

Singleness

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As a final note, I would also add that if you honestly believe, before the Lord, that your basic identity is so intrinsically bound up in being married that you perceive it as a truly central and inextricable part of your life, 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. It's not necessarily wrong to be pro-active in seeking a *Christian* marriage partner.

However, even in this, be careful. Everything in our lives - and especially that which is most dear to us - needs to be laid before the Lord (cf Abraham and Isaac in Gen 22). It may be, if we're not careful, that God will let us have whatever it is that we're hankering for, but send "leanness into [our] soul" (Ps 106: 15). Please note Gal 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, and leave the answer JOYFULLY in God's hands** (Prov 3: 5-6). It's been said that "God gives the best to him who leaves the choice to Him". You can't 'outgive' God. He loves us and 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).

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1) First of All, Some "Reality-Points" to Recognise

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.

Most singles, if you ask them, don't see singleness as a gift, but as a burden/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). Most 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 and marriage are gifts (1 Cor 7, Matt 19: 11-12), and He doesn't give first-rate gifts (i.e. 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 to actually live full, joyful, exuberant lives that both celebrate His goodness and glorify God?

Look ahead to the next 10/20 years: what sort of woman or man do you want to be i.e. 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' (a term used henceforth) 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 and in intimacy, understanding and 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). For that reason, I would suggest the following:

2) Principles to Follow

- **Spend time with God in His Word** (privately and publicly - i.e. church): *become a man or woman of the Word.*
 - **Develop your prayer life - private and public:** *become a woman or man of prayer.*
 - **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/couples): learn to appreciate relationships on all sorts of different levels - very close, close, not so close, casual, etc; enjoy people (which, as well as being a blessing for you, is one way of blessing 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), and 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 the 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 and comes from seeking first God's kingdom - happiness isn't a goal in itself.
 - **Develop a thankful heart:** make giving thanks a hallmark of your life (Phil 4: 6, I 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 Sam 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).
 - **Lighten up!** Jesus, and His gospel, can't be taken too seriously: your own life can. Celebrate Him today.