

## Happy Single Holiday

*I remember how I felt the first holiday season following my marital breakup. I found myself dreading what had been one of my favorite times of the year. I was upset for two reasons. First was the thought that I would be alone that year for the first time in more than ten years. Although I wasn't ready to become involved with someone, I was accustomed to at least having an arm to hold at holiday festivities (one of the many advantages of having a partner). So I found myself feeling incomplete.*

Making matters worse, everywhere I looked—from television commercials to shopping malls—I saw “happy couples” doing “happy things” together: playing in the snow, romantically meeting on New Year’s Eve, lugging a tree home together. These images only served to reinforce my feelings of loneliness.

Second, I was increasingly anxious about encounters with relatives. I didn’t look forward to questions or comments regarding my divorce. It was personal and painful, and I wanted to keep it private.

I made it through that first year, and the next, and the next. Now, five years later, I’ve healed much, and once again I enjoy the holidays. However, I still experience the temptation to give in to loneliness or discouragement, especially when I am invited to affairs where couples will be. But my current struggles are not over a relationship gone bad, but learning to accept my “state” (Philippians 4:11) and maintaining a proper focus.

Let’s face it, for us single sisters, the holidays can be difficult, and even painful—especially when we desire to spend them with someone special. The temptation to feel incomplete, discouraged or even depressed can be overwhelming.

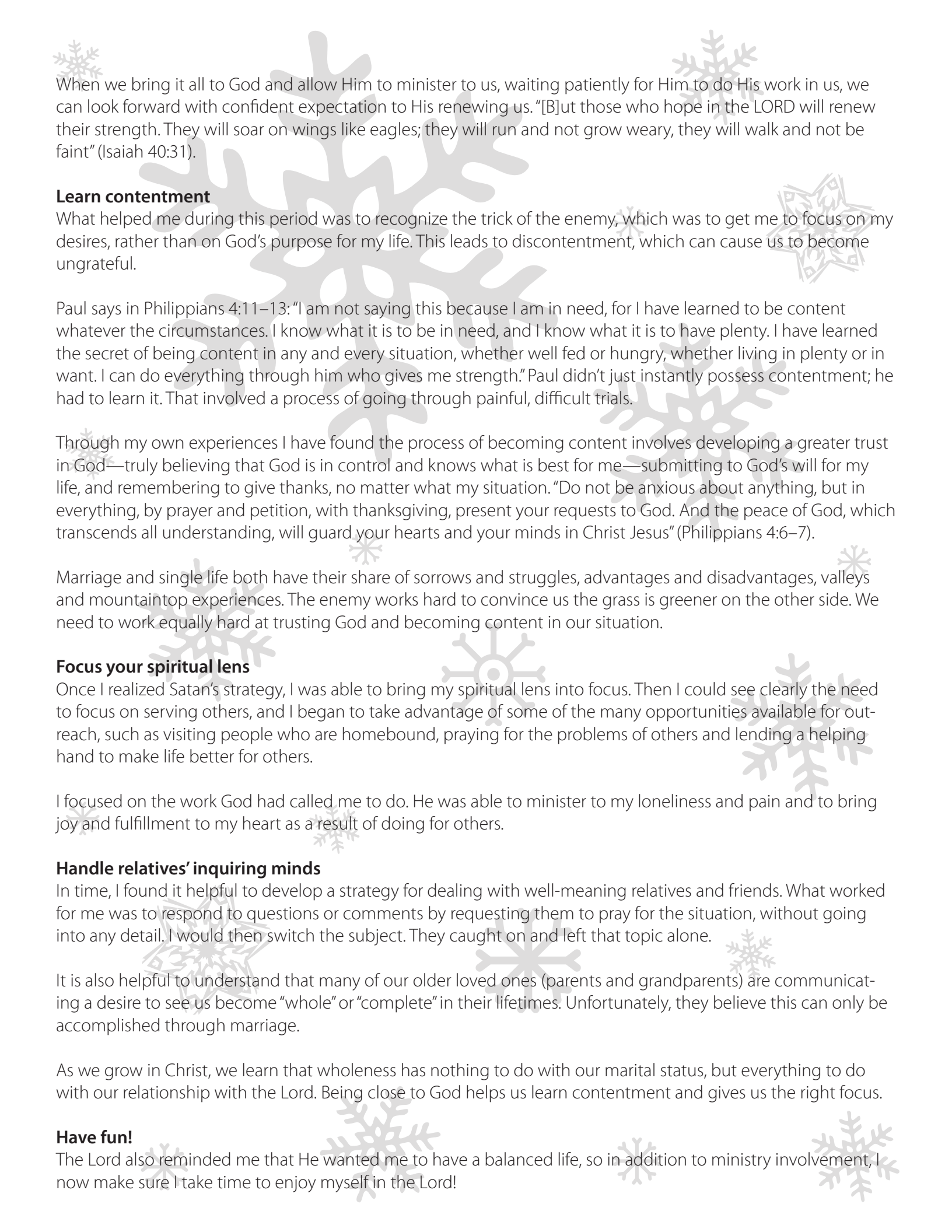
For you singles who were a “couple” last year but who, through divorce, widowhood, separation or the breakup of a courtship, find yourselves alone again, it can be downright devastating to face family members without your significant other. People may try to pretend all is normal, or they may feel it necessary to comment. But there is always a degree of discomfort accompanied by the continual reminder of failure and loss.

For those who just haven’t found “Mr. Right,” there’s pressure from well-meaning family members to get hitched, especially those who see you only this time of year. If you’ve been there, then you know all too well the questions and comments. Probably the worst is “I can’t understand why someone as nice ... pretty ... smart ... \_\_\_\_\_ (you fill in the blank) as you can’t find someone.” Their intentions may be good, but they don’t realize their comments have the effect of pouring salt on an open wound. Whatever your situation, if you’re plagued by feelings of loneliness or find yourself dreading the holiday season because of the lack of a mate, you can still experience victory in your single life even through the holidays. Here are several ways we as single women can make it through this sometimes-difficult period.

### **Get close to God**

Remember that the God of all comfort knows your pain and heartache, your longings and desires. If we stay close to God, He will comfort our hearts, ease our pain, and in due time, give us the desires of our hearts. We can give our anxiety to the Lord because of His great care for us (1 Peter 5:7).

If you find yourself broken or hurting because of a failed relationship or loss of your mate, allow yourself time to heal. Spend time with the Lord, who promises to comfort us and give us strength through the joy that He provides. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength (Nehemiah 8:10). While happiness is circumstantial, joy is not.

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When we bring it all to God and allow Him to minister to us, waiting patiently for Him to do His work in us, we can look forward with confident expectation to His renewing us. “[B]ut those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (Isaiah 40:31).

### **Learn contentment**

What helped me during this period was to recognize the trick of the enemy, which was to get me to focus on my desires, rather than on God’s purpose for my life. This leads to discontentment, which can cause us to become ungrateful.

Paul says in Philippians 4:11–13: “I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.” Paul didn’t just instantly possess contentment; he had to learn it. That involved a process of going through painful, difficult trials.

Through my own experiences I have found the process of becoming content involves developing a greater trust in God—truly believing that God is in control and knows what is best for me—submitting to God’s will for my life, and remembering to give thanks, no matter what my situation. “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6–7).

Marriage and single life both have their share of sorrows and struggles, advantages and disadvantages, valleys and mountaintop experiences. The enemy works hard to convince us the grass is greener on the other side. We need to work equally hard at trusting God and becoming content in our situation.

### **Focus your spiritual lens**

Once I realized Satan’s strategy, I was able to bring my spiritual lens into focus. Then I could see clearly the need to focus on serving others, and I began to take advantage of some of the many opportunities available for outreach, such as visiting people who are homebound, praying for the problems of others and lending a helping hand to make life better for others.

I focused on the work God had called me to do. He was able to minister to my loneliness and pain and to bring joy and fulfillment to my heart as a result of doing for others.

### **Handle relatives’ inquiring minds**

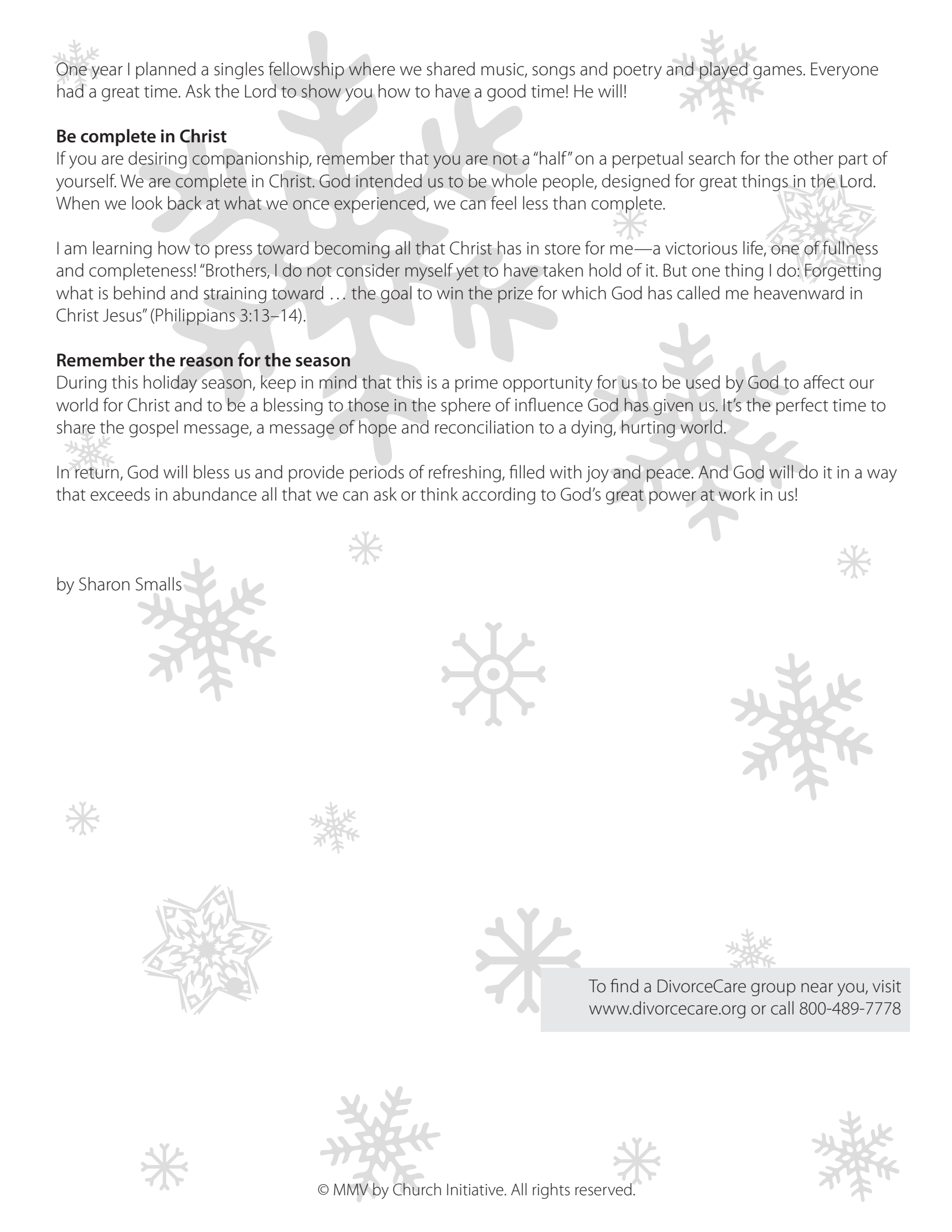
In time, I found it helpful to develop a strategy for dealing with well-meaning relatives and friends. What worked for me was to respond to questions or comments by requesting them to pray for the situation, without going into any detail. I would then switch the subject. They caught on and left that topic alone.

It is also helpful to understand that many of our older loved ones (parents and grandparents) are communicating a desire to see us become “whole” or “complete” in their lifetimes. Unfortunately, they believe this can only be accomplished through marriage.

As we grow in Christ, we learn that wholeness has nothing to do with our marital status, but everything to do with our relationship with the Lord. Being close to God helps us learn contentment and gives us the right focus.

### **Have fun!**

The Lord also reminded me that He wanted me to have a balanced life, so in addition to ministry involvement, I now make sure I take time to enjoy myself in the Lord!

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One year I planned a singles fellowship where we shared music, songs and poetry and played games. Everyone had a great time. Ask the Lord to show you how to have a good time! He will!

### **Be complete in Christ**

If you are desiring companionship, remember that you are not a “half” on a perpetual search for the other part of yourself. We are complete in Christ. God intended us to be whole people, designed for great things in the Lord. When we look back at what we once experienced, we can feel less than complete.

I am learning how to press toward becoming all that Christ has in store for me—a victorious life, one of fullness and completeness! “Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward . . . the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13–14).

### **Remember the reason for the season**

During this holiday season, keep in mind that this is a prime opportunity for us to be used by God to affect our world for Christ and to be a blessing to those in the sphere of influence God has given us. It’s the perfect time to share the gospel message, a message of hope and reconciliation to a dying, hurting world.

In return, God will bless us and provide periods of refreshing, filled with joy and peace. And God will do it in a way that exceeds in abundance all that we can ask or think according to God’s great power at work in us!

by Sharon Smalls

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