

Does Your Church Struggle With Toxic Monogamy?

Some marriages are incredibly inspiring. Both partners honor and respect each other deeply.

Having shared countless experiences over the years, these couples have a powerful bond built on a foundation of love. They embody healthy monogamy.

However, there are also couples who are incredibly draining to be around. Their foundation seems to be built on insecurity, jealousy and self-centeredness. These relationships can be described by an emerging term, “toxic monogamy.”

What Toxic Monogamy Looks Like

References to “toxic monogamy culture” began appearing online in 2017. In short, toxic monogamy describes relationships built upon insecurity and unrealistic expectations. The term resonated because it was intuitively understood by anyone who heard it.

Therapist Elizabeth Earnshaw, LMFT, asserts that our culture romanticizes behavior that’s actually rooted in jealousy, anger or resentment. Imagine the insecure husband who refuses to allow his wife to have any male friends or vice versa. This behavior is not romantic; it’s controlling and coming from a place of fear.

Toxic monogamy also emerges when we have unrealistic expectations of marriage, assuming one person can somehow fulfill your every emotional need and magically be able to make you whole.

Toxic Monogamy in our Churches

Churches are made up of flawed people who embody the

overarching culture they live in. So, when our society displays toxic monogamy values, this is often reflected in our churches.

Because Christian culture can be very averse to divorce, Christians can often avoid confronting abusive behavior in relationships. For example, many pastors don't recognize when someone's going through physical or emotional abuse. They may counsel that person (often a woman) to continue to suffer because divorce is to be avoided at all costs.

These leaders often don't realize the magnitude of their influence. Often, a parishioner is desperate for help to escape abuse. They need the leader they confided in to act boldly to help find a safe option.

Net Grace creates a strong theological argument for why Jesus is on the side of the abused, asserting that "Jesus repeatedly spoke up on behalf of the weak, marginalized and wounded. ... Faith communities ought to be the safest place for victims, a place where offenders are held accountable. If you know someone who is abusing, expose it. Do not leave the victim or perpetrator in the darkness. You become complicit if you do."

Pastors have a tremendous responsibility in these situations. Safe Resource explains that "churches and pastors are uniquely positioned to respond helpfully in situations of abuse, but they often lack the resources and training to do so appropriately."

If you're in a position of influence at your church, consider implementing educational programs from Net Grace or Safe Resource so you can better provide to help those experiencing abuse.

Monogamy as an Idol

Christian culture often elevates monogamy to the status of an idol. When monogamy is held up as the gold standard, it's easy

to believe that once a couple has made their vows to be monogamous, they're to be elevated above the uncoupled in the church.

Many single Christians say that they feel unwelcome in church because of their relationship status; they may feel even more ostracized if they're divorced. Often due to a lack of pastoral discipleship, their complex sexuality is often encouraged to simply be boxed up and ignored until they eventually marry.

Many churches even prevent singles from leadership roles (either overtly or subconsciously). Congregants often, in turn, respond to this pressure by believing that *any* marriage is better than being single, so they enter into toxic monogamous relationships simply to escape the social ostracization they're experiencing.

This ostracization of singles can have profound spiritual consequences, namely, it's driving people away from the church. Let's look at the statistics: While 53% percent of married and widowed adults attend church at least once a week, the number drops to 42% for people who have never married.

It declines to 40% for the divorced and to only 26% for people who live with their partner. When churches make singles feel unwelcome, they deny the Good News to entire segments of the population.

Both Jesus and Paul are powerful examples of God's use of singles in His perfect plan. If you hear people in your church saying they feel unwelcome because they're single, *believe them*. Actively listen to their concerns and work to change your church's culture that may have placed monogamy as an idol.

Healthy Monogamy

All this talk about jealousy, abuse and idolization of

marriage may make it sound as though I have a problem with monogamy. By *no* means is that the case! Healthy monogamous relationships are incredibly beautiful and well worth pursuing if you desire one.

If you're already married, but there's toxicity in your relationship, boldly pursue therapy to help restore health to your marriage.

If your relationship has devolved into an abusive place, act now to get the help you need to escape that abuse. You're a child of God and deserve to be treated with utter love and kindness. The National Domestic Violence Helpline offers 24/7 chat support.

If you're single and desire to marry, *please* remember that it's better to be single than in a toxic relationship. It's better to marry at an older age, in a relationship built on love and respect, than to rush into a monogamous commitment built on a foundation of insecurity.

Remember, you're not single because you don't value marriage. In fact, you may value marriage more than many married people, because you're willing to put the time in to find that person worth marrying.

If you're single and desire to stay single, it may be because you've witnessed the damage a toxic monogamous relationship can cause. You have every right to craft a meaningful life solely on your own.

And for those of you who are in a healthy relationship, please help those around you achieve the same. Lovingly counsel people towards the resources they need to breathe more health into their relationships. We don't need more toxic marriages; we desperately need more health in both our nonromantic and romantic relationships. {eo}

LightWorkers' *mission is to create engaging, uplifting and*

*inspirational content that breaks through the clutter,
building a community of sharing and igniting a movement in the
real world that motivates people to celebrate and share the
good all around them. Please visit .*