**New Convert Syndrome**

A pastor from Chicago recently contacted me for my opinion regarding the dynamics of how singles and America's evangelical church interact.  He'd found my name from a Crosswalk.com article that I'd written several years ago, back when the Christian webzine had me as [one of their regular contributors](https://www.crosswalk.com/search/?q=tim+laitinen).

**Here's his question:**

*Although single myself, I have spoken on singleness maybe twice in my life.  Singleness is way down my list of interests or passions.  Nevertheless, I’ve begun looking at bias or even prejudice against singles in the Protestant church, as pointed out to me by Muslims background believers and Jewish believers.  A cultural lens is strong and causes us to see things that are not there and blinds us to things that are.  The fresh eyes of Muslim background believers and Jewish folks looking at Protestant Christianity have exposed different blind spots in the church, and one of those may be perceived bias against singleness.  My own experience as a single has been positive, but the more I've dug into the issue of singleness and the church, I'm realizing my good experience may be the exception.  What is your perspective of the broader church and its relationship with singles?*

**And here is my response:**

What you highlight here is probably less a dynamic of singlehood, and more a dynamic of "new convert syndrome."

Which, of course, is quite unfortunate, and inexcusably common, since as evangelicals, we should be used to being around new converts.  But so few of us, at least in the United States, participate in the conversion and initial discipleship experience of new converts, we actually find the enthusiasm and intensity of new believers (regardless of their marital status) to be somewhat draining and odd.  Particularly for new believers who come from other religious traditions that are more intense than ours, such as Islam and Judaism.

We Western evangelicals are mostly sanguine and enveloped in our own problems and frustrations with church, even to the point where we become wet blankets for new converts.  Here they are, with the Holy Spirit having just revealed the most profound truths they will ever know, and here we are - no matter our gender, or race, or ethnicity (as conventional American evangelicals) - actually being bothered by the questions, the optimism, the exploration, and the excitement of new believers.

I myself have been guilty of this, and I've seen it first-hand, where a new believer quickly runs into walls thrown up not just by unbelievers, but by fellow Christ-followers who should be willing to spend the extra time and energy necessary to help acclimate our new brothers and sisters in Christ into His new life.  It's called "discipleship," and we try to squeeze the process into a program, or a class, or some other package, when discipleship is often as individualistic as the convert.  Like most genuine relationships, the discipleship dynamic should probably be more organic and less structured than we try to make it.

I suspect that true discipleship requires more time and energy from us than we want to give it.

And particularly within the dynamic of a singles ministry, or when singles have new faith, this "new convert syndrome" can take on even more awkward tones, at least with men.   Evangelical women, as you might be able to attest, can be fiercely protective of their virtue to the point of being overly guarded and easily offended.  Meanwhile, evangelical men tend to be either ill-equipped spiritually or at least uncomfortable discussing faith with new believers.  If it's not about sports, business, or politics, many guys quickly clam up.  In my New York City days, I was around MBBs and Jewish converts who tend to be more intense, and frankly, when you're not used to it, it can be off-putting.  Which, of course, is my fault, not theirs.

A lot of it depends on the language and expressions that were used in the salvation process.  If people come to Christ on promises that He will make their lives better, and that He will help them succeed, then frustration will inevitably ensue after the conversion experience.  Life isn't easy for believers, and those of us who've been saved for a while know that.  However, if people are led to Christ through Biblical instruction, which teaches the indelible nature of our sin, yet the totality of God's holy grace, then emotional and situational expectations probably won't lead to quick disappointment.

So while the church in general may have issues with singles, for new converts of any marital status, it may be that many long-time evangelicals simply consider them too much work...

...To which this Chicago church-planter replied, "well-said."

Was it?



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