

'... to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord' (1 Corinthians 7:35)

UNDIVIDED

JESUS FELLOWSHIP/
MODERN JESUS ARMY
CELIBACY
INSPIRATIONAL
NEWSLETTER

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FROM THE
EDITOR ...

An Evening Call

1979. A peaceful summer evening. I sat on the park bench, my usual place for quiet reflection and prayer after a hectic day at work, waiting for my lift home.

As I gently eyed the swaying trees, trimmed hedges and neat borders of flowers, I sensed something of a deeper movement inside myself. God's clear, insistent yet calm words were stirring within. I became aware of the unmistakable voice of the Holy Spirit speaking to me: "Be all for Me and I will be all for you."

In that special moment my course was set. Like a silent earthquake, in an instant, all was changed and the landscape of my life would never be the same.

I had been wrestling with the call to celibacy for some months. Naturally longing for marriage and children, I was aware that God's purposes might be taking me in an entirely different direction. I knew what that direction was in that moment, wholeheartedly committing myself to living celibate for Jesus.

I found a reassurance of my deepest heart's desire - to be set apart for God and to be used by Him wherever He wanted me and in whatever capacity for service. In that peaceful encounter, my life's calling was confirmed.

Today, almost twenty four years later, that same desire to be wholly available to God and His people is as strong as ever.

This is a time when God is opening up this rare and neglected gift to others, in a time when over one third of adult attenders at church are single. More are considering if God is calling them in a way of celibate consecration, to sacrifice marriage for the sake of His kingdom on earth.

The latest *Undivided* inspirational newsletter seeks to encourage this gift of celibacy and spread the biblical truth about living 'holy in body and spirit to the Lord'.



Huw Lewis

'The Celibate Pioneer'

IN THE eighteenth century Methodism arose as a powerful new force within the English church, bringing fresh vitality and taking the Gospel to large numbers amongst the poorer sections of society. It could not be contained and its influence soon spread overseas.

During the lifetime of John Wesley (1703-1791), its founder, Methodism was to take root in America. Francis Asbury was one of early Methodism's greatest children and can be described as the founder of the American Methodist Church. His impact on America was as great as Wesley's on England.

Asbury felt he could never contemplate marriage as it was unfair to expect a wife to share the hardship and dangers he experienced as he laboured to spread the Gospel and establish the church in America.

Asbury was born in Handsworth, Birmingham, into a poor and honest hardworking family. His parents were converted as a result of Methodist preaching and Asbury could read the Bible when he was seven. Indeed, he was nicknamed "The Methodist Parson" by his friends at school. At thirteen he was apprenticed to a nearby Methodist blacksmith and whilst still a teenager, become a local preacher.

In 1771 Asbury attended a Methodist Conference and was accepted by Wesley as a volunteer missionary to America. The same year he said goodbye to his friends and family and set sail, never to return to his country of birth.

Setting to work as both evangelist and Bible teacher, Asbury rode on horseback over vast tracts of inhospitable terrain. Eating the coarsest food for weeks at a time; sleeping in crowded cabins or on the bare ground; traversing rough and difficult mountainous roads; wading through swamps; swimming rivers; in danger from attacking Indians and frequently suffering ill-health, he pressed forward.

He was indeed a man without a home.

Once, when entering the prairies of Ohio, a stranger met him and asked him 'Where are you from?' Asbury replied, 'from Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, or almost any place you please.'

In his lifetime, it is estimated Asbury travelled more than a quarter of a million miles on horseback, and preached nearly 18,000 sermons. *Pain! Pain! Pain! Yet I press on!* he said.

Asbury's commitment and hard work was soon recognised and in 1784 he was appointed the first Methodist Bishop in America.

Asbury was not a man of great eloquence or learning. He was a man of few words yet his preaching carried conviction and caused many to turn to God.

Asbury lamented that, at a time when such a rich harvest field for the Gospel lay open in America, many Christian young men chose to marry when they could have achieved so much more as celibates.

Marriage is honourable in all but to me it is a ceremony as awful as death. Well may it be so, when I calculate we have lost the travelling labours of 200 of the best men in America, or the world, by marrying and constant location.

When old and having no more strength to walk to church, Asbury was carried in the arms of a friend and placed in a chair on a table in the church and, in much pain and great weakness, preached his last sermon. He died in 1816 at the age of 71.

Asbury's huge contributions to the church, indeed to American life, was acknowledged when, in 1924, a statue of him was unveiled in Washington D. C. and the then President of the United States said of him: *He is entitled to rank as one of the builders of our Nation.*



*Pain! Pain! Pain!
Yet I press on!*

All quotes from *A New History of Methodism Vol 2: Hodder and Stoughton, London.*



Janet: has grown in confidence

JANET, 49, first began considering celibacy when she was 19 and finally made a life-long celibate vow on her thirtieth birthday.

After 10 years of leading the Jesus Fellowship marquee catering team, in 1997 Janet moved to Birmingham where she shares a house, *Sha'al* (the Hebrew for *to ask of God*), with another celibate, Marie Lutter, in the inner city district of Handsworth.

Janet and Marie's original vision was to reach out to Asian women in the area and initially they found themselves leading a small Wednesday night group with people from Nigeria, England, Japan and India.

Both Marie and Janet found faith stirring for 12 strong men to find Jesus. It was then that they began meeting many asylum seekers, mainly from Iran, and 12 were baptised in 2000. They have seen a steady increase in people finding Jesus since, particularly Iranians, and by January 2003 as many as 50 were attending the mid-week meeting held at *Sha'al*.

"Within the church, cultural barriers can be broken down and we can work out a Jesus culture. Jesus culture is not British culture!

"I'm not a frontline person, nor

For Janet Butler, celibacy has brought a release of spiritual motherhood and friendship power in Jesus

God, please don't stop!

particularly an evangelist. I see myself more as a mum and sister, getting alongside people and caring for them. Being a mum means being there to wash their denim jackets, cook English cake, make phone calls, recommend medicines for them to take when they're not feeling well - practical everyday things - but also to sit down with a cuppa and have a listening ear. On Wednesdays I cook for about 40.

"In Iranian culture there is a strong mother-son bond. Our Iranian brothers desperately miss their families and *Sha'al* is like home to them. They become like sons and brothers and treat us with so much respect. They help us out, too!"

"Celibacy is a gift God gave me - for the sake of the Kingdom of God. Not having a husband and family gives you more time for God. I'm available for God to use me. I could use the time selfishly - for example go to bed early every night with a good book! - or expend myself for the Kingdom.

"God didn't give us women a capacity for nurturing and caring for nothing. As celibates we're flexible. My ministry hinges on celibacy. If I wasn't celibate, I wouldn't be here.

"I'm a naturally cautious person but I feel a different person these days, growing in confidence and taking risks. It's such a privilege being in the middle of a work of God.

Sometimes I say 'I can't cope' - then I say 'God, I don't mean it! Don't listen to me. Please don't stop what you're doing.'

"A celibate needs friends. When I felt God's call to celibacy I envisaged having to work at it alone. Then I came to this church and found many brothers and sisters. I have true friends who believe in me.

"Celibacy is my gift from God. When I was seventeen these words of C.T. Studd, the great missionary, impacted me: *If Jesus Christ is the Son of God and died for me, no sacrifice is too great for me to make for Him.* In Celibacy I am laying down my life for the sake of Jesus because I love Him. I want to explore it and use it to its maximum potential. I don't feel I've missed out. If I had married I think I would have ended up living an 'ordinary' life - and feeling frustrated!"

Many years ago, when Janet was seeking God about whether she should take the relationship with her boyfriend deeper she felt Him say 'I don't want you to be married - I want you for Myself.' Forgoing that one special relationship with some-

"I feel a different person these days, growing in confidence and taking risks"

one has meant sharing the fullness of her heart not only with God but with *many* others. Truly, she has found herself a mother and friend to many.



"FROM THIS EVENING to all eternity, Your will, not mine, be done. Command and rule, and reign in me. I yield myself up without reserve and I promise with your help and power, rather to give up the last drop of this my blood, than knowingly and willingly, in my heart or in my life, be untrue and disobedient to you. Behold Jesus, You have me wholly and completely, sweet Friend of my soul. You have the love of my heart for Yourself and none other. Your Spirit be my keeper, Your death the rock of my assurance; may Your Spirit seal that which is written in the simplicity of my heart... Those who 'have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven', may be truly called pure. They were not born so, nor was it the result of their natural disposition: grace and a noble impulse of faith animated them to this pure conflict."

(Gerhard Tersteegen 1697-1769)

"IT IS IMPOSSIBLE to imagine a more single-minded person than Jesus. Throughout His ministry He knew His business exactly. He could not be dissuaded from His agenda by the concerns of the crowds, the criticisms of the Pharisees, or the fears and hopes of His disciples. He 'set His face' as He went toward Jerusalem, to His own death. This picture of Jesus steadfastly choosing to give His life is the greatest sign of the kingdom; everywhere that the kingdom has been preached, the cross has been used as a shorthand symbol for that single-minded self-sacrifice."

Tim Stafford (Article in *Pastoral Renewal*, 1989)

"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 (*Clowning in Rome*)



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

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

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