

The God Who Knows the End of Your Singleness

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The twelve-year-old boy strode across the conference stage with complete assurance, oozing the precocious seriousness of youth that can strike adults as charmingly amusing. But any patronizing thoughts present were soon squashed as 3,000 adults heard the evangelistic heartbeat of God in the words of the young speaker. After giving his testimony of being adopted from a Romanian orphanage by his American parents and his subsequent adoption into the family of God when he trusted Jesus for his salvation, Gabriel Spiro outlined his hopes for his future.

"Since becoming a Christian, I've had the dream to attend the PDI Pastors College," he said to spontaneous, thunderous applause. "I feel like God has called me to be trained and equipped so that I can go and help the poor people and the orphans that are still living in Romania. My desire is to start a PDI church there in Romania. I thank God that He has brought me to my family and to Covenant Life Church—my extended family. I pray that by His grace I'll be able to be trained in character in order to fulfill the calling of God."

Watching from the back row that steamy May evening, I gave silent thanks to God for the plans He has for singles and families alike. Eight years earlier, a single woman from my church had wrestled with God as He called her to overlook her own desires for marriage and children in order to serve a good friend during an international adoption process by traveling with her to Romania. "What would I gain?!" Charlotte Ennis recalls. "I'd have to spend my own money, put myself at personal risk, and watch someone else return with children. I would return with ... nothing."

Then 36, Charlotte was not certain that God did have marriage and a family in her future. It certainly had been a long wait and her hope was waning. She had no idea that she was facilitating the adoption of a child whose presence would be a blessing to many more than his own family. She had no idea that this little boy would develop a strong passion for the local church before he even hit his

teens, and that he would be a regular and *fruitful* part of his church's evangelism ministry. She had no idea that one day this little boy would speak to a gathering of churches about their collective mission and be the highlight of the evening. Nor did Charlotte know that on the same evening Gabriel spoke, she would be married—a gift from God to her at age 39—and the mother of several children.

But the One who “makes known the end from the beginning” (Isaiah 46:10) knew all of this, and it was His perfect plan that had been operating all along.

Moments like these are glimpses of the Lord's sovereignty in action and treasures to be stored up in the hearts of single women especially. Only occasionally do we have the privilege of seeing so clearly how “in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28). We should cherish and retell those evidences of God's grace to encourage and strengthen each other. Our Lord is not a random God: His plan includes blessing us but also making *us* a blessing to *others*.

I didn't know Charlotte when she was single, but I do remember reading her testimony in our ministry magazine, one that was written just weeks prior to her wedding. At the time, I was thirty-two, a fairly new Christian, and to be unflatteringly honest, horrified at the prospect of having to wait until thirty-nine to be married. Now I am thirty-seven, a little less arrogant (hopefully), and grateful for Charlotte's example. Last year in my church, a woman got married for the first time at forty-three. That pushed Charlotte's benchmark out of the way and gave me six more years to hope, so to speak.

In my extended season of singleness, I've had the time to ponder the risks and rewards of singleness from the perspective of both a rank unbeliever in my twenties and as a chaste Christian in my thirties. As I write this, I have been praying over the demise of two Christian marriages I thought were trophies of God's grace—both of which were shipwrecked over sexual sin committed by the husbands.

Many years ago, one of the men had asked me out. I had declined the relationship, and he went on to marry someone else while I remained single, but now I grieve for his wife and daughters as they wrestle with the nuclear fallout of a perverse and unlawful form of sexual sin. Though I do not mean to imply that God wasn't good for allowing this woman to marry my friend, I can

certainly see where He spared me the “many troubles in this life” (1 Corinthians 7:28b) in marriage by keeping me single and unencumbered.

Three times so far I’ve been privileged to see why He said no to my prayers asking Him for specific men to be my husband. In each case, it wasn’t too many years later that I discovered I had been spared inheriting some serious sexual sin. That is one of the benefits of being an older single– I’ve lived long enough to see what unconfessed and unrepentant sin does to wreck the dream of living “happily ever after.” Those sad moments make me appreciate the pleasant places where my boundary lines have fallen (Ps. 16:6).

Why is knowing God and embracing His sovereignty so important when we’re single? We have to keep in mind that we’ve received this gift of singleness from the pierced hand of the One who bore all of our sins—from unbelief as singles to selfishness as marrieds. We can be like Peter who initially rebuked Jesus for His humiliating, yet glorious, plan of redemption, or we can be like Mary, who came to accept His plan and purposes and demonstrated it in the costly outpouring of perfume in anticipation of His burial. Confident of the Lord’s good plan for our lives, we can emulate Mary and spend our treasures (youth, dreams, desires) to further His purposes on this earth.

More importantly, when we are almost faint under the strain and worry of wondering if singleness is to be forever, we need to be reminded that there is an end to singleness: One day we will be at the wedding feast of the Lamb and we will be His bride. Even if we receive the gift of marriage on this side of heaven, that’s not our ultimate goal. It is a shadow and a type of what is planned for eternity and, like all things on this earth, it will have its conclusion in death.

Our Father knows the time when earthly gifts will be distributed and when they will be no more; He knows, as well, when the heavenly wedding feast will commence. We can blissfully rest in the knowledge that the future is better than anything we think we’ve missed now: Jesus is preparing us for the eternal rewards and eternal joys of a future He’s told us is too inexpressible for us to understand.

For His purposes, and within His covenant to always do us good (Jer. 33:40), He has declared for us that being single now and into the foreseeable future is His very best. He desires that we overflow with hope as we trust in Him (Rom.

15:13) and His sovereignty in this season—redefining hope from hoping in a particular gift from God to trusting the God of hope unreservedly.