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INTRODUCTION

This single scripture provides the backdrop for this entire project—The Naked Truth.

I Timothy 4:12 – *“Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young (SINGLE), but set an example for believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith, and in purity.”*

Reflecting on the lives of those who were young and single in the scriptures, I realize that far too many singles today are living defeated lives. I hear their constant cries of being despised by their congregations, society, and even their own family members. In the scriptures, Paul, Joseph, and even Jesus Christ faced similar obstacles, yet they remained victorious in their daily living and service toward God.

Throughout my single years, the stories of those singles in the scriptures were the catalyst of encouragement that molded my life. Through their experiences and perseverance, I understood the scriptures better and clearer. I learned of divine placement through Joseph’s story. His character taught me the necessity of living a life of integrity despite what others around me were doing or the direction they were taking. Through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, I recognized the value and weight of sacrifice and the purposeful service of the work of the ministry.

Because I was profoundly helped by those who led by example in the Word of God, I wanted to offer this same hope to singles all over the world. One cannot deny that these are perilous times, even more so for the Christian singles that are attempting to live according to God’s Word. For this reason, my strongest desire became to provide singles with sound spiritual truths by which to live and on which to hold. Consequently, this project, The Naked Truth, was inspired by this strong desire and from my own life experiences. In fact, in keeping with the title, I actually had to become NAKED to write each chapter. I had to strip myself of my past mistakes and wrong turns. I had to remove layers of mistrust and doubt in my own God given abilities. I had to become exposed and in turn expose my life before you the reader in order for people to be blessed.

Having been single for thirty-eight years, I know firsthand how trying the life of a Christian single can be. As you follow my journey in these pages, you will catch glimpses of my testimony -- unclothed and stripped to the bare truth. You will see how as an eighteen year old, I embraced my singleness as freedom -- freedom to date, freedom to stay out late, and freedom to make my own choices. When I turned twenty-five, I recalled viewing my single years as periods of growth. I grew spiritually, physically, and emotionally. And, boy did I experience the growing pains! By age twenty-eight, it was obvious that I was no longer the person I was in my teens. By my mid-thirties, a new single had emerged. God had performed a spiritual makeover. Thank God I did not resemble what I had been through. Like a rose bush surrounded by fertilizer and manure, I used the decay to my advantage and grew from the experience. The fragrance I was releasing was a sweet smelling savor unto God’s nostrils.

The E. Marcel that once took life for granted was finally living responsibly. There was actually the resemblance of a mature man. However, I had a rude awakening. There was something missing in my life -- A helpmate! At first, I struggled with the idea that maybe God was calling me to a life of celibacy. Maybe this was as good it was going to get for me. The more I wrestled with this notion, the more intense the feeling became that there was someone out in this huge world waiting on me to complete her. Strange, huh?

Well, God did send me a helpmate. He could not have chosen a better partner for me. We *complete* each other. She is what I need to be competent, and I am everything that her soul has

ever longed for in a man! Well, okay, maybe that is a bit of a stretch, but I am what she needs from a mate to be totally equipped for God's service.

As you read my Christian experiences, keep in mind that I have been where you are and have walked some of the same roads. No, I have not been in YOUR shoes, but as you read, you will discover that I have traveled similar paths. Does this make me authorized to write to singles? Yes, indeed! You bet your Aunt Beatrice's peach pie it does! Think about this; who is really authorized to write to singles? Would it be someone who is still single and is ambivalent about marriage and commitment? Or would it be someone who has been married for many years and is out of touch with singles today? In my assessment, it is really not about the marital status of the author but about the passion in the author's heart. He must be passionate about singles! Writing to singles is about allowing the breath of the Holy Spirit to rest upon every single word penned in each chapter. Once God's signature is on the document, it is official!

Now, understand something else about this project. The contents of this book left my hands a while back. It was as if God lifted the lines off each page, pulled each chapter together in the order he wanted them, poured his voice into the pages, rewrote the beginning and ending, and then handed it back to me to have published. What an awesome God!

Along the way, of course, there have been many disappointments and road blocks that have attempted to keep me from publishing The Naked Truth. But, God had it in his hands each time. And, when I was ready to receive the idea of publishing again, he entrusted it back into my hands. There is a Word waiting for you in the contents of this book. The Word is that there is no time like the present to serve God!

If you read the Bible closely, you will find that many of the most influential Biblical characters were used by God at the peak of their singleness. Yet, in an era when the harvest for saved souls is ripe, the laborers are few. There are singles that have become paralyzed by their past or incapacitated by the bureaucracy of church leadership. On one hand, many choose to remain inactive in their service to the Lord because of what wrongs they committed in the past; they refuse to accept God's complete forgiveness and cleansing. Still others encounter those reluctant church leaders and congregations that are against singles serving in various leadership positions or in select ministries. Nevertheless, there is no excuse for NOT serving God! There is no more convenient time than the present to give God your all. There will never be another moment like right now to allow God complete access to the gifts and talents he has blessed you with so far.

I travel quite a bit because of my job. One of the things I love to do while driving is listen to various radio stations. One particular morning while driving, I tuned in to a station that carried the National Public Radio (NPR) program that is considered to be a scholarly station. I love the news reports and on-air journals the program shares. One particular morning, the program was dedicated to a photographer who had died after a long career of capturing some of the world's key events and people.

One of his photos featured a blind boy with no arms sitting with his face buried in a book. Upon first glimpse of the photo, the boy appeared to be sound asleep. However, the caption below the photograph revealed that this young blind boy without arms was actually reading the Braille embossed book with the tip of his nose. The sad thing is that hundreds of young people in the United States who are blessed with arms, eyes, and the ability to read choose to remain illiterate. No excuse! Likewise, some of us have the capacity to do great things for God yet choose to remain inactive in our kingdom work.

My prayer for you as you read the contents of this book is multifaceted. I pray you discover

God's anointing and favor for your life. I pray that your lifestyle lines up with God's purpose and that you intentionally increase your quiet time alone with Him. As you read, I encourage you to do the following: Record your emotions and reactions in the margins of the pages; scribble scriptures that support various points made throughout the book. If the book blesses you, purchase one for a friend and another one for a special teenager in your life. Also, please know that this book is not meant to be read in one sitting. Like a crock pot, you must slowly allow the flavor of each chapter to marinate your soul's craving to know God more intimately and enjoy the feast set before you.

Love Handles: What factors could be hindering your complete devotion to God's purpose for your life?

Chapter 13 - The ABC's of Abstinence: A recipe for remaining pure

Colossians 3:5 -- Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.

The best thing my wife offered me was a challenge to my biggest struggle – she made me wait! I do not know of many in my circle of peers that can say that they married their spouse without even tasting her lips first. Most singles I know believed in the motto that you have to test the waters before you decide to buy the ship. Or, in the South we say it like this: Before you buy the car, you better take it on a test drive around the block. This mentality has messed up the lives of so many saints that I feel compelled to challenge it in this chapter. I want to pass on some sage advice on how to live an abstinent lifestyle. The scripture says in Colossians 3:5 to put to death (or kill) whatever is earthly in nature, such as sexually sinful acts, lusts, and impure thoughts to name a few. All during my years as a single's pastor, I encountered countless individuals who were beating themselves up over sexual acts of the past. "How can I stop?" they would ask. I never had the perfect answer for this question. But, I was able to share with them what was working for me.

At the age of 27, I decided enough was enough. No longer would my spirit man allow me to get away with declaring God's Word but living according to the world's standards. I was preaching to the youth to keep their pants up and skirt tails down but was leaving Bible study on Wednesday preparing for sex on Saturday night with my girlfriend. And, in my mind, since she was a girlfriend, it was okay. At least it was in a committed relationship, right? Wrong! So, against all worldly standards and much to the chagrin and sometimes anger of girlfriends to come, I declared abstinence. Like anything, it was hard to accomplish at first, especially the starting cold turkey. But, you cannot treat sex like a water hose and turn it off gradually. If you are going to do it, you have to shut the valve off immediately, without hesitation.

For the next eleven years, I had some good days and some challenging days, but I held on to my commitment to God. I was determined to let this be my testimony of God's grace, mercy, and deliverance all in one! One relationship ended after only a month of dating. She had formerly been involved with an abusive guy and was relieved to be in a relationship with a man who valued her and taught her so much about herself and her relationship with God. But, after being told repeatedly that I had no plans of being involved sexually, I was given the famous Dear John letter and kicked to the curve. This one hurt...

Not only did this woman cast me aside because she could not as she said, "...continue at

the pace we are going without having sex,” but she also made the choice to revisit her relationship with her abusive ex-boyfriend. In other words, it felt like she was saying to me, “Since you refuse to meet my sexual needs, I will go back to something not good for me, just to have my sexual needs met.” Mannnnnn! That hurt. I almost slipped up and gave up the fight at this point. I started questioning if this thing was worth it and where I would end up in life. I was tired of being the butt of all of the jokes -- of exploding or imploding from the build up of unreleased passion. I wanted relief and would have turned away from my mission, if it were not for the grace of God.

On that same day, I recall taking a long walk in the mall, hurting, when God reminded me that it was all going to be worth it in the end. What was so awesome was that He made it plain that my reward would not just be received when I got to heaven but in this lifetime, I would see the glory of the testimony of holding on to His promises. While walking in the mall that day, God led me to a jewelry store where I had once purchased a watch. It was there that I cast my eyes upon one of the most impressive gold wedding bands that I had ever seen. It was a simple diamond cut band with several crosses embellished around the body of the ring. It was the last one in the store; I purchased it without hesitation!

“When is the big day,” the clerk asked. “I have no idea, but it is coming,” I replied. Can you imagine the look on the clerk’s face? God instructed me from that point forward to wear the ring on my right hand for at least two reasons.

1. To remind me of God’s promise to me and my promise to Him. Every time, I looked at my hand, I knew of the goal I had in mind.
2. To provide a constant testimony of my vow of abstinence to those who inquired. Daily, without fail, someone would see my ring and comment on its style. That opened the door of witnessing for me. I would share what I was doing and give them the testimony of how long I had held true to it. I had opportunities to talk to countless people and share the love of God with them.

Now listen, I applaud you and praise God for his sustaining power over you if you are reading this and are still maintaining your virginity. How awesome a place you are in life to have such a precious gift still contained in your soul. You are special and the gift you possess is not only unique but also priceless. You have what I could never reclaim. However, if you have tasted the fruit of pre-marital sex already, do not lose hope. All is not lost. You can begin today renewing the life of holiness you were intended to walk. I know how you think God sees you. And, you would be right in your assessment were it not for the blood of Christ that covers you and me. He sees us as righteous because of Him who died for our sins. Yet this does not give us a license to continue to wallow in the sin state of uncontrollable lust.

Now let us be real with one another. As easy as it sounds, it is not easy to lead a lifestyle of abstinence! For many of us, sex has been placed in a high priority on our list of daily accomplishments. But, the unfortunate component for singles is that God has not granted us a license to indulge in this act. If sex were a car, singles would have no reason even sitting behind the wheel. Singles do not have a license to drive. “But, technically,” you may say, “Minister Jones, I am not driving the car; I am just getting a feel for the road and how the car handles. We are not about to go anywhere yet.”

Let me say this really loud – I am not stupid! If you keep sitting behind the wheel, twisting it, turning it, and pretending to be driving, pretty soon you will get the gumption to crank it up. It will not be long after that you will be driving on the road as an inexperienced driver with nothing

more than practice stimulation (Oops, I meant SIMULATION). And, no one without a license to drive needs to be on the road headed anywhere; the best thing for you is to get out of the car and admire it from afar until the day that God bestows His license upon you. You ask, “How can I walk away from such a tempting set of wheels?” I am delighted that you asked this question. Below, I have furnished a few strategies that should aid you in discovering the lifestyle of abstinence that God desires for you.

THE ABC’s of ABSTINENCE

A -- Accountability Partner: Pray that God reveals to you two accountability partners. These are friends or relatives that you do not mind getting into your business. They know your strengths and weaknesses. They are aware of your vow to abstain from sexual relations. They are folks who do not mind getting in your face and asking you the tough questions. They check on you regularly to make certain you are still on the track. You will hate them at first but love them in the end.

Name at least three individuals that would make excellent accountability partners—folks that would have permission to get into your business for the purpose of making certain you maintain a walk of holiness.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

B -- Be honest with your dating partner: Let them know up front your decision to hold off on intimate contact. This is fair to them in the beginning so they can make a decision to remain with you or flee. If they remain, remind them that you need them to be just as accountable and not attempt to sway you away from your goal.

C -- Celebrate small steps: It can be a trip to the doughnut shop or a simple turning of a cartwheel. Either way, enjoy your accomplishments and praise God for his keeping power each week you are successful. We celebrated during our Single’s Ministry meeting one Friday night when we found that half of our members had maintained their abstinence for several months. Even the members who boasted of weeks of abstinence joined in our celebration.

D -- Distinguish between love and lust: Too often, people get wrapped up in the emotions and lust of the relationship while neglecting to develop the love. Understand that lust and emotions are present instantly. But, it is the love that one has for another that will take time to mature. The type of love I am alluding to is not EROS. That is the erotic love that drives the lust and all of the passion that you are not ready for in a non-marital relationship. I am speaking of AGAPE love, an unconditional love that looks past faults and wrongs. Despite the fact that this person is not the most ideal mate you would have imagined, you are still able to love him or her. When you think about it, you may not be the most ideal mate either. So, just as you are imperfect, you learn to love those who are imperfect. When you invest more AGAPE time than EROS time, you decrease the likelihood that you will end up on the receiving end of a lustful relationship gone wrong.

E -- Elicit the support of prayer partners: Tell others of your plan for abstinence and ask them to pray with you and for you in the beginning. Their prayers will strengthen you, especially as you embark upon the first couple of months. The prayers of the righteous people in your life will avail much. Ask family, friends, and even co-workers to pray for you and for your choices. You will find that not only will God's will become clearer but also that your choices will become much wiser. You will be a happier more fulfilled person without the confusion of being sexually tied to another.

F -- Filter seductive images/sexual thoughts: A few images of seduction on the big screen or a sexy romance novel detailing the sexual affairs of two characters is all that is necessary to kick your hormones in overdrive. Stimulation can arrive in a number of packages. Even our own thoughts can sometimes stray into the realm of ecstasy if we are not sober and vigilant about maintaining holy thoughts. I do not mean that we have to walk around twenty-four hours a day with nothing but scriptures and worship on our minds. But, the more we preoccupy ourselves with thoughts that glorify God, the less room remains for the enemy to infuse wicked images. Even married couples must be intentional about discarding ungodly thoughts from our minds.

G -- Guard your eyes: Protect your eyes because they are the portals of your soul. What we see, we develop in our minds. Sometimes, we overdevelop the images we see, especially men. Men are prone to do a double take when spotting a beautiful woman from across the room. Just that image alone, if left untamed, can lead to a host of thoughts.

H -- Handle your vessel with honor: When the Bible speaks of a person's vessel, it is alluding to a person's body, especially their genitalia. Possessing one's genitals with honor essentially means remaining pure and reserving sexual pleasures for his or her spouse. Married couples must abide by this rule as well; it is a good idea to put into practice what is required in the marriage bed.

I -- Identify your weaknesses: The enemy has a resume on us and knows our weaknesses. Therefore, we must be aware of what could take us down. Everyone is not the same; we each have our own idiosyncrasies. For example, it would be hard for me to resist chocolate brownies with pecans and ice cream or about a half dozen glazed doughnuts even though I know they would destroy me if I consumed them daily. But, placing a box of fig newtons or a slice of coconut cake before me would have little effect. Why? The latter does not tempt me to indulge. When you know what tempts you, you avoid exposure to it as much as possible.

J -- Join a singles Ministry or group that supports your beliefs: These persons will make great accountability partners as you strive to maintain a lifestyle of abstinence. I headed a group for more than eight years. These members were the people that encouraged my walk and held me accountable to the ministry God was birthing in me. They kept me focused on the purpose of abstaining for God's glory. If there is not one in your town, organize your own with just a few friends. Before long, it may grow to impact thousands.

K -- Kill the flesh: This is easier said than done. Killing the flesh involves quickening the spirit man within you. The more you feed your flesh, the stronger it becomes. The more you feed your spirit man, the stronger he becomes. It makes sense, if you are going to profess God as your Father, then you feed the man that matters the most. The flesh should be fed pot-roast not porn. But,

when we allow our flesh to be fed porn our spirit becomes corrupt and weak. You must kill the flesh by feeding your spirit with prayer time, devotional time, along with praise and worship time. Build him up to be more victorious than defeated.

L -- Learn to avoid compromising situations: If you find yourself at the end of a date in the bedroom with the lights completely off and the music of Luther Vandross blaring in the background, there is a pretty good chance that something is about to occur that you will end up regretting in the morning. There are some factors that increase the likelihood that a sexual encounter will take place. Learn to identify them and avoid them at all costs!

M -- Move forward with your life: So you messed up! Okay, repent and get over it. Instead of dwelling on the mistakes of the past, even if it was last night, it is a good idea to get up from your bed of guilt and move forward. God needs you at one hundred percent. So, trust that he has forgiven you and make a serious commitment to NOT indulge anymore. It is time to move forward.

N -- Never expect more than you are willing to give: Do not assume that giving in to sexual pleasures with the person you are dating will cause him or her to become more committed to you. It does not work that way. True commitment works well in marriages when both persons are working at it. In a dating relationship, it often fails because of one person's partial commitment to the partnership. The ultimate commitment is not the guarantee that I will go out with you next weekend. The ultimate commitment is, "I do take you as my wife." That is the type of commitment that is not given just because you slept with me last week.

O -- Obey God: He is our father and requires our obedience. Obedience is basic to any parent-child relationship. Even earthly parents expect this of their children. We obey God by adhering to what His Word expects of us. God wants to protect his children from the harm caused by sex outside of his will. So, he instructs us to wait until we have married our soul-mate before we share what is precious. To share with several people what God has ordained as exclusive disrespects Him and the person for whom it was ultimately intended. Practice daily obedience.

P -- Pray continuously for strength, especially during down periods: There were periods in my life as a single that sexual tension was not an issue. But, during those times when I was at my weakest, I had to really seek God for strength. There were times when I had just finished preaching or teaching God's Word and worship had been at its highest. However, in my winding down period when all was quiet and settled, I found myself being tempted at all points and from all directions. Never let a day go by without talking to God and praying for strength to make it through another hour.

Q -- Query: There is nothing wrong with asking questions for clarification. If you do not understand something, the best thing to do is ask questions about it. Sex is complicated when it takes place out of the will of God. So, a good starting place for answers to your questions is the Word of God. The Word gives explicit advice on the purpose of abstaining and the blessings of waiting until sex is ordained of God. Before you query your favorite tabloid, magazine, or journal, I would definitely seek what God has to say first.

R -- Recognize the moves of the enemy: His ways are deceitful and damaging. His whole mission is to seek us out, steal what he can from us, kill everything that resembles God, and ultimately destroy us. This is precisely what sex out of the will of God does for our soul. It is damaging. So, deceptively, he introduces people in our lives who do not agree with our mission of abstinence. He places those things and people in our paths that tempt us the most and beckons us to entertain them. Recognize his ploy and avoid him altogether. Flee full speed ahead if you must.

S -- Surround yourself with positive people and rid yourself of negative folk: Positive people enhance our lives. They think, walk, talk, give, and live differently from negative thinking folk. The vibes and connection you feel with positive people exceeds the drag and drain of hanging with negative people.

T -- Try alternative dating strategies: For some, group dates are the way to go. Group dates take the focus off of intimacy and places the night's events in the category of friends having a nice outing. Still others have found that dating in an open arena during the daytime without the stimulation of dark lights and soothing music is ideal. Skating rinks, bowling alleys, putt-putt golf centers, and botanic parks are a few of the non-threatening locations for alternative dates.

U -- Understand that abstinence is a lifestyle, not an event: You have to keep this in your mind and comprehend the process fully. Just going through the motions one time is not enough. Daily, you have to recommit to the challenge of successfully abstaining from sexual promiscuity. It is similar to a diet done right. When I consider a diet as an event, I am likely to eat healthy today but binge tomorrow. However, if I consider a diet as a lifestyle change, I become sensitive to what I am allowing my system to digest daily. I make a conscious effort to do right daily because I UNDERSTAND it is a process, not an event.

V -- Volunteer your time serving God and meeting the needs of mankind: God has positioned singles in a unique place in life. You have the freedom to serve without reservations. Often times before I can even think of volunteering my time, I have to consider my wife's needs, my child's needs, and our household needs. By the time I consider all of these responsibilities; the opportunity for service has usually passed or seems undoable. Volunteer your time at nursing homes, prison ministries, homeless shelters, children's hospitals, schools, or even community agencies.

W -- Walk away from unhealthy relationships: You do not need anything unhealthy in your life. Would you ever think of digesting slices of raw chicken sandwiched between two slices of molded bread and a couple of rotten tomatoes for breakfast every morning? Then why would you continually allow unhealthy people to remain in your life? I promise you that you will feel like a new person once you walk away from unhealthy influences. Try it!

X -- eXamine your walk daily: It is important that you keep your walk holy before man and God. You cannot afford to keep slipping up if you are trying to move forward. Know where you stand and definitely be aware of where you are going. Your goal is to maintain a lifestyle of abstinence until such a time that God allows you to unite in matrimony with your soul mate.

Y -- Yearn for a closer fellowship with Christ: Seek God while he may be found. Develop an intimacy with Christ that surpasses any earthly relationship you have ever had. Get so close to God that you begin to take on his image. Feed off his Word daily and learn of Him. There is so much more to be revealed.

Z -- Zip up your pants or skirt and leave the zipper in locked position: Your days of dropping your clothing for every tickle of the flesh are gone! Your clothes are your covering. They are only to be removed for two reasons – to wash or to change into another article of clothes.

Extra Love Handles: Keep track with the number of days, weeks, and months that you remain abstinent and celebrate your accomplishments regularly.