

How to Live in the Christian Singles 'Waiting Zone'

I just really want to be a wife and mom," said the pre-med college student who had come over for tea. She wanted to chat about her career options and her new boyfriend—and she was much more excited about the boyfriend than a possible medical degree.

I said the same thing during my early single years, and I've heard the same thing over and over from many young women. So many women, particularly Christian women, envision the house, the kids, the loving husband, the dog and the yard. They long for the days filled with baking cookies, raising kids and greeting their husband at the door after a long day's work—a *Leave It to Beaver* episode that plays and replays in their minds.

And, you know, there's nothing wrong with that. As a matter of fact, it's perfectly natural for women to daydream about weddings and husbands and kids. The problem comes when that is *all* we dream about, when our dreams end at the altar and we think the wedding alone is our destiny.

You were made for more than a ring.

Wake Up to the Real "More"

I remember the day I was, for the 400th time, bemoaning my singlehood. A good friend challenged me: "Nicole, what else do you want to be besides a wife? What does your life look like outside of the home?"

I sat dumb. I couldn't answer her! I always knew in my head that life was multifaceted, but I realized deep down that I was hoping a husband would be my panacea, my savior—not only from loneliness but also from purposelessness and boredom.

My friend's question challenged me, and the Holy Spirit began to speak to me: "A husband will never give you purpose. Your life is about more than being a wife. Simply being a wife will never fulfill you."

That sobered me and propelled me to take hold of the garment of Jesus and beseech Him. I cried out, "What have You called me to do? What have You made me to do? What can I do uniquely that no one else can do?"

That day I realized that even though I desperately wanted to get married, my life was meant to be about more than domestic bliss—and the same is true for you.

Face Up to the Church Challenge

Let's face it, though: The church world doesn't help us out much in this area. Christians often treat single women like they have some sort of disease. They keep them at arm's length and forget about them in their sermons, social gatherings and prayers. Sermon illustrations are filled with examples appropriate for married people but totally irrelevant for singles. Churches organize all kinds of activities for stay-at-home moms and couples, but singles are left to fend for themselves—or, worse, are called on to provide childcare for the marriage activities. This can leave singles feeling lost and invisible.

The truth is that many Christians get married very young, so they simply cannot relate to being 35 or 45 or 55 and single. How many of you single women have had a married man ask, "Why aren't you married yet?" As if you knew! As if you're somehow too prudish or too snooty or too picky or too something to get a man. You walk away sure you must be the problem. You assume that in some unknown way you're warding off men. You feel condemned and confused.

Many married women don't know what to say either. They have never lived alone or made a major decision alone. And some

make insensitive comments or suggest perhaps you have the “gift of singleness.” Some assume you’re on the hunt for a man—and they hold their husbands a little closer when you’re around.

Part of the problem is that family has become an idol in the church. Christians have reacted to the feminist movement’s exaltation of career over family by doing the same thing in reverse—exalting family over everything else. The family is so highly esteemed in the church that, with no effort at all, we can conclude life before marriage is suboptimal living, like a winter season to be prayed through and left behind as quickly as possible.

Winter, though, is a season of death. The trees look dead; the grass looks dead; flowers are dead. Wildlife is hidden away and sleeping. Potential life lies dormant beneath the surface, but no life is visible.

How different the single life should be from this!

As a single woman, your life is ripe for bursting with vitality and energy. This is a time for pursuing God, for traveling, for sowing eternal seeds in people’s lives, and for investing in your career and in those you love.

Family is incredibly important, and the breakdown of marriage and family is the cause of many of our social ills, for sure. I do not think, however, that a married person is more important than a single person or that getting married makes you more spiritual or more special than a single person.

So challenge the status quo. Decide that even if you long for a mate, those who look at you will see spring, and you will indeed know life and fruit on a regular basis.

Take Up Responsibility

As a single person, it’s your responsibility to find out the

“more” God has for you. Even if your greatest desire is to be married, open your mind and heart and start desiring something else too. If you die tomorrow, will you leave anything significant behind, or is your free time spent only in daydreaming and indulging in discontent?

If you’re in your 30s or 40s or 50s and aren’t married, perhaps you are supposed to do something else before you wed. After you say “I do,” your time, energy and money will be divided multiple ways. What can you throw yourself into now that will make a significant impact on an eternal soul?

I’ve heard it said a woman’s highest calling is to be a wife and mother. I disagree. I think the highest calling for you is to be in the will of God. I certainly don’t think Gladys Aylward or Corrie ten Boom were less important than my dear friend who stays home raising her seven children. These women are all heroines who have poured themselves out for other people and changed lives for the good.

What is God calling you to do? I know He’s whispering an assignment in your ear and trying to stir a passion in you other than the sexual passion you dream about. He has something for you to focus on other than the left ring finger of every man you meet. He has something for you to be excited about other than the hello of the handsome man in your office.

Sister, you’re too smart to think only about your figure, and you’re too precious to spend your days strutting your stuff and hoping for male attention. You are more than the number of nods you receive from men and the number of dates you’ve had this year. You are a princess, not a prisoner of singleness.

Stand Up and Move Forward

If you are single, the goal for you right now is to figure out why you were created and to move forward with a sense of purpose. The key word for you is *focus*. Identify the call of God on your life, and set your face like flint, pursuing Him

and that purpose for which you were created.

Don't worry. You won't intimidate your future husband. You won't scare him away. You won't miss him. Like an Olympic runner, set your face on the finish line and refuse the distraction of what others are doing ("How come she gets a boyfriend?" "Why can't I have a man like that?"). Claim the truth that God is no respecter of persons and that He has blessings in store for you, too, and *move forward*.

When you get married, your highest call will be walking in the will of God—which will include being the best wife and may include being the best mother you can be. But it will also include more. If your life ends at the wedding altar, if you get married and just settle in, if you stop pursuing God and cease investing the talents He's given you, you will fall short of the purpose for which you were created. You will become stale. And your marriage will suffer.

Our lives should be moving, dynamic and anointed, and that can't start when we get married. It has to start *now*. Once you get a glimpse of the bigger picture, it will focus your time and attention and give you purpose and goals other than catching a mate.

By my late 20s, I realized God was calling me to be a writer and speaker. He wanted to use my mouth and pen to communicate the truths of His Word and encourage others. This was confirmed when I spoke at my first conference overseas. I was in Ghana, West Africa, at a women's conference, and as I stood at the podium ministering to hundreds of beautiful women, I felt like I had come home. This was what I was born to do. Similar to Eric Liddell in *Chariots of Fire*, I realized I "feel God's pleasure" when I speak.

I didn't know how opportunities would come, but I did know those single years were prime time to invest in the talents God had given me. I had enough married friends to know I had

more time on my hands than they did. I knew evenings free of distraction and quiet Saturday afternoons were a luxury and that I should invest some of those hours honing skills and pressing into God. I determined to be ready in season and out of season, and I spent many evenings with my Bible and my laptop open. I had purpose, and this guided my time and focused my heart.

If you have no idea what your destiny is, let me ask you this: What has God put in your hand? Like the boy with the fishes and loaves, if you offer even small things to God, He can multiply them and use them to feed multitudes. So can you write, play an instrument, sing, organize, teach, cook, research, program, build or sew?

Now is the time to discover gifts, no matter how small, and begin to invest in them. Now is the time to ask the Father for a bigger picture of your life and for guidance on how to work toward it.

This is also true for my sisters in their twilight years or those who are single again after being widowed or divorced. It's never too late to discover purpose. If you are retired and your kids are grown and gone, praise God! You still have time to dream a new dream. There is another volume of your life to be written. Don't shut down and assume the best is over. No, my sisters, the best is yet to come!

Do you remember Anna, in the book of Luke? The Bible says she had only been married seven years when her husband died. How sad! And yet she chose to throw herself into purpose and make something beautiful of her life. She spent her days in intercession, prophesying and waiting for the Messiah. And she got to see Him! At 84, she received a most incredible gift. (See Luke 2:36-38.)

Sisters, don't limit God. Remember, a single man wrote half of the New Testament. God wants to use you to change

history—perhaps not world history, but at least the history of a child, a church, a community, a family or an office. What He is calling you to is life-changing for someone somewhere, and it is vital you discover it. Your mate will come alongside you and complement the work you are already doing. He will add to it and make it better, but there is much for you to do in the meantime.

Nicole Dooley served in full-time ministry for almost 20 years. In 2006, two weeks before her 40th birthday, she married Marvin, her long-awaited Boaz. This article is adapted from her recently published book, *The Wait: Encouragement for Single Women*. For more information, visit [www.nicoledooley.com](#).

Watch a hilarious video highlighting the “encouragement” Christian singles sometimes get from married people at [www.nicoledooley.com](#)