

Chris St. John: I'm here with Sam Allberry, apologist and writer for Ravi Zacharias International Ministries and a consulting editor for the gospel coalition. At one point in his life, I know he was based in Maidenhead UK. Right now I'm reaching out to him from Nashville, Tennessee. He's the author of a number of books, including the "7 Myths about Singleness" and "Is God Anti-Gay?" Additionally though, I think of him as a Star Wars aficionado, a fandom manifesting itself through the appreciation of the John Williams theatrical score that I listened to him as we traveled through the deserts of the Southwest in Arizona. He also dawns a number of fancy pairs of socks on a regular basis. I'll ask him about those here in just a second. How many pairs of socks exactly do you have, Sam?

Sam Allberry: Well, I just threw out some of the ones that were slightly, more, falling apart and had big holes in them.

Sam Allberry: The answer is not enough not enough?

Chris St. John: Not enough? Well, we might have to change that.

Sam Allberry: [inaudible 00:01:08] [crosstalk 00:01:09].

Chris St. John: Sam Allberry it's great to talk to you today.

Sam Allberry: It's so good to be with you, and I'm for the record, I'm wearing Stormtrooper socks, today.

Chris St. John: All right.

Sam Allberry: [inaudible 00:01:17] [crosstalk 00:01:17]

Chris St. John: I am not surprised. You're in Nashville, Tennessee today?

Sam Allberry: I am indeed. I've been here for two or three weeks. Yeah, it's hot. So, this is not a time of year to be in Nashville. I'm just kind of-

Chris St. John: No, just know a little bit of humidity. Indeed. So you've been hanging out at Emmanuel Church, is that correct?

Sam Allberry: That's right, yes, this has sort of become a state side base for me when I'm, when I'm in the U.S. So I've been enjoying getting to know the place well and spending more and more time here.

Chris St. John: That's great. And [inaudible 00:01:52] Ray especially just what a jewel he is. You have experienced the transition there, over the last couple of weeks- pastoral transition. Any takeaways from that?

Sam Allberry: It's, probably the best planned and most smooth pastoral succession I've seen. It's just, it's been wonderful actually. It's been a model of how to do it in a non-

disruptive way. It doesn't feel like there's been any kind of sudden lurches at any point. It's been though smooth indeed and a lot of that is to do with how Ray has set things up in a way that is accessible than being in a real position of, you know, he's setting him up to succeed.

Chris St. John: That's great. I think of everybody I follow on Instagram and Twitter right now, Brother Ray is the one who speaks grace and truth and love in such a balanced and practical way. I just appreciate that man's heart so much.

Sam Allberry: [inaudible 00:02:47]

Chris St. John: Yeah, so how's your speaking schedule? Where are you at these days?

Sam Allberry: I was just in San Francisco last week and Detroit the week before that, which has been good fun on first time in both of those cities. In both cases, speaking on human sexuality and San Francisco, well this is a lively context in which- and yet a fruitful context had a really some wonderful conversations there and it's just a constant reminder to me that there is a harvest. The harvest to be had. There are far more- there are 70 people who are refugees of the ongoing sexual revolution who don't know they're refugees until they hear that God has something better for them. So I had a wonderful encounter with, with a young lady there who I've been talking in my talk about how lust make someone into a commodity and she said to me, at the end, that she was tired of trying to make herself a commodity to other people and she never realized God had more for her than that. So, it was powerful. I was deeply moved by my encounter with her and it just made me realize God's truth is always merciful to us. So it's been- yeah, it's been interesting.

Chris St. John: That's great. That's great. What about your next project on the horizon? I've seen your book that you have coming up, I think, in March of 2020. Tell me about that a little bit.

Sam Allberry: Yeah, it's called, "Why Should God Care Who I Sleep With?" and it's an evangelistic book looking at Christian sexual ethics and it's part of a series Ravi Zacharias International Ministries has been publishing with The Good Book Company. So that is due out at the beginning of March. It's again, it's been a- I've actually learned how to write the book through having lots of conversations, like the one I just mentioned, and just seeing how the Bible's teaching on this whole issue is where there is enormous traction with people and what kind of questions people have and objections and all those kinds of things.

Chris St. John: It's exciting. Can't wait for it. Well, I wanted to chat with you today about the latest book, "7 Myths About Singleness" and for those that are listening we had Sam here in Phoenix back in March of 2018 and he spoke in Tucson and Phoenix, a few places around the Valley here in Phoenix and shared from his book "Is God Anti-Gay?" But, the one thing that I love and appreciate about UCM, more than anything, is that it doesn't matter what you're speaking on.

You can fill in the blank about whatever the topic is. You spend just a couple of minutes on that topic, but then you immediately get to the gospel and to Jesus and I found that to be true about this book as well. So yes, you talk about singleness but then you quickly get to Jesus and that was true in "Is God Anti-Gay?" So I really appreciate that about you, Sam.

Chris St. John: And so, as we dive in, I just wanted to get your thoughts on this book. I couldn't get past the introduction before being confronted with... Just this quote that says that every time- even the way we described singleness, is assumed to be pretty much awful. You said the point of the book is, therefore we need to see if we might be able to eke out something just about tolerable from it. And I found that amazing. You said, "It is almost always defined as negative as the absence of something. It is about the state of not being married." And I mean, everywhere you go, is that pretty much the truth as far as when you talk about singles ministry in church and it's always the absence of something, right?

Sam Allberry: It is. I mean, we tend to think of singleness purely in the negatives of what you miss out on and not always aware that there are even unique positives. I think that is a common theme in many, many places. I know that's prevalent back in the UK, where I'm from. I suspect it's more prevalent here in the U.S., just from my observations. Which is why I really write the book. It's to try and show us that the Bible has a more positive view of singleness than we tend to. I think, what the Bible says actually surprises us now.

Chris St. John: Yeah. I wish we had time to go through all seven of the myths, but the one that I think that hit me more than anything- in full disclosure, I've been married since I was 19 years old. I'm 45 so you can do the math: I've been married awhile, but I wanted to just really press into a couple of these myths, with you Sam, and as I read this book, the myth that singleness requires a special calling. Explain the nature and goodness of the gift of singleness, if you would. That really struck me as I read this.

Sam Allberry: So the myth is that I think, I think we've seen Paul use the language of the gift of singleness and I think we've assumed that means some people have a special kind of spiritual superpower that enables them to be single and to flourish as single people. But, only some people have that capacity. I just don't think that can be right. It would cause all kinds of problems as you then- I've had people use that as a, as a justification for going into un-biblical forms of marriage or disobedient forms of relationship and they'll justify it by saying, "Well, God never gave me the gift of singleness."

Sam Allberry: And I fear it could be an excuse for some people not to persevere in marriage. You could think, "I don't have the gift of being married, it turns out." I think what Paul is referring to in this would be consistent with the latest EGM gifts in first Corinthians, is the gift is the state itself. Whether you are married or single, that condition is meant to be a gift of God's grace through you to other people. It's meant to be a means of serving other people and means of serving the Lord. Neither marriage nor singleness is meant to be an end in itself. It's not meant to

be, "Hey, I'm single because I get to do everything I want to do in my own way and my own time." Marriage is not meant to be about, "Hey, now I've got married, I've got everything I need. I'm just going to fill up the Drawbridge." Whether you're married or single, we are to be those things for the sake of others and to use those things in the Lord service.

Chris St. John: Boy, that's good. Later on in that chapter about the special calling, you quoted, United States Senator, Ben Sasse, who is one of my favorites, in the prolonging of the American- prolonging of American adolescence and into adulthood. He talked about the underlying problem not being with singleness but with selfishness. And I think that is so profoundly true is that we are so fixated on identity and seeking our own good and willing up the Drawbridge, as you mentioned, a moment ago, the need to challenge those who deferred marriage for ungodly reasons, without demeaning those whose singleness is neither their choice or who has been in fact chosen for the sake of the kingdom. And so, talk to me a little bit about this. The calling that you have to singleness and how that's enabled you to be able to do what you do for the kingdom of God, even in your own vocation.

Sam Allberry: Yeah. Say for me, single, and this has just, has really been- I never felt a kind of deep moment early on in my Christian life where I felt God saying, "Right, you're going to be single forever." The circumstances are such- it's never been realistic or appropriate for me to marry. And I might not have chosen this, but I'm very thankful that God has given it to me.

Chris St. John: Right.

Sam Allberry: Because as you say, there are things I've been able to do as a result of my singleness that never would have been possible had I been married or at least wouldn't have been advisable to do if I was married. So, being able to write and speak in the way that I do, I'm able to have a bit more of an itinerant ministry. I've been able to have a range of friendships. I wouldn't have had the capacity for if I was married. So all of those things really become precious to me. So, I'm very thankful. I'm very thankful for those opportunities singleness has given me.

Chris St. John: Yeah. You tell one story, and I think it's about a mutual friend that we share in the book that, where you're able to drive their kids to school and drop them off at school. And I thought that was a really tender and special story of just being able to have that opportunity to be welcomed into that family and you even talk about Rosaria Butterfield in the book and how the gospel comes with the housekeeper and the- [crosstalk 00:12:54]

Sam Allberry: Exactly. Some people have been extremely generous to me in opening up their homes and opening up their family life. And that's a precious thing. I mean, I don't take that lightly and to be involved with the kids' bedtime routine and said to say prayers or read the Bible with them or all those sorts of tests, just to be part of some of those family moments, that's very meaningful.

Chris St. John: That's real beautiful. [crosstalk 00:13:22]

Sam Allberry: A real privilege.

Chris St. John: Yeah. But then singleness- another myth that you mentioned is how singleness hinders ministry. I've often heard, having been in vocational ministry over the years, is that I've heard it said that churches shouldn't hire a single pastor or especially hire a single youth pastor. Speak to that a little bit, in that myth.

Sam Allberry: Yeah. I think, there's often an assumption that if you're single, there must be something wrong with you. That you're not mature enough as a Christian, you've not kind of- people often see marriage as a kind of Christian form of graduation. So once you've married, you've kind of graduated into mature, proper Christianity. So I think sometimes people assume if you're single, you must be- it must be something up there that's suspicious.

Chris St. John: Yeah.

Sam Allberry: Sometimes I think, churches think if you're married, they're going to get a bonus extra staff member for free.

Chris St. John: [crosstalk 00:14:20] You're not a player..

Sam Allberry: There's all kinds of dynamics like that. But, Paul is assuming marriage is the norm. He's not insisting on it. And that part and the places where he says that the pastor should be a husband of one wife. He's not prescribing that all pastors been married. He is saying that married pastors need to be faithfully married.

Sam Allberry: Just as he says their children should be obedient doesn't mean Paul is ruling out childless couples or even a pastor who's only got one child and therefore he can't say his children, plural...,

Chris St. John: Exactly.

Sam Allberry: are obedient. Paul is not making the point that pastors must be married. He's assuming, they will be because that's the kind of- that's more far more common. But else where, Paul talks about ways in which singleness can mean actually your service to Christ is less. You've been pulled in less directions. You can be more pulled towards that being more devoted in terms of single-mindedness.

Sam Allberry: So actually, that there are ways in which you can, it can be an advantage to be single and you don't have to have the same life experience as the people you're ministering to in order to be able to minister to them faithfully. So I can still teach on what the Bible says about marriage. I can still teach what the Bible says about parents not exasperating kids and kids being obedient to parents.

Chris St. John: Sure.

Sam Allberry: What qualifies us is that we are faithfully teaching God's word and shepherding his people.

Chris St. John: Yeah.

Chris St. John: [inaudible 00:16:13] [crosstalk 00:16:15].

Sam Allberry: Totally advocating for, a lot, campaigning for single pastors. But, I do want to push back on churches that would say we can't have a single pastor or that's a sort of second best.

Chris St. John: Hmm. Yeah, that's great.

Chris St. John: Well, the myth of singleness wasting your sexuality. I really want to press into this one because I think this is really important for those that I hope that will be listening to this podcast, but and the interesting spoon that you described, the friend that has this interesting spoon with the hole in it. I found that very captivating because my grandmother collected spoons and I remember that collection as I was growing up and seeing the one with a hole in it and kind of being intrigued by that and almost using that spoon as entertainment as you characterize. So maybe, describe that a little bit and unpack that little story for me and how that broadly applies to our biblical sexuality.

Sam Allberry: Just a random thing, but there's a friend of mine who found no idea where it came from. He found a Spoon that had a hole in it. And so, he had no idea what it was for. So he would keep it in his sugar bowl just to see how people reacted to it and kind of tease people. And he later found out it was an olive spoon: it was designed if you put this bean in the jar of olives as you lift up and all of the drains. And the point of that really is that when you understand what it's for, you can make sense of the way it is and that's true of God's purpose for human sexuality. And just any things. When we know what our sexuality is for, we can begin to make sense of why does it God as made us as sexual beings and the way that this affects us in the way that it does. That was the point of that, so just trying to think through the big picture of why God has made a sexual beings to start with and obviously, we know lot of that is reproduction and the fellowship within marriage, but there's also a bigger picture dimension in the Bible that it is meant to be a signpost to the ultimate marriage between Christ and the church the...

Chris St. John: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Sam Allberry: ...around romance.

Sam Allberry: And the fact that our, there will be that there are deeper longings in our hearts and the ones for romantic fulfillment and there's a greater union and there'll be a much better conservation...,

Chris St. John: Sure.

Sam Allberry: truly with Christ. That's the point of all of that: is to try and show that actually if we're stewarding our singleness in the right kind of way, then far from it being a waste of our sexuality, we were actually fulfilling the ultimate purpose of our sexuality, which is to point us to Christ.

Chris St. John: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Sam Allberry: and what we have in him and what we await in him.

Chris St. John: Yeah, that's so good. And you quoted N.T. Wright where he says that, "The biblical picture of man and woman together in marriage is not something about which we can say, 'Oh, well they had a funny idea back then. We know better now.' The biblical view of marriage is part of the larger whole of new creation and symbolizes the point to that divine plan. Marriage is a sign of all things in heaven and on earth coming together in Christ." And I just so appreciate, Wright and thinking that we somehow have this new, better revelation than the millennia that that preceded us. Thank God for guys like him and I appreciate you bringing that into the book because we're at this point now where, I think, we live in a generation where somehow we've got this better idea that all of a sudden we've got this great revelation that somehow overrides and supersedes the wisdom of the ages but, boy.

Sam Allberry: He's been very, very helpful on a number of those things.

Chris St. John: Yep. And finally, maybe the last myth that you bring up or the myth that you conclude with is that singleness is easy. Talk to me a bit about that.

Sam Allberry: Yeah. So, sometimes I think, you know, I remember having a church member say to me many years ago, "Well, life's much easier for you obviously isn't because you don't have a family." If someone who is dealing with a difficult family situation of her own. And I think people sometimes assume that although singleness can make life a bit more streamlined in terms of less complex, that doesn't necessarily mean it's more easy and for many of us, the, the absence of a spouse can be deeply felt. There can be fears of who we're going to grow old with and whether we're going to be on our own when we're in old age.

Sam Allberry: There's the fact that our culture and our, sadly sometimes our church culture, doesn't always prize friendship as highly as it ought and therefore, even when we do have friendships that they can feel very insecure as people will often move on and people will move a family, they'll move from money. Very few peoples will kind of factor in their friends.

Chris St. John: Yeah.

Sam Allberry: And so, as a single person, it can feel like there's quite a provisionality to many of our friendships because we don't really know if people are going to be sticking around for the long term. So all of those things can make there are some deep challenges, deep pains that can be associated with that. Marriage of course, is also not easy. So I'm not saying that one is easier or harder than the other, but it helps married people I think to understand some of the unique difficulties and pains of singleness just as it is a responsibility for us who're a single to understand some of the challenges and pains of our friends who are married is how we can better support and care for each other.

Chris St. John: Hmm. Yeah, that's good.

Chris St. John: I mean, one of the things that you kind of wrap up the book is the trustworthiness of God and how we can trust that he has put together what he's doing, with regard to relationships or lack thereof, and you quote Psalm 1:39 "He has searched us and known us. He knows when we sit and when we rise up and discern our thoughts from afar off." And you know this song of David is so comforting to know that God has this plan for us and he has knit us together completely and thoroughly. And so, I appreciate that as we think through the way he's made us, the way he's knit us together. Just as I read this book, I appreciate your candor and your transparency and authenticity.

Chris St. John: I guess, as I've gotten to know you a little bit over the last year or so Sam, but then I read a book and I can almost read it in your voice; in my inner Sam Allberry, to hear your heart. And so, I just wanted to thank you for the book and, and, and your, your heart as you pour out yourself in the works that you, that you author. And so I think you're a real gift to the church and to the body of Christ, my brother.

Sam Allberry: That's really kind of you to say. It's pleasure to know you too and I'm so grateful for your ministry. Isn't it crazy that we get to do anything for the Lord?

Chris St. John: It's a humbling thing, isn't it? And it is crazy to use your word. You're absolutely right. I mean the fact that God would limit himself through somebody like me, is quite amazing.

Sam Allberry: Yeah. It really is extraordinary.

Chris St. John: Yep. Well, listen, I hope you survive the rest of the heat and humidity of the Nashville summer and do well and be well and keep in touch and God bless you, my brother.

Sam Allberry: Thank you so much and lord bless you too.