



It was like an electric shock!

For Ruth Burling, God's call to celibacy came at a surprisingly young age and in a totally unexpected way

RUTH'S MOTHER, Betty, was about to give birth to her second child. She began to feel a deep sense of peace come upon her and knew the presence of Jesus Himself. A verse from the Bible kept coming to her mind: "For your maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is His name" (Isaiah 54:4). Later that day she gave birth to her daughter, Ruth.

"Mum and Dad were Christian radicals," Ruth says. This often caused conflict at school. "But these troubles made me cry out to God. Early on in my life I found a relationship with Him.

"When I was about 13, I began to fall away from God. There was the distraction of friends that wanted different things and the opportunity of boy-friends."

Then, in her early teens, Ruth began to find a new move of God in her life.

"The fear of God came upon me and I started to cry away my lack of devotion to Him. Afterwards, I felt such joy and then for weeks after I knew anointings of laughter.

"I found myself longing to move into Christian community. I was 13 and sensed within me a great desire for God and His church. I carried, too, a real sense of destiny and God's call on my life."

It was August, 1990. At a Jesus Fellowship Festival meeting, a call was being made for celibates to stand up.

"Suddenly," Ruth continues, "I heard God's voice within. 'I want you to be celibate.' It was like an electric shock. The thought raced through my mind, 'I'm only 14!' That whole weekend I just couldn't stop thinking about it. I can only describe it as a 'burning inside.' I went home and wrote down what I felt God was saying to me. I didn't tell anyone for a whole year!

"That year I felt tested on my sureness about it, especially knowing that I would never have children. I was dying to tell someone, but I felt I would wait for the right time."

It was exactly a year later when Ruth was at a meeting that the leader of the meeting prayed,



Ruth - a young celibate pioneer for Jesus

"God, You're going to anoint the celibate gift to young people. They'll pioneer it."

"I started crying!" says Ruth. "Then I just knew what I had to do. I felt the Holy Spirit say, 'Go and tell them all.'

"I went up to the front," Ruth says, "and told everyone that I felt God wanted me to be a celibate. I was in floods of tears afterwards. I don't think I can have eaten for a week, or hardly slept either, I was so in love with God!" It was at this time that Ruth's mother shared with her the verse that she had read before Ruth was born.

The fellowship only supports a full celibate vow from the age of 21, so Ruth had to wait a few years to confirm her decision finally.

"Sometimes God has brought me painful reminders that I'm not going to have children." This is, for her, a sacrifice to be made in her call to celibacy.

'The gift of celibacy has to be poured out for others'

"At times there is a loneliness in celibacy and I am finding a stronger 'spousal' relationship with God. This refreshes the spiritual inner well deep within me and I find that through this my relationships with other celibate friends get stronger. I can't live without married people, either. Without families, us celibates would miss out so much on family life. Both families and singles really need each other.

"I know that if God puts celibacy in your heart, then God will give you grace for it! He'll hold you in it. Celibacy is a two-part bargain. God says, 'I'm as much in it with you as you are with Me!'

"Celibacy is a gift to the body of Christ," says Ruth. "I know that I can't keep it for myself. The gift has got to be poured out for others continually, otherwise it will go stale. God has given me everything. My heart's desire is to hold nothing back from Him!"

From the Editor ...



The power of love

"THE SOUL has as much capacity to love as the sun has to shine."

Thomas Traherne, the poet and mystic, wrote that over 320 years ago. For celibates, it is this powerful love of God, from God and for people that is both their sustaining force and reason for existence.

Within every celibate is a very large store of compassion. If this isn't poured out and expressed in practical ways towards others then it will turn inwards and become sour. Awareness of personal needs can then dominate and soon the celibate has become a shrivelled and dried up person.

More than ever, there is a need for released love in our days - to reach out to the hurting and emotionally starved people of our society. Celibates are in an excellent position to express the warmth of the new humanity in Jesus. They

can easily form friendships with others and draw alongside them in their needs.

Huw Lewis

Complete

"There is nothing in the Bible to say that man is incomplete, or needed a specifically sexual relationship ... Do marrieds know the insult a single person with a full life and a significant ministry can feel when told that he or she is 'incomplete'? The assumption that everyone is eventually destined to marry exists, largely unchallenged, in many books, articles, sermons and speeches produced by Christian married people (and even parroted by some Christian singles), though Scripture and experience deny it ... Those who come from non-western cultures, where the extended family rather than the nuclear family is the norm, simply do not understand it."

(Mike McMillan - *Purposeful Singleness/Family Idolatry: A New Heresy for the 90s?* <http://www.singleness.org>)

Pathfinders!

Past and present heroes and heroines of celibacy

Augustine of Hippo

(354-430AD)

AUGUSTINE was born in 354AD in what is now Tunisia in North Africa. It was then a thriving Roman province.

When he was a boy, his father, Patricius, was not a Christian, but his mother, Monica, was and she was to play a very influential role in his eventful life. As a young man of sixteen, Augustine visited the great city of Carthage.

As he later related in his famous autobiography, *Confessions*, from this time on, amidst his life at the university there, he recklessly followed one sin after another. He soon found a girlfriend and they lived together for several years. They had a son, Adeodatus, whilst he was still a teenager.

Despite his wild ways, Augustine was a seeker after truth and he fell in with the popular religion, Manichaeism. This was an eastern religion, which he felt explained both good and evil in the world and did not make too many demands on him.

When he was 29 he moved to Italy to take up a professorship in Milan.

In that city he met Ambrose, the bishop, who made a deep impression on him. Augustine's assorted intellectual, moral and spiritual objections to Christianity were slowly stripped away as Ambrose answered many of his searching questions. In 386 he was finally deeply converted while reading Paul's letter to the Romans in a garden in Milan. He came to know that Jesus Christ was the way to truth and salvation. Shortly before this he had split up with his girlfriend.

At Easter, along with Adeodatus, now aged 15,

he was baptised by Ambrose in the cathedral in Milan. Monica, who had been praying for her son all the while, died soon afterwards.

He longed to find out what God wanted of him and found himself drawn to the celibate life. After the tragic death of his son, he returned to Africa, gave away his possessions to the poor and devoted his life to living in Christian community as a celibate.

He was chosen as bishop of Hippo (in North Africa) in 396 and stayed there until his death 34 years later. He primarily preached, teaching his people week after week, and wrote - we have 113 of his books. With his powerful intellect he refuted much of the false teaching around at the time.

He also formed several celibate communities. However, one of his profound beliefs was that celibates should not spend their days in isolation, but were to serve the wider church and to bring the gospel to the people. He once spoke of Christ, knocking at the door of a celibate's room, saying, 'Open to Me. Preach to others. How shall

they listen to Me if no one preaches!'

Celibacy was never to be forced upon anyone and yet he described marriage as a 'hill of inferior blessing' and encouraged people to 'rest upon the mountain of the greater blessing of celibacy.' He founded communities for celibate women as well as for men and wrote to some of these: "If, therefore, you owed great love to a husband, how much ought you to love Him for

whose sake you have chosen not to have a husband. Let Him be placed in complete possession of your heart."

Augustine died in 430 as the Vandals were besieging the city of Hippo. He has since been regarded as one of the most influential Christians who ever lived. He has left an indelible mark on the life and thought of Christianity - as church planter and builder, writer, apologist and prophet, as well as pioneer of brotherhood and celibacy.



A portrait of Augustine studying at his desk

The Celibate Vow

I WANTED the taking of my celibate vow to be extra special. On Friday night I started to fast and I also prayed that the Lord would meet me in an extra special way during the vow.

As we were called up to the front during the Celebrate Jesus event to take the vow, I felt nervous but also at peace. On stage the feeling of love coming to us from the congregation was tremendous.

Taking my vow was special. I just sensed a great peace. During the prayer, the Lord met me. He honoured my prayer and I knew His love was surrounding me.

He is my first love! I felt like a young wife very much in love and getting married for the first time.

During the week leading up to this moment I had prayed for forgiveness in my failed marriage and bad relationships. It was even more special for me as Fred, my spiritual dad, also took his celibate vow with me. It was a lovely surprise!

(Mary Hill, a celibate sister from the Jesus Fellowship who has recently taken a full celibate vow)

Released energy

"When you are involved in a one-to-one relationship, it takes energy and commitment. With us, that energy and love is given out to God, the church and the world. By vowing celibacy you can be used by God and the community in a much wider context."

(Sister Rachel - *New Habits*)

Manhood restored

"As a celibate, I've found the liberty and freedom to be a spiritual father. Through this spiritual fathering I've seen humanity being restored in others and manhood to men. We have lost out so much in western society with fatherlessness."

(Nick Everard - *celibate brother in the Jesus Fellowship*)

Power through the cross

"Chastity is the way of the cross for many of us. But there is power in the cross of Christ. We must be willing to lose our lives, to give up sexual satisfaction for the sake of Jesus Christ because after all, He did for us ... What sort of spiritual power might be unleashed if a group of people ardently desired celibacy?"

(Julia Duin - *Purity Makes the Heart Grow Stronger*)

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.

Just published!



Seven Silver Rings

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

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