teaching and speaking to beggars and business men, peasants and governors, mule drivers and wayward monks - and even the King.

Teresa has been described as one of the greatest 'mystics' of the west and yet one of

its greatest activists. For Teresa, true 'mysticism' was never divorced from earthy, practical Christian love. She was action-woman extraordinaire, carrying within herself an intense fervour to live and work for God as she burned with zeal to see her native Spain freed from the shackles of sham religion and hypocrisy. She laboured with all the fierce energy that lay within her, sometimes discouraged, sometimes in danger, sometimes misunderstood, often ill, often exhausted, at times travelling in abominable conditions as she worked with tireless expense for the kingdom of God.

In love with God! In love with people! In love with nature! In love with life itself! This was Teresa. She loved to dance, she loved to play the castanets, the drums and the tambourines. Her favourite colour to wear was orange and though often filled with merriment and good humour, underneath she carried a rapt seriousness and longing for men and women to find their way to God.



A sculpture of Teresa showing her experience of being pierced with the arrow of God's love

For Teresa, her life calling to celibacy was no dull thing. God, she describes, as 'the King of Majesty, her heavenly husband.' Her language describing her relationship with God is often bridal - it could even be taken by some to be erotic! It is Spanish passion! It is a love affair! An exciting adventure that she wouldn't miss for the world, even if at times extremely exacting.

For Teresa, Christian life, and particularly for her, celibate life, is meant to be lived to the full. There is no self protection in it. She strongly laments mediocre Christian existence. 'We won't move out of this lower realm unless we go mad, take risks, embrace a holy insecurity, full of holy daring. 'We are not invited,' Teresa writes humorously, 'into the divine wine cellar to sip a little here and there. We're invited to drink every bottle so that we become totally God-intoxicated!'

Single, but not alone

'IN GENESIS 2:18 we see that God looked down and said, *It is not good that man should be alone.* Now notice God did not say, 'It is not good that man should be single.' We must differentiate between being alone and single.'

(Trevor Partridge: *The Challenge of Singleness*)

Opportunity and ability

'CELIBACY IS of the nature of heaven and embodies self-denial. It gives opportunity for impartiality and the ability to be a friend to all. It thrusts one into a greater sense of the 'spiritual family'. There are less anxieties of life and more time for spiritual 'parenting'.'



(Piers Denholm-Young, a celibate brother in the Jesus Fellowship)

Listen to Paul

'IN OUR DAY we miss the profound wisdom of Paul's counsel - marriage of necessity divides one's loyalties. The single person can concentrate with abandon on the advancement of the Kingdom of God.'

(Richard Foster: *Freedom of Simplicity*)

Gifted to give all

'THE SINGLE WHO chooses celibacy is like the woman who poured perfume on Jesus' feet - a lavish gift, a sacrificial gift, but an appropriate gift.'

(Julia Duin: *Purity makes the heart grow stronger*)

Use your gifts!

'CELIBACY IS NEVER a goal in itself but only ever a tool, like any other spiritual gift, that gives greater ability or opportunity to find the freedom of service.

Only the celibate heart that has gained the desire to love will truly be fruitful.'

(Ann Hawker, a celibate sister in the Jesus Fellowship)

Look at our lives

'THE CELIBATE LIVES in the flesh what the whole church lives in faith - complete self-giving to the Lord.'

(Augustine: 5th century)

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Available Soon...

Seven Silver Rings

The accounts of seven celibates from the Jesus Fellowship who tell their own stories with passion, humour and courage

Info: Jesus Fellowship Central Offices, Nether Heyford, Northampton NN7 3LB, UK. Tel: 01327 349991.



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