

# Single Parenting

## Success with God as Your Partner

*By June Hunt*

She denied that her husband had shut himself off from her. Maybe he was just angry about something. Surely he would get over it. In truth, he had never been open with his feelings. Then, a week before their oldest child's tenth birthday, he announced, "*I'm just not happy. . . . I need to get away and find myself.*" Within days, he had packed his clothes and left. This wife and mother felt devastated, yet she still held out hope that he would return and no one would ever know. She told no one although she tried to explain his absence to the older two children. The baby wouldn't understand. Fear gripped her heart as she gradually faced the possibility that he would never come back home . . . then she cried out, "*Oh, God, I can't do this alone!*" In this true scenario, the crisis led her to accept Christ as her Savior. That is when she experienced the Lord saying to her,

*Isa 41:10*

### DEFINITIONS

Single parenting—understandably the most difficult role on earth! What single parent has not brooded over these thoughts:

- How can I parent my child alone without feeling lonely?
- I need to take care of my kids without them needing to take care of me!
- How can I fill the role of both mother and father? I feel I have to have help!

The Bible says help is near. The Lord will be your constant help when you need to be upheld.

*Ps 63:7-8*

#### **A. Who Is a Single Parent?**

A single parent is an adult who has custody of at least one child and manages the family without a marriage partner.

#### **God's Hope:**

Although you may think you have taken on more trouble than you can bear, Jesus said,

*John 16:33*

## B. What Determines Single Parenting?

### The Six D's That Determine the Single Parent Status

Raising a child alone because of one of the following:<sup>1</sup>

#1 *decree* of adoption by a single person<sup>2</sup>

#2 *decision* of a never married parent to keep the baby

#3 death of a mate

#4 *divorce* or separation from a mate

#5 *desertion* of a mate

#6 *distance* of a mate due to extended

— military service

— hospitalization

— employment

— imprisonment

#### God's Hope:

Although you may hate the circumstances in which you find yourself, the Bible enables you to claim with assurance,

*Phil 4:11*

## C. Why Has This Happened to Me?

No one escapes having crises in life. In a crisis all you have believed in and planned for is suddenly disrupted. It feels as though the ground has been pulled out from under you . . . none of your old coping mechanisms work. Life is changed . . . forever! Bob Burns writes in his book *Through the Whirlwind*, "The Chinese have a two-faced symbol for crisis. One character stands for *catastrophe* and the other stands for *opportunity*. We tend to look at the catastrophe of a crisis, but with each trial comes the opportunity for personal growth."<sup>3</sup> God knows you so intimately that He knows exactly which crisis can motivate you to cry out to Him. Spiritual growth and maturity are almost always the result of seeking God's help to resolve a life crisis.

#### God's Hope:

Although you may feel "afflicted" as a single parent, the psalmist, who knew the value of affliction, said,

*Ps 119:71*

### Goals for Personal Growth

- A closer relationship with the Lord
  - As you rely on Christ to give you strength, your trust in his faithfulness deepens.

- A closer relationship with your children
  - You can choose to spend more quality time with your children and to become more sensitive to their needs.
- A stronger sense of self-confidence
  - Meeting the needs of your children provides a sense of accomplishment and develops their confidence in your ability as a provider.
- A stronger training ground to build character
  - Children in single parent families usually learn responsibility sooner and gain maturity earlier.
- A deeper joy in parenthood
  - Single parents assume more responsibility and develop a wider range of relational and practical skills.
- A deeper joy in life
  - Single parents tend to set priorities more carefully and to develop a greater sense of appreciation for what they have.

*James 1:2-4*

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF SINGLE PARENTING**

The bright, competent father had a picture perfect marriage. He and his beautiful wife were active in their church and accepted their responsibility to nurture their two small children in the ways of God. She was only thirty-two years old when the doctor said she had less than a year to live. Their life crisis came in the form of a dreaded disease . . . incurable cancer. His devotion to his wife knew no bounds. He took her to every known cancer specialist in the world as they traveled through North America, Europe and Asia searching for a cure. But hope after hope vanquished. On a cool fall evening, she quietly slipped away from him. Only then did the emotion of anger begin to engulf his heart. In spite of his ability to “fix” everything in business, it would take time to accept that here was a mortal wound to the family that he couldn’t fix. And it took time for his broken heart to heal.

*Ps 147:3*

### **A. Accepting the Emotional Fallout**

#### **Anger**

Anger is an emotion we all experience. This is especially true when you wake up one morning only to realize you are a *single* parent . . . though you had no choice in the matter. When you feel angry, first identify where your anger is directed.

- Are you angry because you have no marriage partner?
- Are you angry toward yourself for your own mistakes and bad choices?
- Are you angry at God for taking your spouse or allowing divorce?
- Are you angry because you feel rejected?

- Is your anger denied yet unleashed toward others?

*Heb 12:15*

## **Depression**

The loss of a mate for any reason ignites grief—actually a grief process. This process usually manifests itself in the form of depression. And just as all grief takes time to heal, emerging from depression involves working through various contributing emotions.

- **Self-pity**—“Why has this happened to me?”  
“I have been abandoned by everyone.”
- **Envy**—“It seems everyone else has a successful family life.”  
“Our family is taking a financial nosedive.”
- **Jealousy**—“It hurts to see my ex dating others.”  
“It hurts to see the children leave home for visitations.”
- **Fear**—“Am I destined to be alone for the rest of my life?”  
“How will I be able to provide for the basic needs of the children, much less to finance their education?”
- **False** guilt—“Why couldn’t I hold the family together?”  
“God is punishing me for some past sin!”

*Jer 29:11*

## **Fear**

One response that most people have when facing a major life change is fear. With each step forward into the unfamiliar, there is the giving up of something familiar . . . possibly something that was good and satisfying. It can also mean giving up a simpler, easier life for a more difficult and challenging life. Since fear can be contagious, you need to work toward having victory over your fears so that your children will not catch the same disease.

### **The Germs of Fear**

- fear of the future
- fear of financial hardships
- fear of loneliness
- fear of emotional damage to children
- fear of personal rejection
- fear of losing a home
- fear of being inadequate to do a good job

- fear of losing children’s affections

*Ps 34:4*

## **Loneliness**

For many single parents, the first and most difficult emotion experienced is loneliness, especially if you married before you developed the maturity to enjoy being single or alone. Many times the marriage was an immature attempt to escape loneliness. Then when a mate dies or leaves, the effects are devastating. All too often the result is to rush quickly into another marriage in an effort to escape the pain of loneliness. Now is the time to enter into a more intimate relationship with your Savior and allow Him to make the healthy changes that you would have never made before.

### **Learn about Loneliness**

- You cannot be a good parent if you are focused on your loneliness.
- Holidays, birthdays and anniversaries will be the most difficult times to fight feelings of desertion and loneliness.
- Don’t look for something or for someone to depend on in order to escape loneliness.
- Choose to depend more and more on God to see you through loneliness, one day at a time.
- The time you are lonely is the time to take responsibility for your own life and to look closely at the personal changes you need to make.
- You are not really alone. . . . God is always with you.

*Deut 31:6*

## **B. Four Stages of Single Parenting**

Be optimistic . . . even when you don’t feel like it. Optimism is one of the most important ingredients for making your way through the stew of emotions you will experience. As long as you are optimistic, you are hopeful. And just as fear is passed on to those around you, optimism is also contagious. Normally, single parents move back and forth between these four stages of healing . . . always moving toward the hope that we have in Christ Jesus.<sup>4</sup>

*Isa 40:31*

### **#1 Helpless**

The “helpless” single parent is often overwhelmed and feels a desperate need for the stability of someone else.

#### **• Comments**

- “I can’t make it alone.”
- “I can’t handle the responsibility.”
- “I’ll never be happy again.”
- “It’s hopeless.”

- **Characteristics**

- emotional extremes
- outbursts of tears
- deep depression
- desire to die

- **Consequence**

- The adult may feel isolated and alone and may withdraw from family and family responsibilities.
- The child may feel the need to be super responsible and becomes the “protector.”

- **Comfort**

*Jer 29:11*

## #2 Hanging-on

The “hanging-on” single parent is one who is in partial denial, clinging to the previous partner for personal identity and security.

- **Comments**

- “You are my source of security.”
- “You are my source of happiness.”
- “The children and I have to have you in our lives.”
- “The children are doomed without a ‘whole’ family.”

- **Characteristics**

- manipulation
- self-pity
- desperate pleading
- misplaced identity

- **Consequence**

- The adult may despair of having a “normal life” again or ever again experiencing joy and happiness.
- The child may feel the need to fix the hurting parent and become the “emotional provider.”

- **Comfort**

*Acts 17:28*

## #3 Heroic

The “heroic” single parent is one who appears totally self-sufficient and is determined to look like the successful single parent, trying to cover all the bases and

juggle all the responsibilities. This parent often tires and wears down and finally burns out.

- **Comments**

- “There’s nothing I can’t handle.”
- “I will succeed no matter what.”
- “The children and I are doing great.”
- “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.”

- **Characteristics**

- unwilling to be vulnerable
- vindictive
- bitter
- fearful of failure

- **Consequence**

- The adult may feel the need to fix everything, refusing help from anyone else, trying to convey an air of self-sufficiency.
- The child may feel no need to rely on the Lord because the parent is self-sufficient.

- **Comfort**

*2 Cor 3:5*

#### #4 Hopeful

The “hopeful” single parent is one who realizes that sufficiency is not in one’s self or in others but is found by relying on the Lord.

- **Comments**

- “Our future is in God’s hands.”
- “I will rely on God to provide our needs.”
- “I am thankful for my deeper walk with Christ.”
- “I believe God’s Word that I am complete in Christ.”

- **Characteristics**

- secure in the Lord
- confident
- patient
- whole

- **Consequence**

- The adult will depend on Christ to meet each God-given inner need—the need for love, significance and for security.

— The child is secure, knowing the parent’s confidence is in the promises of God.

- **Comfort**

*2 Peter 1:3-4*

## CAUSES OF DESPONDENCY

The life of a single parent is not like “Been there, done that!” It is more like “Have not been here and don’t want to do this!” One of the major questions your heart cries out to God is, “Why me Lord? What have I done to deserve this?” The children of Israel had somewhat the same reaction after God brought them out of bondage to the Egyptians. They turned against their leader, Moses, whining, “Why have you brought us out into the desert to die? We would have been better off in Egypt!” Their bitterness was aimed at Moses, but in reality they were so angry at God that they could not envision His promises or trust Him for their future.

### A. Causes of Bitterness and Discontentment<sup>5</sup>

- resentment toward ex-spouse or toward God
- reduction of income
- loss of friends and social life
- loss of identity
- loss of freedom because of bearing parenting responsibilities alone
- envy of friends who have spouses
- exhaustion from having to carry the load of parenting alone

The degree to which you respond positively to single parenting determines the degree to which you can parent well!

### B. Inner Causes of the Deep Pain and Loneliness

We all have three inner needs—for love, for significance and for security. The dream is to be surrounded by a family where these needs will be met. The reality is, these needs can be fully met only by God. He has given these needs to us so that we eventually will realize that He alone meets our inner needs and that nothing tangible will ever bring the ultimate love and fulfillment we need and seek.

- Did you look to your marriage partner to confirm that you are loved unconditionally?

Yet God says . . .

*Jer 31:3*

- Have you placed your identity in or received your sense of significance from being married?

Yet God says . . .

*Col 3:2-3*

- Did you think your family provided the emotional security you were seeking?

Yet God says . . .

### **C. Root Cause**

The root cause of your anger, depression, fear and loneliness is rooted in a wrong belief system. Until we know Christ and realize that it is only in Him that our needs will be fully met, we seek to meet our own needs based on a wrong belief system. As you begin to renew your mind in the truths of God, you will be able to meet the high challenge to which you have been called.

*Rom 12:2*

#### **Wrong Belief:**

“As a single parent, I can’t feel secure unless I have a mate beside me providing the physical and emotional help I need,” or “I have to assume responsibility for making everything right for myself and my children. The only person I can trust is myself.”

#### **Right Belief:**

As a Christian single parent, I can feel secure knowing that my relationship with Jesus is my source of security. God is the perfect provider for our family and a faithful Father to my children.

*Isa 41:10*

## **STEPS TO SOLUTION**

Single parents who feel they have three strikes against them have left God out of the lineup. He certainly has not been taken by surprise. In fact, He knows you better than anyone else does, and He considers you worthy of your job as parent to the children He gave to you . . . children whom He loves even more than you possibly can. He knows you will go through hard times, but His promise is to be with you. And you will know He is there . . . guiding you all the way.

*Isa 30:18-21*

### **A. Key Verse to Memorize**

#### **For the Single Mother**

*Ps 10:14*

#### **For the Single Father**

*Isa 49:15-16*

### **B. Key Passages to Read and Reread**

*Ps 145:8-9,13-20*

### **C. Meeting the Emotional Needs of Your Children**

Allowing the Lord to meet your emotional needs will enable you to focus on the needs of your children. They will have anger at the absent parent, anger at the parent they are left with, anger at themselves—feeling everything is their fault, and anger at the situation in general. Children worry and fear that more unwanted changes may occur or that something may happen to the one parent they now have and there will be nobody to take care of them. Additionally, most children do not always understand that divorce or separation is not between a parent and the children. Thus they have a deep feeling of rejection and guilt. Put your children first. Recognize the importance of building your home on the firm foundation of security. Security is the single most important need of the single parent home.

*Num 24:21*

#### **Children need to . . .**

**See that you are emotionally healthy and not insecure about the future.**

*Ps 146:5*

**Experience a consistent, structured home life brought about through your wise parenting.**

*Prov 24:3*

**Continue to have the freedom to love both parents.**

*1 John 4:11*

**Understand they are not responsible for having only one parent at home.**

*Prov 16:22*

**Receive comfort so that someday they will be able to comfort others.**

*2 Cor 1:3-4*

**Identify their inner feelings and confront them honestly.**

*Ps 51:6*

**Turn to the heavenly Father to find security in His family.**

*1 John 3:1*

**Yield to the Lord their discontentment, realizing that there is no “perfect family.”**

*Phil 4:11*

### **D. Do’s and Don’ts for Single Parents**

A Christian lawyer who experienced an unwanted separation and divorce knows the weight on the shoulders of a single parent. He writes in his well-acclaimed book, “If separation or divorce is like a death to us as adults, we can only begin to imagine the devastating impact it has on our children.”<sup>6</sup>

Single parents will do well to remember his bottom-line reminder: “Our children need blessing and acceptance from us—a warm acknowledgement that they are loved and appreciated as individuals.”<sup>7</sup>

**Don't** hang on to negative feelings.<sup>8</sup>

**Do . . .** Forgive the absent parent.

*Col 3:13*

**Don't** try to be the father and mother.

**Do . . .** Be the wisest parent possible in your God-given role.

*Ps 68:5*

**Don't** think your children are “doomed” or “permanently damaged.”

**Do . . .** Know that God has a plan for them and that they can reach their full potential.

*Jer 29:11*

**Don't** try to hide your emotions from your child.

**Do . . .** Be vulnerable. Let your child know who you really are as a person.<sup>9</sup>

*Ps 32:5*

**Don't** criticize the absent parent.<sup>10</sup>

**Do . . .** Mention positive attributes of the absent parent and, if possible, give children the opportunity to build a relationship with the absent parent.

*Ps 141:3*

**Don't** live on borrowed money.

**Do . . .** Set a budget and involve the children in the planning.<sup>11</sup>

*Prov 22:6-7*

**Don't** take on the financial burden alone.

**Do . . .** Count on God to fulfill financial needs.

*Matt 6:26*

**Don't** do everything for your children.

**Do . . .** Give them household chores with daily, weekly and monthly schedules.<sup>12</sup>

*Prov 12:24*

**Don't** overcompensate by buying too much for your children.

**Do . . .** Realize that you can't buy what your children need the most.

*Prov 15:16-17*

**Don't** accept disrespect from your children.

**Do . . .** Realize that when fear of rejection rules you, it can lead to passive parenting.

*Prov 19:18*

**Don't** expect your children to fill your emotional needs.

**Do . . .** Pursue friendships that will give emotional support and role modeling.

*Prov 18:24*

**Don't** look to the world for advice and approval.

**Do . . .** Look to God and His Word for correction and instruction.

*Ps 139:23-24*

**Don't** exaggerate or make impossible commitments.

**Do . . .** “**Keep** your promises.”<sup>13</sup>

*Prov 12:17*

**Don't** be pessimistic about the future.

**Do . . .** “**Look** for the positive.”<sup>14</sup> Create a sense of adventure and excitement about a new life. Provide assurance regarding the child's basic needs.

*Phil 4:19*

**Don't** make your child feel guilty for continuing to love the absent parent.

**Do . . .** “**Be fair**” not only to the absent parent but to their parents as well (your child's grandparents).<sup>15</sup>

*Ex 20:12*

**Don't** shelter your child from the reality of their painful situation.

**Do . . .** “**Teach** them about disappointment.”<sup>16</sup> Life is sometimes unfair and disappointing.

*Lam 3:48-50*

**Don't** exclude the absent parent in making parental decisions.

**Do . . .** “**Cooperate** with your spouse in co-parenting as much as possible, setting mutual goals and discipline boundaries.”<sup>17</sup>

*Prov 11:14*

## **E. The Only Perfect Mate**

Are you afraid of going it alone? Do you think you must remarry to fill the shoes of your missing mate? Do you think you must find a new mate to help in the role of parenting? Blended families are usually more difficult than is seen on the surface. Before you jump into a potentially difficult situation, remember who has called you to be His bride.<sup>18</sup>

*Isa 54:5*

- He is *always there* for you.

*Ps 46:1*

- He is a *good listener*.  
*Ps 62:8*
- He is *faithful*.  
*Ps 117:2*
- He is *patient*.  
*Ps 86:15*
- He is *wise*.  
*Job 12:13*
- He is *forgiving*.  
*Ps 30:5*
- He *loves you forever*.  
*Rom 8:39*
- He *loves your children* more perfectly than you do.  
*1 John 4:16-18*

*The heavenly Father has a special place in His heart for single parents. . . . He personally identifies with their pain. If God in His infinite wisdom has given you the responsibility of raising a child alone, hold your head high—you have a high calling.*

—June Hunt

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FROM *HOPE IN THE NIGHT*

### A two-hour live call-in counseling program

**“I am a single parent with a ten-year-old daughter. I have tried to raise her in the church and give her Biblical principles to live by, but she continues to argue and be disrespectful with me. What can I do to keep this from getting worse?”**

Some children just seem to come into the world with extremely strong wills. I wouldn’t begin to say that you can do certain things and she will change. But you can continue to do what is right: keep her in church, set appropriate boundaries, establish consequences for negative behavior and model appropriate respect for her. Persevere with prayer that God will work in her life, and give her encouragement when you can.

*1 Thess 5:18*

**“I am a single parent, and I would like to have more time raising my child instead of leaving it up to others. Should I change jobs in order to spend more time with my preschooler? What should I**

**to others. Should I change jobs in order to spend more time with my preschooler? What should I do?”**

Your greatest calling in life right now is parenting. To be the parent God wants you to be, you need to be actively involved in the various stages of your child’s life. God will honor your decision to take a loss financially in order to make your child your priority. Check employment ads in the paper, contact an employment agency and tell others of your desire to work at home or to work fewer hours. Be willing to accept what God brings your way. He will communicate to your heart which job to accept, and you will experience the joy of God’s provision.

*Phil 4:19*

**“My teenage son is rebellious and is getting into trouble. His father left home two years ago, and my son won’t listen to me. He says I am constantly nagging him. Should I give up trying to tell him what is right?”**

No. Even if your son continues to make choices that are wrong, as a parent, you are responsible for communicating what is right. You are not accountable for your son’s wrong decisions, but you are accountable for your parenting. If you won’t try to teach your son what is right, who will?

*Prov 13:14*

**“I have a five-month-old daughter, but her father doesn’t want anyone to know about her. We are not married, but I don’t think this is right. I’m beginning to think that I should put him out of my life. I used to go to church, but have stopped. Now I want to go to church again and begin doing things right. I really want to make the right decision here. What do you think I should do?”**

It seems obvious that you are seeking to do the right thing for your daughter. You are wanting what will be the best thing for her. This is agape love. It is the same kind of love that God has for you. But your friends’ opinions, or even my opinion, is not the answer for you. You need to become convicted in your own heart of what you should do. This means seeking God and His will. Ask God for forgiveness of your past and seek His guidance in the way you should go. Pray, “Lord, I want only to know Your will.” With God’s help, you can start a new life and begin doing things His way. And His ways will include being honest about your life, not hiding the truth about your child, and bringing honor to God by choosing sexual purity.

*Prov 11:3*

**“What can I do about my ex-husband’s allowing our son to watch movies that both my son and I are opposed to?”**

Check the laws in your state to see whether you have any legal recourse. Maybe there is a lawyer in your church who could give you some helpful counsel. Be grateful that your son is aware of the improper actions of his father. It is important though that he be prepared to appeal respectfully to his dad. He also needs to be trained in what to do with his eyes and mind when he is being exposed to things he finds objectionable. He needs to be taught how to respectfully say no to things . . . that violate his conscience.

*1 Peter 2:18*

**“I was unwise and got a woman pregnant who is not a citizen of this country. Now she rejects my desire to help her or to even be a part of my child’s life. What can I do?”**

You are the natural father and therefore responsible to provide for your child. Since international laws vary greatly from country to country, you will want to learn the civil laws within her country regarding a father’s rights for child custody, visitation and all other related matters. Ultimately, pray for God’s wisdom so that you will be able to discern the leading of the Lord.

*1 Tim 5:8*

## NOTES

1. For this section see André Bustanoby, *Being a Single Parent* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 10.
2. Arlo D. Compaan, "Single Parenting," in *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology & Counseling*, ed. David G. Benner and Peter C. Hill, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 1125.
3. Bob Burns, *Through the Whirlwind: A Proven Path to Recovery from the Devastation of Divorce* (Nashville: Oliver-Nelson, 1989), 23.
4. See also Robert G. Barnes, Jr., *Single Parenting: A Wilderness Journey* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1988), 17-39, and Virginia Watts Smith, *The Single Parent*, 2nd ed. (Old Tappan, N. J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1983), 69-81.
5. Virginia Watts Smith, *Advice to Single Parents* (Pomona, Calif.: Focus on the Family, 1989), 3-7; Compaan, "Single Parenting," 1126.
6. Joseph Warren Kniskern, *When the Vow Breaks: A Survival and Recovery Guide for Christians Facing Divorce* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 233.
7. Kniskern, *When the Vow Breaks*, 231.
8. Barnes, *Single Parenting*, 25-28.
9. Kniskern, *When the Vow Breaks*, 239.
10. Dandi Daley Knorr, *Just One of Me: Confessions of a Less-Than-Perfect Single Parent* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw, 1989), 164.
11. See Barnes, *Single Parenting*, 155-66.
12. See Barnes, *Single Parenting*, 145-54.
13. Kniskern, *When the Vow Breaks*, 238.
14. Kniskern, *When the Vow Breaks*, 240.
15. Kniskern, *When the Vow Breaks*, 239.
16. Kniskern, *When the Vow Breaks*, 239.
17. Kniskern, *When the Vow Breaks*, 239.
18. Knorr, *Just One of Me*, 37-44.

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