

Everyone Else is Getting Married



I can say from experience that being single is great. I can also say that, at times, it is painful. Recently, I have stumbled on a number of people who testify to this experience of painful singleness.

As friends marry, key friendships are often maintained but intimacy and depth of relationship can fade, particularly with members of the opposite sex. Time together has to be squeezed in and often feels superficial. Many personal issues are different.

Added to these changes are often new concepts of self. "I've always thought I'd be married by this age"; "What's the problem with me?" People only a few years younger speak of you as though you are an asexual super-spiritual martyr who is beyond all hope of marriage! And lines such as "Just trust God" and "God has a plan for you" can seem empty in the face of real disappointment and the fear of being alone.

Feelings such as these need not necessarily be coupled with singleness but they are common and need to be treated seriously. If you are struggling, let me share with you some of the lessons I am learning.

Pain is part of the deal of living in a fallen world - but remember that God has good purposes for you. In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul is very open about the often relentless physical and emotional pain he experienced while living for Christ. He did not enjoy it. On one occasion, he tells us that he begged God three times to take his affliction away (2 Cor 12:8).

But God reveals good purposes in difficulty. The weaker we are, the more we see Christ's power and recognise him at work in our endurance (v.9). As we suffer, our aching for our heavenly home intensifies and the preciousness of God's grace becomes more vivid. In persevering with sexual purity and avoiding the temptation of non-Christian or merely crave-satisfying relationships, we speak volumes to each other of all the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus.

Do not let your need for companionship make you forget your greatest need. In Philippians 3. Paul considers nothing in all the world superior to the "worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord".

Dwell on the judgement described in Revelation 16 and 18 that would be for you were it not for the righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus. So stupendous was this knowledge that Paul had been willing to lose all of his considerable worldly religious assets "... in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him." (Phil 3:8)

So what relationship is it that we need most? What is it that makes life really worthwhile? Knowing Christ. Marriage is not the ultimate loving relationship, but a reflection of that which is. Do everything you can *not* to forget this. Nourish yourself on Psalm 23 or 42. Sing Christian songs loudly in the car. Bury your head in the Bible.

Despite common perceptions, your married friends are not necessarily in relational paradise. Think of their situation as "different" not "better". Guard yourself against envying them and serve them instead. Initiate friendships and enjoy them. Remember that even if everyone around seems to think that singleness is a curse, God thinks being single is pretty good (1 Cor 7:8, 32). And He would know.

When you are feeling needy, keep on giving. I do not mean pulling on your "happy face" while suffering in silence - your friends (particularly the married ones) need to know your thoughts to enable them to care for you. But you have a gracious God who promises to provide you with all you need to live a life teeming with good works. And those who give generously will reap good things generously (2 Cor 9:6-10). Your help and refreshment will be found, not in demanding, but in giving.

Pray, pray, pray. In Psalm 55, David pours his heart out to God while expressing his trust in him. Talk to God about your circumstances and give them into his care.

Being single is a good thing but often not without its challenges. My prayer is that singles bring those challenges to the feet of our Father and seek our help and comfort in him.

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