



Genevieve T Jennings

Singleness and Reality

Most people want to be married, and that is the normal state of affairs (Gen 2:18ff). It doesn't help me when married people point out all the benefits of singleness because, when you ask them, they'd usually rather be married if given a choice.

Certainly, when I was growing up as one of seven children, I just assumed that I would get married. Then, when I became a Christian at the age of 23, I revisited the issue. Even allowing for God's sovereignty, I thought that I would marry one day.

Most singles, if you ask them, don't see singleness as a gift, but as a burden or trial. If you think of it in terms of a gift, it's one that most singles would want to give back in exchange for a different one (marriage). Many singles whom I have come across, as well as not wanting the gift of singleness, wouldn't actually say that they have it - they're just single! However, God is sovereign and His Word is true. According to the Scriptures, both singleness & marriage are gifts (1 Cor 7, Matt 19:11-12), and He doesn't give first-rate gifts (marriage) to some of His children but only second-rate ones (singleness) to others.

So, how do we live lives that are in line with that biblical line of thought, and which help those of us who are single not merely "to cope" as if we were hanging on by our fingernails, but actually to live full, joyful, exuberant lives that both celebrate God's goodness & glorify Him?

Look ahead to the next 10/20 years: what sort of woman or man do you want to be? What sort of character do you want to have? The answer to that question doesn't depend on whether you're married or not. The standard for 'marrieds' and for singles

is the same: love and consecration unto the Lord (Matt 22:37). Therefore, let your relationship with Jesus grow in its reliance upon Him & in intimacy, understanding & love as much as it possibly can. Don't set a ceiling to that. Whether you are married or not, He is meant to be "the Friend who sticks closer than a brother" (Prov 18:24b). As well as Saviour, Lord and King, whether you are married or not, He is meant to be your "Beloved" (cf Song of Songs).

Seeing Jesus as your first love is both a challenge & an invitation. That is what I discovered as I began to grow as a Christian. God had & has put SO many blessings in my life but also difficulties at various times, & it's easy to let either one of those overtake my love for Christ. The following helped:

Principles for life

- **Spend time with God in His Word** (privately and publicly, i.e. in church): become a man or woman of the Word.
- **Develop your prayer life** - private and public: become a woman or man of prayer. There is a sweetness in time spent alone with God which is an essential but usually hidden part of the Christian life. Wisely, I had been taught this when I was still working for a computer company as a Technical Author. This was before I went to Bible college & then to Japan as a missionary. Whether in full-time ministry or not, prayer is an indispensable part of our walk with Christ. When I first arrived in Japan, my knowledge of a complex language & culture was zero.....But I could pray.
- **Serve** within the church and outside of it (the home, workplace, community, etc): become a servant.

- **Develop your relationships** (with people of the same sex and couples): learn to appreciate relationships on all sorts of different levels - very close, close, not so close, etc; **enjoy** people which, as well as being a blessing for you, is one way of honouring them.
- **Develop your career:** you may end up marrying, but you may not. Either way, you don't want to waste opportunities or spend your life with half your heart and energies rooted in an imaginary existence. Life is short: live it to the full for Him (cf the parable of the talents - Matt 25). God can be trusted to give you the best in your life (Ps 37: 3-4, Jer 29:11), & believing that is partly a decision of your will, in reliance upon God. He deserves the best from you (Col 3:17, 2 Sam 24:24).
- **Develop your hobbies/outside interests:** as well as the fact that being single is a great chance to do this (which, for whatever reason - financial, health, marriage, etc, you may not always have), you don't want to become a boring person whose main topic of conversation and interest is getting married! Do all the things that you can do now or as soon as is realistic. If you do end up getting married, you don't want to end up looking back on that period of singleness with regret because of wasted opportunities. If you don't end up marrying, you don't want to look back at your life with regret for the same reason.
- **Be 'real' with God** - pour out your heart before Him (Ps. 62:8) about all your hopes, dreams, disappointments, loneliness, sadness, etc, **but don't give in to self-pity**. Self-pity, if not checked, can often lead to depression. Remember that happiness is a by-product & comes from seeking first God's kingdom - happiness isn't a goal in itself. Personally, I'd have to say that I've never experienced such loneliness as when I was in Japan. BUT there was also a deep joy in the way that God met with me & also blessed the work there.
- **Develop a thankful heart:** make giving thanks a hallmark of your life (Phil 4:6, 1 Thess 5:16). It's easy to allow either the flesh or the Enemy to put a magnifying glass over the one area in your life that you're not satisfied with until it totally fills your vision. It's right to be aware of your struggles and desires and to bring those to the Lord (cf Hannah in 1 Samuel 1) but to also make a point of giving

thanks for the many blessings that you've received, the greatest of which is Jesus himself - Phil 3:7-10. John Piper, in a sermon that I heard a long time ago, pointed out that we may lose everything but we cannot lose Christ.

- **Lighten up!** Jesus, and his gospel, cannot be taken too seriously: your own life can. Celebrate him today!

As a final note, I would say that it's not necessarily wrong to be pro-active in seeking a Christian marriage partner, before the Lord. Therefore, you might consider having a word with your pastor or another mature Christian whom you trust about any positive steps that can be taken in that direction.

However, even in this, be careful. Everything in our lives - and especially that which is most dear to us - needs to be laid before God (cf Abraham and Isaac in Gen 22). It may be, if we're not careful, that He will let us have whatever it is that we're hankering for, but send "leanness into [our] soul" (Ps 106:15). Please note Galatians 6:7: "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap."

Hence, be prepared, if you really think that it's right, to be prayerfully pro-active in this, in conjunction with a trusted mature Christian, but **set a high standard of godliness for your required partner, & leave the answer JOYFULLY in God's hands** (Prov 3:5-6). Jim Elliot (deceased missionary) said that "God always gives His best to those who leave the choice with Him". You can't 'outgive' God. He loves us & knows what is best for us (Ps 103:13-14), as well as what will most bring glory to Himself which, after all, should be our ultimate desire - married or not (1 Pet 1:24-25; 4:11b).

Having returned from Japan, I now have the privilege & joy of serving as the pastoral worker at Eden Baptist Church in Cambridge which is a church-family that I love. Both in looking at the past as well as at the present, I can honestly say that God "has done marvellous things" (Ps 98:1) for me, for which I am eternally grateful!

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