

Kingdom Singleness

Renea McKenzie



Renea McKenzie takes a look at two books providing thoughtful responses to being Christian and single.

While studying at L'Abri Fellowship, I encountered two books that really made an impression upon me for the simple reason that, of all the many books I come across in my years of work with students, my studies, and my personal reading, I had never seen even the likes of anything like them. I'm speaking of Laura Smit's *Loves Me, Loves Me Not* and Lauren Winner's *Real Sex*. These two books contain what's desperately missing in the "Christian living" section of our bookstores, particularly for singles.

A Theology of Romance



I really appreciate and highly recommend Laura Smit's book, *Loves Me, Loves Me Not: The Ethics of Unrequited Love*.^{1} It isn't your typical book on singles and romance. Right away, the subtitle lets you know this book is special because while there are countless books on mutual love and our moral responsibilities as Christian lovers, hardly anyone writes about our responsibility toward virtue when feelings are not mutual. Smit begins with a "theology of

romance” in which she details God’s nature as love, God’s creational plans both in Eden and in the New Heaven and the New Earth, sin’s effect on those plans, and finally, virtuous and vicious romance, how sin twists God’s intentions for love and how we can be virtuous by shaping our romantic lives to God’s plans. This framework is centered on New Testament teachings on marriage and family and singleness, teachings many Christians, myself included up to now, have been successfully avoiding.

Smit notes the importance of pouring a new understanding of marriage and family into new wineskins. In Matthew chapter 19, Jesus makes this astonishing statement: “For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it” (v. 12). And shortly after that, in response to the Sadducees, Jesus declares, “At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven” (Matt. 22:30).

Jesus also asserts that the way we think about family changes when he enters the scene. Jesus is teaching and his biological family interrupts him, expecting that they deserve more of Jesus’ attention than the crowd. And it was natural for them to expect this. But again, Jesus turns social expectation on its head, responding, “‘Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?’ Pointing to his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother’” (Matt. 12:48-50).

Jesus seems to be saying marriage is not ultimate; only the union between Christ and his Church is ultimate. He is also saying our biological families are not ultimate; only the family of faith is ultimate. Saying all this about marriage and family was a big deal. In Jesus’ day, everyone’s number one loyalty was to his or her biological family, people who were married were higher on the social ladder than those who were not, and couples who had children (well, sons) were even higher. Jesus came and changed our primary loyalties, and he declared that the

only members of society who are valuable to God's kingdom are those who do God's will, regardless of their social status.

By looking into these passages of Scripture, Smit is asking us to consider: Should Jesus' teachings change the emphasis American Christians place on marriage and family? Why do most unmarried Christians feel social pressure from the church to get married and start a family? They also feel excluded from congregations whose messages and activities have a biological family focus instead of a spiritual family focus. How then can we change our focus and the ways in which we interact with one another so that we are following in Jesus' revolutionary footsteps?

A Theology of Romance Gets Personal

Smit suggests that not only will the way we think about (and consequently our behavior toward) others change, but so will the way we think about our own lives. To give you an example of how we, the Christian culture in America, think about marriage, specifically the expectations we have regarding marriage in our own lives, let me share with you this story.

Several weeks ago, I was subbing in AWANA, and the third through fifth grade girls were asked what they foresaw in their future. Every girl there stated, rather confidently, "I'm going to go to college then get married." What a wonderful vision for one's future! What's interesting is that each child had the *same* vision for her future, which simply speaks to the fact that marriage is socially expected for church girls (and boys too as a matter of fact). It's what Christians consider normal and the "natural thing to do." Again, marriage is wonderful. The question is, are we limiting ourselves, and our daughters, and ultimately, Christ and the Church, when we consume this view of marriage and personhood wholesale? Is it a limited vision rather than a Kingdom-vision?

To give you a clearer picture of what I mean by "Kingdom-vision," let's look directly at Smit. She notes:

Our primary loyalties shift when we come into contact with Jesus. Whereas in the Old Testament the family was one's primary loyalty, Jesus redefines this, saying, "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matt. 12:50). Jesus is our family now and the community of faith is our primary social commitment. "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son and daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it" (Matt. 10:37-39). Jesus insists that his followers live sacrificial lives that will make little sense in the eyes of the world.[{2}](#)

That's interesting, isn't it? Think for a moment about the political implications for the Religious Right. Marriage and family concerns wouldn't cease to exist, but would rather exist within a broader context, under a farther-reaching banner. What might such a banner look like? Let's look again at Smit. She posits:

If all Christians everywhere were to take [seriously Jesus' teaching that marriage is not ultimate], stop getting married, and stop having children, perhaps the church would start to grow through evangelism rather than through procreation. In this case, the church would be a blessing to the nations, just as we are supposed to be, with most of our nurturing energy going outside our own community. Finally, if we actually converted everyone in the world, and everyone in the world then embraced continent singleness so that no children were being born (a rather unlikely scenario), wouldn't that mean it was time for Jesus to come again? All Christians are supposed to be longing for his second coming and doing everything possible to bring it about.[{3}](#)

Wow! What a bold statement! Well, don't worry, in the very next lines she says,

I do not believe that all Christians need to be single [or stop having children], but all Christians must come to terms with Jesus' teaching that marriage is not

ultimate. Taking [this] teaching seriously will change how we think about the possibility of marriage in our own life and how we treat people around us—particularly within the church—who are single. [{4}](#)

I think it important to note that throughout her entire book, Smit never once devalues marriage or children—particularly within the church. And that is part of the point. Jesus came and demolished value hierarchies society had placed upon people. The apostle Paul states that this is to be the case particularly within the church: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). Marriage and children and sex and singlehood and abstinence and romance each offer valuable life-pictures that teach the church about who God is and our relationship with him.

With that in mind, we are now ready to consider the romantic lives of unmarried folk with nuance. Smit’s book challenges Christians to govern our romantic relationships with a Kingdom-perspective, reminding us to readjust our ingrown eyeballs: to look up toward God and out toward others. How do we do that when we’re in love with someone who doesn’t love us back?

The Ethics of Unrequited Love

Loves Me, Loves Me Not helps us learn how to behave virtuously in loving someone who does not return our romantic affection. It also helps us to behave virtuously toward someone who cares romantically for us, when we desire only friendship for him or her. Smit encourages her readers to consider true Christian charity in these situations and whether or not charity—or we might use the word *agape*—supports or rejects society’s scripts for such roles. Whether we realize it or not, our society has our lines and stage directions all laid out. From film and literature alike we know how to behave if we find our love rejected. We will hold on to our rejected love by continuing to pursue until resignation is absolutely necessary; in which case, we resign to martyrdom upon the cross of love,

sometimes in a gallon of ice cream and sappy movies, sometimes quite literally, leaving our legacy behind on the suicide note. Or, we simply move on. It is their loss, and undoubtedly there is someone out there who is more deserving of us.

Certainly both scenarios can be true. Sometimes we ought to continue to pursue and not give up too quickly; sometimes our love is misplaced upon someone undeserving and we must recognize the fact and move on. But motives matter. That is Smit's point.

How do we counter our ingrained selfish patterns and social scripts when we love someone who doesn't love us back? I'm not going to give away the whole book; I'm hoping you'll pick up your own copy. But I will pass on one practical tip from Smit: we must desist from wanting to possess the other person. Now, that sounds creepy in the restraining order kind of way; and you're thinking, *I don't do that*. But we all do it. We do it when we create a whole imaginary life with our crush—where we go on dates, how we sit together in church, how he kisses me hello, how she makes my friends envious. We also get possessive of our crush when we allow our hurt and jealousy to win over our charity (love) for him or her. Because if I didn't think he and his affections were (or ought to be) *mine* I wouldn't be jealous that, in reality, he's interested in another girl. But the truth is he's a person, not an object; and as a person he is free to be interested in whomever he chooses. And if I really love him as a person rather than lust after him as an object, I will honor, value, and even celebrate that freedom. Not that at times it won't be painful; it will be.

What about when someone loves us and we don't return their romantic feelings? What's easiest is to simply ignore that person. Don't return his calls. Pretend you didn't see her. Flirt with someone else right in front of her. Tell him you have to wash your hair. It's much more difficult to actually continue to be that person's friend, behaving in Christian love toward him or her, considering them to be better than yourself. Part of the reason this path is more difficult is because it makes you all the more attractive and difficult to get over, and it's easier to

convince ourselves that we're doing the other person a favor by being a jerk.

Sometimes it is appropriate and necessary and loving to give the other person his space or to stop returning her phone calls. Sometimes it isn't. Sometimes I wish God designed our relationships to be governed by clear-cut, black and white formulas: do this, get this result . . . always. But he didn't. God designed our relationships to be governed by faith. So we have to work hard to live counter-cultural lives, acting out according to God's script rather than what's socially expected of us. Smit's exhortation to consider what motivates our behavior is key. Are we responding lovingly or selfishly? And while motives cannot always be wholly separated or distinguished in such a clear-cut way, God always honors the search.

Smit has in *Loves Me, Loves Me Not* some very powerful exhortations for the church that I appreciate on two levels: one, she forces readers to think seriously about New Testament teachings on marriage, family, and singleness; and two, she gives singles in the church a voice, in part simply by writing a book that addresses the lives of unmarried folk in a thought-provoking, holistic, and meaningful way. If my brief look into the book has sparked your interest, and if you want the specific, and I think rather good, suggestions Smit makes as to how we can pursue loving virtue in our relationships, be sure to pick up a copy of this singular book.

Why We Need *Another* Book about Sex

Lauren Winner, author of *Girl Meets God* and, recently, *Mudhouse Sabbath*, put out a book in 2005 titled *Real Sex: The Naked Truth about Chastity*.^{5} And that's exactly what Winner designs to do: talk about sex in a realistic fashion, from a biblical worldview, that allows us to get past various myths, including the highly eroticized and romanticized beliefs about sex we frequently absorb from both the world and the church.

You're familiar, no doubt, with the statistics on Christian sexuality. We don't stand out as very different in our sexual behavior, which means our basic beliefs and ideas about sex must not be that different either. If all those books in the "Christian living" section of the bookstore aren't helping us develop ideas regarding our sexuality that differ from social norms, if they aren't helping us believe that what the Bible has to say about sex is relevant and true, something isn't right. So what makes Winner different? *Real Sex* offers an alternative to the magazine-like "Seven Secrets to Sexual Purity" by stretching beyond spoon-fed "dos and don'ts" derived from proof-texted Scripture, and instead presents the case for sex within marriage from a holistic, biblical view of who we are and how we relate in the world sexually.

From the creation-fall-redemption narrative presented in the arc of the gospel, Winner posits that an important part of who we are is that we are embodied, and the main way in which we relate in the world sexually is communal. Chapter three is aptly titled "Communal Sex: *Or, Why Your Neighbor Has Any Business Asking You What You Did Last Night,*" and helps remind us that community is a part of the creational order; we were created in and for community. And though we have fallen from God's original order for creation, he has, throughout history, made a way for his people to live redeemed, creational lives. When Jesus Christ came embodied to earth, he came as the Way, finally making it possible for those who believe to no longer live under compulsion of the fallen, distorted patterns of the flesh, but rather in habits redeemed and restored to God's creational intent. Winner reminds us that Scripture flies in the face of our over-individualized, over-privatized American way, exhorting the community of the faith to be intimately involved in one another's lives. She puts it this way:

The Bible tells us to intrude—or rather, the Bible tells us that talking to one another about what is really going on in our lives is in fact not an intrusion at all, because what's going on in my life is already your concern; by dint of the baptism that made me your sister, my joys are your joys and my crises are your crises. We are called to speak to one another lovingly, to be sure, and

with edifying, rather than gossipy or hurtful, goals. But we are called nonetheless to transform seemingly private matters into communal matters (53).[\[6\]](#)

Already we're presented with a meaty alternative to the false views of sex, or we could say, unreal sex propagated in force by our surrounding culture. The next two chapters speak truth against the lies about sex we hear both from our culture and our churches. These chapters give readers an opportunity to take a step outside of their everyday, cultural surroundings and consider them. Opening up the conversation of sex and our sexuality to the whole of Scripture and to our Christian communities is like opening the windows of a dark room. By this light we see the lies our culture tells about sex, and we can work together to begin rejecting such ideologies, establishing a core understanding of human sexuality that, in fact, stands apart; we can develop beliefs and habits of a sacred sexuality. Winner points out that society tells lies, like "sex can be wholly separated from procreation" (64), cohabitation is a good practice-run (68), modesty doesn't matter (71), and "good sex can't happen in the humdrum routine of marriage" (77).

Of those four statements, which strikes you as most dangerous? We might think it's the prolific idea of shacking up; and in fact, the church is usually pretty clear on its position regarding premarital sex. However, I would like to suggest that a subtle distortion is always more dangerous than an obvious one. Winner agrees; she states,

Too often we assume that contemporary American sexual life is a one-dimensional world of licentious prurience. Yet it may be more important for contemporary Christian ethics to constructively engage secular romanticism than to righteously denounce sexual libertinism. It is, after all, pretty easy for us Christians to distinguish ourselves from the sex-is-recreation ethic. The real question is not whether we can counter the message that sex is just like racquetball, but whether we can also articulate a Christian alternative to the

regnant ideal of sex as an otherworldly, illicit romance, an escape from quotidian, domestic life (80).

Sex isn't meaningful because it's an erotic escape from everyday realities. Rather, sex is meaningful because it's real (81). And while romance is certainly appropriate, even important, as part of sustaining love, if it serves merely to compartmentalize our lives rather than integrate them, our lives will be less, not more, fulfilling.

Getting Real

This next chapter is perhaps where we get a bit more personal: "Straight Talk II: *Lies the Church Tells about Sex.*" In an effort to do right and protect the biblical ethic of sex within marriage, and with honorable intentions, "the church tells a few fibs of its own" (85). Winner chooses to discuss four of these fibs: "premarital sex is guaranteed to make you feel lousy" (85), "women don't really want to have sex anyway" (90), "bodies (and sex) are gross, dirty, or just plain unimportant" (93), and finally, that good sex is all about technique, a secular myth that we can, and should, Christianize (97).

I can't talk about all of these ideas (and I wouldn't want to give away the whole book!), but I do want to address a couple of them. I'm sure some of you are thinking, "Doesn't premarital sex make you feel lousy, full of guilt and regret? And if it doesn't, shouldn't it?" It's possible there's more truth in the second thought than the first one because, let's face it, sex feels good, even sinful sex. If it didn't, premarital (and extramarital) sex would certainly be a lot easier to avoid. We wouldn't need Winner's book, or any other book, not to mention the community of faith, the Bible, or the Holy Spirit for that matter; at least, not insofar as we need them for our journey toward right-living (89). "What the church means to say," posits Winner, "is that premarital sex *is* bad for us, even if it happens to *feel* great" (90).

But at least we've come to recognize that sex in marriage feels great and should feel great. And while it seems we may never be able to fully shake Gnostic parasites from the gospel, I believe churches have generally come to embrace marital sex as good. However, the message from the pulpit can still be a bit confusing, especially for women. Winner notes a study of teenage girls which shows the "strongest predictor of teenage virginity" isn't church involvement or the youth group, but team sports (18). That may seem obscure, but athletics teaches girls (and boys) something about bodies being good, not to mention useful—for other purposes than sex. This is a message we are not communicating well.

What should we do? Have more church sports leagues? Perhaps. But, maybe not. We can, however, change the language we use when we talk about sex and modesty. Personally, as a woman who grew up constantly hearing from youth group and other parachurch media that my body was the vehicle of lust and destruction for young men everywhere, it took lots of time to unlearn negative associations about my body and become comfortable in my own skin, though perhaps less time than others; I played sports. The way we talk about sex and modesty in the church isn't only damaging to women. To suggest that men simply can't help themselves is to suggest that men are less than human, or that they can experience the fruit of the Spirit in all areas but lust. It is essentially degrading to men to imply that men are animals and women are angels, that somehow women are morally superior to men and therefore responsible for them (73). Certainly we are responsible *to* one another as brothers and sisters, but responsible *for* is another thing entirely.

The last few chapters of Winner's book touch on topics such as kissing, pornography, and masturbation, and dish out practical—and I think rather good—ideas to guide us in practicing chastity within our caring, Christian communities. Winner reunites chastity with the other spiritual disciplines, and talks about what marriage, children, sex, and singleness teach the church, and why each is important in God's economy, an economy of repentance and

forgiveness. Placing sexual purity back within a story that's bigger than itself makes the issue of chastity important, rather than indifferent; and gives it meaning by giving it context.

Notes

1. Laura Smit, *Loves Me, Loves Me Not: The Ethics of Unrequited Love* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).
2. Smit, *Loves Me*, 65.
3. Ibid., 71.
4. Ibid.
5. Lauren Winner, *Real Sex: The Naked Truth about Chastity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005).
6. Page numbers in the text refer to Winner, *Real Sex*.

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To Live Is Christ: On Singleness and Waiting

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We live in the tension between contentment and craving. Whether you are married or single or widowed or divorced; dating, not dating, wanting to date, not wanting to date—for now, forever. If you are wondering about your sexuality or your sex-appeal, your marriage, the strength of your love or your hope. . . And if you can empathize with the faith-struggle of doubt and dashed or delayed dreams

(because without empathy we are nothing but the annoying, repetitive clanging of construction in the city streets) . . . Angela Severson has bravely opened a vein to unleash the power that only life-blood has for the healing and cleansing of [telling the truth](#).

This poem is so very well done. I've never seen anything like it. It's holistic and honest and inspiring and right on the money. The single life and the married life illustrate and teach us about life with Christ and the character of God. The story of "This Life" is one that all too often gets marginalized and left untold, or told unwell—But, we're doing better. When both stories are told (and listened to), all lives (and theologies) are enriched.

This Life

We wait, we long for, we pine after, ... we desire, we yearn. We wait.

I wait

I am thirteen

Puberty explodes like a rash, an epidemic.

My girlfriends hold hands with boys we only months ago snickered at, turned up our noses at, as though their very essence was a disease. Now the disease appears to be, that my girlfriends can't stop gawking over these same specimen. I decide to play along and choose my crushes. I crush my way through high school, waiting to be asked out. Waiting by locker stalls during break, waiting for a nudge in the hall, a simple "hey," a nod. I wait, standing pressed against the wall, through all the slow songs on Friday nights in the darkened gymnasiums. I wait for an invitation to senior prom. I wait.

Through this waiting, I feel like it is not working, meaning me.

Something is not working with me...my friends acquire boyfriends, hold hands, kiss, and I acquire journals, stashed by my bedside, full of wonderings and waiting.

{Wait: as defined by Webster's: To be ready and available}

It is July.

I'm twenty-two.

My days of being a serial "crushest" are about to end.

I am standing in a parking lot surrounded by pigeons pecking at croissant crumbs. The aroma of Newman's fish-n-chips deep fat fryers heating up engulfs me. In the slant of the morning sun my current crush tells me, that he has a crush on me.

.....finally! He likes me and I like him. So, this is what it's like to be loved, this is what I've been waiting for... this messy, dizzy, complicated, delicious, heart pounding love. We dance the dating dance for months and then on a quiet unexpected spring day he wants me to be his...asks me to be his, opens the door to the promise of forever and stamps soul-mate on my heart.

{Wait: as defined by Webster's: To stay in a place of expectation of}

I am twenty-six.

I am engaged to the same fellow.

I am still waiting.

I've waited through friends getting married, through showers and bridesmaids dresses, through banquets and bouquet tossing, through Martha Stewart Wedding Magazines and honeymoon trip photos. It is now my turn. I am next in line to run from the church doors dodging birdseed and blessings.

However, love is delicate, as fragile as the blossoms of spring, opening in trust to the slanting sun and quick to close in the cool of the evening, so too was this promise, one that could not take hold, a love aborted, out of fear and wisdom, full of pain, and awe. Stunned with grief, the love in my heart shrinks, evaporates, dies and God becomes small, cruel and unkind.

Hope aborted.

For what do I wait?

Am I waiting for what I want, or what I need?

For that which I desire, or believe that I deserve?

Am I longing for wisdom? ...opening myself to the God, who loves me into this deep-down empty sorrow...

{Romans Eight}

"In the same way the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will."

I am 30 or 32 or somewhere in between.

I have dates that last 10 minutes or 2 years. I avoid answering calls from some and linger hours by the phone waiting for others. In and out of love, infatuation, intrigue...sometimes going through the motions, other times knowing he is.

...I'm into men, I'm tired of men. One day I'm free as a bird and content in my singleness, the next I am desperately pining away for every male that crosses my path, searching his finger for a wedding ring. I seize the day, travel over seas, take classes, switch careers, indulging in the delights and rewards of being single and still I wait. I watch my married friends build homes, families and history.

It is summer wedding season again. My cousin is getting married. I congratulate myself that I am actually excited about being there, really o.k with my place in life, o.k. that I don't have a date for this wedding, feeling genuinely happy for the two tying the knot. At the reception, between sipping white wine and sampling stuffed mushrooms, she approaches me....that token distant relative, you know the one...she has known me since birth, and kept up on me through my parents Christmas cards...and she asks "So are you going to be next?" I politely answer that I am not currently dating anyone...and she

replies, “Well, what is a pretty girl like you still doing single?” Deep in my heart I have to trust that she means well, but the thoughts in my head and the words about to fly off my tongue feel like dragon fire. I want set blaze to her lovely over-sprayed doo. I smile and shrug, and pop another mushroom in my mouth to choke down my anger and my shame. “Yeah, what is wrong with me?” A moment ago I was confident in my singleness and now I feel other. I feel like a freak of nature, an alien, a misfit. I feel shaken.

{Hebrews 11/12}

“All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised, they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.....They are longing for a better country- a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.....Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our “God is a consuming fire.”

I am thirty-six.

I am single.

Singleness seems to be the new “have it all” lifestyle.

I decide to take a break in my day, a little escape from work.

I brew my cup of tea, add a dash of cream and sit back on the sofa with a magazine for some creative inspiration. I flip open into the middle and look down on the page. It is an advice column. The first question I glance at reads {Capital Q, semicolon} “Help, Please! What should I say to people who ask “why are you single?” It’s so rude, I can never think of a response. (yeah, I agree and can’t wait to hear the answer) {Capital A, semicolon} Shake your head, frown and say, “I loathe giving up all the fabulous sex” The answer hits me in the gut. I feel sad, disgusted, disappointed and angry. I’m appalled at the culture in which I live and yet not surprised. What do you expect, Angela....this world is not going to encourage you in your singleness, at least

in a moral sense. I've read that singleness is on the rise...more people are single now than ever before. I want to think, great, I'm not so different, not so alone, but there is a huge chasm that defines this single lifestyle. The chasm is sexuality. It is one thing to be single and living with someone, single and sleeping with someone, single and sleeping with anyone and a very different state to be single and abstinent.

Abstinent not because it feels good or is pious, but because it honors God. Choosing abstinence out of obedience and respect for the vulnerability of the human body and spirit. I am ashamed to admit that I often hide the truth that I am nearly forty and a virgin. In this culture being a virgin makes me feel small, prude, asexual. Some nights I lay in bed at night aching to be held, longing for sexual intimacy. Gravity pulls my bones toward the earth, my body fills hollow.....I lay one hand on my belly and the other over my breast, not with the intention of arousal, but to be held. It would be easy to deny my sexuality and I have. But tonight I want to acknowledge that my body was designed for sexual intimacy, and although that yearning is not being fulfilled, I am still a sensual creation.

{Psalms 139}

"You hem me in - behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me."

{Martin Luther}

"This life, therefore, is not righteousness, but growth in righteousness;
not health, but healing;
not being, but becoming;
not rest, but exercise.

We are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it.

The process is not yet finished, but it is going on.

This is not the end, but it is the road.

All does not yet gleam in glory, but all is being purified."

I am thirty-eight.

There are days when I feel content knowing that I am growing in wisdom, I am awaiting the Kingdom. That my singleness is just part of my journey here, it is the color of my life. Our stories all get colored in, mine just happens to be green at the moment.

Perhaps I'll meet someone and get married and then I'll get to add some purple and red, but today it's green. I feel blessed with my greenness, alive and grateful. I love my career. I have rich, beautiful friends, and family..... my daily needs are always met, and still there is this tension.

I'm driving home from Eugene, marveling over the spring grass, the baby lambs, the sinking sun...the beauty is intoxicating and warm tears roll down my cheeks. I've just come from holding my new godson. His sweet newborn smell, his fragile breath, his parents (my beloved friends) and his sisters (my other two god children) all nestled in unison. This is a family. In this moment I am so grateful to be a part of it, but now I must travel north on I-5 towards home, alone. These tears are full of sorrow and joy, so bittersweet. In my heart I hold the hope that I may one day receive the blessing of a family like this earth but I know that this earth in all it's beauty, is broken, so that for which I was made, I may not receive. There are bigger promises, larger hopes...to that I must cling.

{Hebrews 11}

"none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect."

{Wait: as defined by Webster's: To look forward expectantly, to hold back expectantly.

To remain neglected or to remain in readiness.}

Today, as I write this, it is hard to wait.

I squirm. I writhe.

My skin crawls. The discomfort is visceral. Anything would feel better than here. The loneliness penetrates and all I see around me is what I don't have. I

hike through Forest Park and I see love and families. I see holding hands and holding hearts. I see couples with babies and couples with dogs and couples melting into one another, sharing food, laughter, words and breath. I cry out "God, spare me from this loneliness, this waiting. I want my feelings to change. I feel guilty for not being satisfied with what I have in this moment. My head knows the gospel's truth.

The God of the Universe cares for me, loves me to the core, is for me,....and he has promised me life.

Not this life, but the everlasting kind.

The one without pain and suffering, hungering and squirming. A promise that is more than I can conceive, contain, or deserve. His grace covers the reality that my heart, at this moment, does not feel any better with this knowledge. I feel small and fragile, achy, and tired. Right now I am marred then I shall be perfect, right now I am broken, then I shall be fixed. I cry out for redemption.

{Deuteronomy 31}

"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

What is it that I wait for? For what do I long? Is it Connection? Wholeness? Safety? Love?

I wait with myself, with my family, my friends,

I wait with my neighbor, the clerk at the grocery store, the lady next to me on the bus.

I wait with those across the country, across the sea, across the world, in places I know nothing of, filled with people waiting....

They wait for things that I have. They wait for warm food in their bellies and water on their lips, they wait to see their sick child healed, or the miracle of their bodies restored, they wait for a soft place to lay down at night, and the demon voices in their heads be stilled. They wait for the terror to stop and the monsters slain. We all wait.

We wait for hope, for freedom, for comfort

We wait for love.

Deep, deep love that will never fail. A love that will fill us.
We wait for Christ.

{Romans 8}

“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angel nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Angela Severson

<http://www.imagodeiwomen.com/2010/03/this-life.html>

This blog post originally appeared at

<http://reneamac.com/2010/04/09/to-live-is-christ/>

“Are Single Women Purposeless Beings?”

Sue Bohlin

You have biblically and honestly tackled the question of the roles of women in your articles.

But I have a question concerning the meaning of women’s lives. What does the Bible mean when it says that God intended to create a woman to help man? Does it then reduce single women to purposeless beings who have nothing to do on earth? I mean not the widowed, but the never

marrieds.

No, the Bible does not reduce single women at all. I believe God's design of women means that when we operate in our strengths and giftings, we are helping other people in a variety of ways. People have many needs on many levels: physically, emotionally, spiritually, aesthetically. When women bring our God-given beauty and sensitivity, nurture and compassion, intellect and leadership skills to our communities, I think we are contributing in ways that matter. Please note, none of these have to do with marital status.

I think of single friends who are teachers, helping children and adults learn and grow.

I think of single friends who are medical professionals, compassionately treating the sick and helping people get and stay healthy.

I think of single friends who are interior designers and decorators or work for them, bringing beauty and order to homes and offices.

I think of single friends who are counselors, helping people deal with pain and problems and restoring them to functionality.

I think of single friends who are serving in ministry, pointing people to Jesus and helping them grow spiritually.

It's true that God created Eve as a helpmate for Adam, but not all women are called to marriage. Some women are called to help others in their singleness. Many of the women I know, regardless of career or calling, delight in helping others in a variety of ways. And lest anyone think being a helper is an inferior status, may I respectfully point out that God is glad to be our helper? The Psalms are rich with references to God as our helper, our rescuer, our protector. And that's just the beginning. He created us to need help, to need Him and each other, so there is nothing "lesser than" about orienting one's life in terms of helping others.

I hope this helps. <smile>

Sue Bohlin

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“Is God Punishing Me With Singleness?”

Sue Bohlin

At times I feel tormented regarding sexual issues. I was 21 when I got saved and still a virgin. I committed at that time to be obedient to God’s sexual standards. For 27 years I have prayed for marriage and family. I am now 48 and still a virgin. There have been times over the years that the God-given(?) sexual feelings were just tortuous. However, God has not answered my prayers for marriage.

Even though I know that I am within God’s will, I feel tremendous shame because I feel like I’m just not good/attractive enough to attract a husband. I look at other women who have husbands and/or children and I just feel like I am defective compared to them.

Also, it seems that plenty of people have premarital sex with impunity and that the way to get a husband is to fornicate (This is what I see demonstrated). Also, a church in my area is going to great lengths this Mother’s Day to celebrate and honor single mothers. Those of us who waited and those of us who did it right and married before having children are expected to serve and bless the single mothers, most of whom are single mothers by choice. This just kind of makes me feel like my choice is silly.

I even kind of blame God for making me unattractive so that men won't want me. I just feel so much shame, torment, and low self-esteem. I feel like God might be punishing me or playing games with me.

I am so sorry. That is a very difficult burden to bear. And you are not alone! Proverbs says, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick" (13:12), and there are a lot of heartsick people who would so love a spouse and children, but it hasn't happened.

It sounds like you may have been listening to the enemy's slanderings about God—that He is not good, and He does not really love you, and He is withholding goodies from you because He is capricious. In order to live in peace with your life as it is, may I respectfully suggest that it starts with learning to "live loved," as the author of *The Shack* puts it? I suggest that you pray every day, "Lord, show me how You love me." And be looking for the various ways in which He shows His love to you. It is essential to seek God's help in being content; otherwise, we can turn into grumpy, critical, self-pitying people that others don't want to be around. An "attitude of gratitude" goes a long way in embracing life as it is instead of focusing on what we DON'T have. That's why I strongly encourage people to keep a gratitude journal, recording three things every day for which we can thank the Lord.

I do understand shame, and lived with a "shame disability" for many years before God set me free from it when I accepted His gift of His acceptance, as well as the gift of self-acceptance. I pray you will receive this gift as well, learning to embrace His love for you and see the many ways in which He communicates His love and delight in you, every day.

Sue Bohlin