



From the  
Editor ...

# 'I wanted to explore the path of celibacy!'



Lesley is still thrilled by the celibate gift

Living single for Jesus has been a constant adventure for Lesley Cutts

WHEN STILL in her mid-twenties, Lesley looked with uncertainty towards the future. She sensed God speaking deep within. A simple picture came to her mind of a signpost pointing in two different directions - marriage and celibacy. Contrary to her natural instincts, a new desire had been rising within her. "I really wanted to explore the path of celibacy," she said. "It seemed such an attractive pathway although everything within me cried out for secure relationships and children. The thought of celibacy seemed beautiful - the freedom of just me and God."

As a teenage art student, Lesley had wondered what she could make of her life. "I was into partying and enjoying myself," she said. "But it all seemed so futile." It was while looking around for something that might give meaning to life that she met some Christians, whose obvious love and spontaneity had deeply impressed her.

On hearing an ex-lifer speak of how his life had been changed through becoming a Christian, she said to herself, "If this Jesus chap can reach and forgive him, then He can forgive me."

"'Jesus,' I cried, 'whoever You are, come and

change me'. Afterwards, I felt like I'd met someone who'd be with me for the rest of my life."

As a young Christian, Lesley found "celibacy just grew inside me as I began to receive healing. I had felt I could never live life without a boyfriend. Baptism was a step to getting that side of my life sorted. I wanted God and the Body of Christ (the Church) to be everything to me and meet the old emotional needs of my life."

It was often an uphill struggle for Lesley as she battled with old insecurities. "I'd always had male friends for affirmation and security. Yet I felt called to celibacy. A conflict was going on."

It was at this time she realised that, as the picture of the signpost had showed her, God was presenting her with a choice. Her response to the opportunity of a new relationship and possibly marriage was: "Oh no! Something inside me desired to follow the pathway of being single for the Lord."

It was in the summer of 1983 that she finally felt ready to make a commitment to lifelong celibacy. "The fact that I'd desired it meant I'd received the gift. I felt thrilled, overwhelmed and privileged to receive the gift from God and I still do!"

"In one's twenties," said Lesley, "one often rides on the crest of a wave of enthusiasm and zeal. In your thirties, life buffets a little and one can get disillusioned and respond to this by settling down, playing safe. As you reach into your forties you have to adapt and dig yourself deeper into God. You have to apply love in different ways - and those ways of love must get stronger, often forgetting your own needs. If at any time we give up loving we have lost the plot!"

"We mustn't dig ourselves into finding the security which the world offers, but rather we must allow God to strip us and make us vulnerable. It's not so much what activities we do that counts but what we are in depth and character in God.

"Celibacy can be seen by some in rather the same way as one can view

a slot machine," said Lesley. "People feel that if they put their money in, something will come out of the bottom. No way! In celibacy you decide to walk a certain path and you have to work at it. There is no automatic fruitfulness and fulfilment. You have to start investing, sowing the seed in relationships and devotion, pouring yourself out constantly. The deepest relationships come with those you've laid down your life for.

"It's not arduous to be single. I enjoy it. I've more relationships, more friends now than if I'd married. I can flow as a friend of the Holy Spirit into people's lives. I love that! That is the joy of my life - to help people - not necessarily by what I do but by who I am, in God."

*'That is the joy of my life - to help people'*

## Whole or half?

**ONE OF THE biggest myths around today is that marriage brings completeness and that until one is 'paired up' there is something deficient or incomplete about the single state. Many feel that another person can complete one's basic needs. Couples who talk about the 'other half' suggest that without a partner we are somehow not quite whole.**

Jesus demolished this idea by living a life that was single, free and wholly satisfying. There was nothing deficient about His passionate commitment and love for others and He certainly didn't miss out on living a 'fulfilled' life. His relationships were inclusive, without prejudice and focused on the many, rather than the one special person.

More and more people are recognising that the gap in human hearts is not able to be filled by any one individual, but ultimately, only by God Himself and His people.

Satisfaction is not found ultimately in marriage or singleness, but in following Jesus. He has created our hearts with their basic needs for love, security and purpose, and only He can satisfy those needs and bring wholeness!

## A gift from God

"GOD DOES NOT refuse it to anyone who asks Him for it with fervour... This gift is granted to all those who wish for it and who ask for it."

John Chrysostom

## Divine vacancy

"CELIBACY... A vacancy for God."

Thomas Aquinas

**‘Persecutor turned disciple’**

MOB VIOLENCE had taken over. Outside Jerusalem, one could hear angry shouts as the clamouring crowd hastily forced a young follower of Jesus, called Stephen, outside the city walls and pelted him viciously with stones. Not taking part in the brutality but nevertheless standing by with full approval, was, in the words of the *Bible*, “a young man named Saul.”

Born in AD 1, Saul, or better known by his Roman name as Paul, came from a well to do family of Pharisees from Tarsus, in modern day Turkey. Beginning in the synagogue school there, he was later sent, as a young adolescent, to Rabbinical school in Jerusalem.

A sharp intellect and a driving ambition ensured a promising career as both a lawyer and teacher of the Law. Around the age of 30, his zeal for Judaism was to know no limits as he spearheaded the suppression of the early Church.

Some months after Stephen’s martyrdom, Saul was travelling northward towards Damascus to continue his harrying of the new sect, when he was cast to the ground, being blinded by a bright light and hearing Jesus, Himself, speaking audibly to him. It was instant conversion and for the next fifteen years or so we know little about him apart from the fact that he visited Jerusalem, went to Arabia, lived for a while in Tarsus and later became one of the leaders of the church in Antioch, the capital of Syria.

It may be that, while in Tarsus, he suffered ostracism, even wholesale rejection, from his natural family for being a Christian, for he spoke later how “For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things.” This loss could have possibly included that of the desertion of a wife because of his faith, as in view of the Jewish tradition, it is most unlikely he never married. Certainly, by the time he comes to the fore as missionary pioneer in the *Book of Acts*, he is clearly single.

It was around his forty-fifth year that he was commissioned by the Church to be what he is most famous for - an instrument for the spread of Christianity to the distant reaches of the Roman Empire.

**‘Persecutions, beatings, imprisonment and discouragement followed him wherever he went’**

During the next years of his life, often on foot, he travelled thousands of miles through Asia and Europe, visiting some of the largest and most influential cities in the Empire, planting and building churches until he was martyred in Rome around AD 67. Persecution, beatings, imprisonment and discouragement followed him wherever he went, yet he never forgot his converts. Some of the letters he wrote to them have survived the centuries and one of these is a letter he wrote to the Corinthians, around the year AD 55. It shows his heart of care for them.

Paul had first visited Corinth about AD 50 - a cosmopolitan city port with a population of approximately a quarter of a million people. Not only did it have the usual sexual vices common to a large seaport, also, overlooking the city was the Temple of Aphrodite, a cult dedicated to the glorification of sex. In the city

itself was the Temple of Apollo, renowned for its homosexual practices - Apollo being the ideal of male beauty. It was to the Christians in this city that Paul wrote in reply to their questions regarding celi-

bacy and marriage, “I wish that all were as I myself am,” adding wistfully, “But each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.” (1 *Corinthians* 7:7)

“I want you to be free from anxieties,” Paul continued to write. “The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided... I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.” (1 *Corinthians* 7:32-35)

Many have chosen to follow Paul’s example and advice over the centuries as they have sought to live for God and build the church with single-hearted dedication. It would certainly be true to say that Paul could never have achieved what he did if he had been married. Persecutor turned disciple and apostle, his warm humanity, his love for both Christ and his converts radiates powerfully from his letters. He can, indeed, be described as a shining example of one with an “undivided devotion to the Lord.”

**Being empty for God**

“TO BE a celibate means to be empty for God, to be free and open for His presence, to be available for His service... Celibacy can never be considered a special prerogative of a few members of the people of God. Celibacy, in its deepest sense of creating and protecting emptiness for God, is an essential part of all forms of Christian life: marriage, friendship, single life and community life.”

*Henri Nouwen*

**The release of spiritual power**

“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*


**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 orientations.

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Seven Silver Rings



Seven Silver Rings

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

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