

At Peace with Singlehood

Though aware of the many blessings I've received in life, how can I be at peace fully with my singlehood and find support as an unmarried person? This is a question that some might have, especially if they have desired to be married and God has not yet given them a spouse. In this Home and Family feature, which believers have requested, God's children of different ages and stages of life discuss their experiences living as a "single" person. We hope that many readers, regardless of marital status or age, would read these articles. What does it mean to love our neighbor, of any marital status, and support them in their walk of faith? Everyone needs a close friend that they can talk to.

The Old Testament Prophet Isaiah has written, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness" (Isa. 41:10). We are all in God's good and loving care!

Rod Nikula

Contentment Comes from God

"We lose contentment when we try to insert our own will into God's plan."

God has not granted me a spouse, at least to this point in my life. He has not forgotten me either. I have lived a happy and full life. God answers my prayers for contentment and I have been able to live as a child of God in the care of His children. These are my beloved believing brothers and sisters in faith!

There have been times in my life when I was sick and needed help. Believers prayed for me and visited me. When I had nowhere to go, believers took me into their home and became my very dear friends.

I know I am not forgotten. A married couple re--remembered me when my unbelieving relative was very ill. They sent a card and invited me to their home. Believers stay in touch with me, whether at church, by email, or simply through an "old fashioned" phone call. They come to visit, and they invite me to visit and do things with them. They have remembered me at Christmas, and I have gone to their home. These are great blessings in my life.

My joys are the same as many others I know. While I don't have a spouse, I have good friends, many nieces and nephews, godchildren, and my married friends share their children. I have a good job that gives me the kind of work that I enjoy. I am able to travel to various places and often find special joy in attending Summer and Winter Services.

Being single does have trials, too. There are times when I do feel lonely. I might wonder what it would be like to be married to someone and have my own children and grandchildren. I wonder if anyone will remember me and visit me when I am older. But then I think that I must trust and believe that God will take care of me, just as He has until now.

I know that there are some single people who especially long for a spouse. I pray that God would bless them with a believing spouse, if that is His will. I also pray that they would not be tempted to find a spouse from this world and lose their gift of living faith. Whether married or single, I pray that everyone would be content with their life. God has His plan for each person. We lose contentment when we try to insert our own will into God's plan.

I hope that this writing would help everyone to remember each other – whether single or married. I think about the words in verse three of song 420 in our songbook. It is a song about Home and Family, and it reminds us about how

blinded we become in our own selfishness and hurry. We scarcely even notice our dear ones' needs at home. We are encouraged to share our burden and stress within the care of Christ. The gospel carries and uplifts. We find refreshment there for our life of faith.

Another song especially touched me when it was sung at a dear friend's birthday party.

*Sing to the Lord! Glory and praise—
our Father on high, gives of His grace.
He sent His Son! Vict'ry is won.
Christ has redeemed all His brethren.
Dear one, for you we pray, stay in His grace each day,
always secure in the family of God (SHZ 226:1).*

A sister's perspective (U.S.A.)

On the Journey

“Down here in the ravine, it looks as if the mountains will fall on us, it makes me dizzy when I try to look up.”

I am sitting on a rock and look down at Sarah calling to me. Her voice echoes between the mountains with a hollow sound. The sun shines so warmly that it burns, but fortunately, the trees and the huge rocks provide protection. The sky is blue, with no clouds in sight. It's hard to believe that there was a violent thunderstorm last night and the water just came pouring down. I awoke to the thunder and the lightning. The thunderclaps were deafening and they bounced back off the mountains. I pressed my hands together crossing my fingers. I became calm and waited peacefully for the end of the storm.

I follow Sarah's climb and admire at the same time the most marvelous designs on the surface of the mountains. The guide told us that this island is still “alive” and the mountains are rising with the passage of time, so new pieces of art continue to be born for people to admire.

Sarah sits down next to me panting and leans on her backpack.

“Here, on a trip, a person always realizes how good they've got it. Oh, if I only were so thankful at home, too.”

Sarah's words wake me up. Johanna, who is a mother of a family, once said that a person is never satisfied. She also yearned for her own time and peace once in a while and was sometimes envious of my lot. And I myself often look at my life through the lens of a single person.

“Yes, you can be happy when you have a permanent job and regular income, even if the wages may not be great,” Sarah continues, “There is the opportunity to travel and to broaden horizons. And, for people like us, it is easy to go because we don't need to worry about anyone but ourselves.”

“Yes, that's true,” I think. Although a single person could travel with a family, if one wanted to badly enough.

We go deeper into the ravine accompanied by the chirping of the cicadas. I almost step on Sarah's heels when she stops suddenly.

“Do you hear that?”

I listen and look down toward the rushing sound. Way down at the bottom of the ravine a brook is flowing. The water is clear, and all the different rocks are plainly visible through it. Next to the water, but in completely barren and rocky

land, stands a flowering tree.

I sit next to Sarah to watch the brook flow by. A branch in the brook disturbs the water's flow, but soon it flows again without any obstructions. It's like my own life was years ago. How was I so blind back then that I didn't notice the change in my "near one"? In the end, we sat side-by-side like two unconnected persons. I cried and took off the engagement ring from my finger. It felt as if life had stopped. All of our mutual plans and dreams became rubble. St. John's Day Eve was the next day and there were services, but I had no desire to go with the others. Nevertheless, the Heavenly Father set a choice before me, He reminded me of the most important matter in life.

"What are you thinking about?"

I'm jolted back to the present—either by my own thoughts or Sarah's question.

"Somehow the flow of that brook is a picture of the course of life. My life goes forward like that brook. There have been difficult issues at times. Perhaps the most difficult was the break-up of the engagement. At that time, my life didn't look like it would flow anymore. But still, it didn't stop."

"Yes, your life got another direction," Sarah acknowledges, continuing, "I believe that difficult experience of yours has given you compassion to understand the difficulties of others. You have many friends—all different kinds, in different situations in life, and you've gotten to be with children in your sisters' and brothers' families."

"It was really hard in the beginning. Meeting a person of the opposite sex especially oppressed me almost to panic, and I tried to avoid such situations."

Sarah touched my hand.

"Do you know that I marvel now, afterwards, how I pulled through it all. I'm so thankful that you were near and had the strength to listen."

"Isn't it good that we don't need to find the strength alone? The Heavenly Father gave you strength as well as supportive escorts."

"Yes, they put me back together piece by piece."

Pirjo Kanniainen

Translated from *Yksin Yhdessä* (Single but Not Alone),

SRK 2003

Marital Status—an Annoying Detail

A while back there was a worthwhile writing published in the *Päivämies* that inspired me to add on to the thoughts expressed about single living. The official descriptor for that is "unmarried," but it is sometimes casually referred to as being a "bachelor" or an "old maid."

"Too bad that no one was interested—must be something wrong there!" From such pronouncements, you can sense an undercurrent that a person's worth as a human being might very well improve by getting married. Have you ever noticed that this kind of attitude does pop up now and then? This kind of thinking gives the understanding that God's guidance couldn't possibly reach into a single's household.

Even though God guides every individual's life, we can, nevertheless, see temporal reasons for remaining single. One may stay single—unmarried—for many different reasons, and it is in no way a pitiable fate. There are many who do not

necessarily want to get married, and that is not a sin. Some may be convinced that they are neither capable of rearing children nor could they shoulder the responsibility that goes with having a family.

Of course, family life certainly brings immeasurable joy and happiness. Some may find their own lack of daring to commit themselves to a close relationship an obstacle to marrying, or there could be some other limitations as well. The past always influences one's choices.

Whatever the reasons for singlehood may be, the most important thing—aside from faith—is how one regards his or her own lot in life. God has intended that everyone can be happy. Happiness is satisfaction with one's life here and now. It is being present in this moment, while still not forgetting one's dreams. After all, it is said that one's own portion in life is the best portion!

There are a lot of single people who feel that they are living life to its fullest without suffering any deprivation syndrome. They are content, and their lives are pleasant. But there are also those who suffer terribly in their singlehood, and this condition casts a shadow over their lives in general. Every person's life has things that they wish were different. One can get over these by grieving them and then accepting whatever they may be.

Faith is a real and is the most important resource in life, and a child of God has reason for contentment even just from that. Faith also helps us to understand that our life is in God's hands and everything is as it is for a purpose. Life is also made easier by knowing yourself and the acceptance of yourself just as you are, including your past. This helps us in our relations with other people and opens the way for personal development as a person. Taking good care of your health is also a part of liking yourself.

Life moves along its track, and every individual's life is of equal worth. We are all "in the same boat": the single person, those married with family, the forgotten senior, and the manager moving up a career path.

Anna-Leena Heikkilä

Translated from *Päivämies*, no. 41, 2014

It Feels Good to Gather Together

I'm very thankful that God has given me time with older singles and family members. Gathering each year on Labor Day weekend at the Peace Gardens has been terrific for me. In these occasions, I'm able to just be myself, with no pressures or expectations. Believing fellowship is valuable for all believers, and I feel lucky that I'm surrounded and uplifted by so many amazing people.

It's not always easy—but then, whose life is? Whether married or single, male or female, young or old, it seems that all have trials and need the support and encouragement offered by other believers. I find contentment from this support.

I have been teased about being a single man. I think it's easiest when the teasing has been "good-natured ribbing" from others in a situation similar to mine. We have a mutual understanding. Sometimes questions from others can be hurtful. For example, "Are you going to be like so-and-so your whole life?" Or, constantly dropping comments about someone being a "nice match." Sadly, this can immediately put a rift between me and the commenter.

The hardest part for me are the implications in the comments that I am somehow not "trying hard enough" to find a spouse. It was God's plan that they should find one, and it would be nice for me to know God's plan for myself. There are always hopes and prayers. For some reason God has not led me to be with anyone and I am content with His will.

It can be frustrating to sense undertones in presentations, discussions, or sermons that seem to imply that being single is a sorry plight, and we must feel woe and receive much encouragement to plod onward. I have no such feelings, so it feels odd for me to have someone comforting me for yearning and sadness over my life's situation when I am content and happy. Nevertheless, some may find their single state to be one of longing and trial.

Perhaps surprising to others, most singles are very busy. There seems to be a misperception that single people have ample time on their hands, and waste it pursuing frivolous or fruitless endeavors. Unfortunately, this feeling has come to light when there have been assignments or duties in congregational work. I am thankful that for me it is different. I do feel that my time is respected, maybe because of the nature of my work and my eagerness to stay busy.

Of course, I do get occasional thoughts comparing to friends of mine who are married and have children, but I am always comforted when noting the balance that life presents. What may be easy for a single person may be difficult as a married person, and vice versa. There are joys, trials, and temptations unique to both.

I believe that every person has been given roles in society and life, and simply, this is mine. There is no need to dwell on the "what-ifs" and "what-might-haves" because my life is wonderful and fulfilling. My daily work is purposeful and rewarding. I have a close-knit family that includes me, and many nieces and nephews to love and take on outings. I'm always in pursuit of hobbies which constantly enrich and fulfil me intellectually. I travel and work at church camp events and meet many believers of all ages. My "believing family" is enormous, stretching over continents.

I am convinced that no matter what one's situation is, all that is required is that one strives to hold onto their small shred of faith, and live a full, positive life. Therein is happiness and contentment. My believing friends are a support, and it is good to gather together.

A brother's perspective (U.S.A.)

It's Good Either Way

God's Peace! It's good to see you! It's been a long time. You must still be a bachelor. By the way, how old are you? Do you plan to ever get married? You haven't decided who to choose, eh? Hey, we can't let you off too easily.

Every so often I had to answer such questions and comments and try to smile understandingly when someone clearly enjoyed introducing the subject. But right off the bat the just-pick-someone style wasn't easy to take even though someone said it to me. I once read an article in the paper, which was very humorous to me for some reason: "If someone asks a person who lives alone, Why aren't you married? it is at least as offensive as if someone were to ask a married person, "Why did you get married and why with that type of person?"

But joking around didn't always feel bad; the opposite was true instead. To be sure, we discussed the subject among friends and good-naturedly goofed off. But if I was already tired and irritated, then my tolerance would be tested, especially if the subject was repeated several times in a day. Once, at the conclusion of services, an older brother came to speak to me and said that you and another brother tempt the sisters in faith when you don't get married. However, I soon received consolation when another brother stated curtly, "You do not tempt anyone, and if someone is tempted, let them repent." It so happened once that I won a large doll in a drawing at a bazaar. Other people appeared to enjoy my success in the drawing more than I did. The doll was the topic of conversation for the entire evening. There were plenty of

congratulators. One brother asked me in good humor the next morning, “Did it let you sleep okay?” It got put into a closet to wait for better times. Sometimes I thought that the style of the humor was probably connected to the humorist’s own wedded bliss.

In spite of everything, I understood that I don’t need to have to get married because of social pressure. I have the right to live as a bachelor, to get to know myself, my own thoughts, and to learn to get along with myself. My studies were still in progress in addition to my work, and many kinds of duties seemed to increase in quantity. In reality, marriage did not even fit into my thoughts very well at the time, even though in my childhood and early youth I had dreamed of my own family. But feelings of longing sometimes hit me, and a prayer was part of it, asking God to lead my life in these matters also.

When I neared the age of 30 years, the thought sometimes arose, “Will I remain a bachelor? Is it as some have kidded me that I cannot make a decision? But finally, are these matters to be decided by me?” Sometime, I asked some trustworthy brothers seriously about what love is and how would I know it. One brother spoke well of the grace-gift of falling in love. Through faith I understood that God also directed these matters as He sees fit. No one will manage to get ahead and carry away the person intended for another. There was content and purpose in my life as a bachelor. I felt that I was happy even alone, even in my yearnings and expectations.

The bachelors’ ranks thinned threateningly, but there were still some left with whom I would jog and discuss everything between heaven and earth. It saddened me when some people tried to arrange my marital affairs, just as if I were helpless myself. Also the sincere revelations of their interest by some sisters made me somewhat sad, as I did not have reciprocal feelings. Perhaps my relationship with the sisters became even more cautious.

Then, I was able to purchase a two-bedroom condominium. I first sought a one-bedroom apartment, but the bank manager was of the opinion that I needed a bigger place. The smaller ones were most likely easier to sell. It bothered me a little bit how people would relate to this bigger place: Can a bachelor live in so much space? Is some plan connected to this purchase of a home? During my entire school, student, and work years I had lived very frugally, sometime in a room in someone else’s home. It was awesome that now I, too, also had my own home, my own kitchen, living room, bedroom, and workroom. I could invite guests whenever I wanted to. Sometime on a Sunday, when time seemed long, I also invited families to come. The guests came willingly and it was nice to discuss matters with people in different phases of life. Sometimes, a thoughtless remark by someone about a bachelor’s unnecessarily large dwelling felt bad. But the Christians were generally happy that I had finally acquired my own home. Even as a bachelor, I had the permission and the right to have it.

But then it happened. One spring it felt that my own emotions had to be clarified. Even a man, who was considered a devoted bachelor, had to get moving because that is how it felt, but it wasn’t easy. But when I had expressed my feelings honestly, I felt good and at peace. No matter how it ended up, it wouldn’t go wrong. The will of God will take place. The matters took their time, and there were painful and difficult phases. Nevertheless, the emotions were clarified, love ripened on both sides, and we found that we were in love.

It was interesting to watch how our dear friends related to the fact that a bachelor came to services with a girl. One brother asked some questions, “Are you here to study or for some other reason? Are you relatives?” Then, when we announced our engagement, I experienced a special warmth in the congratulations of the Christians. Many of them, who had teased me even wildly while I was a bachelor, now shared the joy that I felt.

“Love requires marriage,” our wedding pastor stated in his wedding sermon, and we were ready for it age-wise too. Since then I have had to learn that marriage requires love. In the midst of my everyday rush and large family, I have acquired an answer to my pondering of bachelor days on what love could be in everyday life. Love is the desire to dedicate oneself to the other person’s lot. Emotions are controlled by one’s own desire and the desire to love each other as was asked of us at our wedding. To live happily, I need to also make my dear one happy. We need to understand and be understood. I want to share everything in my life with her. Her joys are my joys, and her problems are my problems.

Since I had lived a “long youth” and came and went freely, I did not want to go anywhere away from my family at home. I wanted to go to services, of course, and the participatory lifestyle that I had adopted as a bachelor remained as a responsibility of sorts and a favorable pursuit. I kept contact with the friends of single days, though not under the former conditions. Through her, I got to know her friends—now also my friends. When our children were born, I felt that I lived also for them and, therefore, I was in a hurry to get home for I knew that my wife and children were waiting there. Life had acquired new dimensions.

My human values did not change because of my change in marital status. Some characteristics of my personality were strengthened while others weakened, but in both single life and marriage, I felt that I am a whole human person. This is how God has wanted to guide our lives. The Giver of Life, and duties, has not made a mistake with me or anyone else. It is good that way, and it is good this way.

Antti Paananen

Translated from *Yksin Yhdessä* (Single but Not Alone), SRK 2003

“Behold, I Will Do a New Thing”

The girl playing with dolls had dreams just like most little girls have: When I grow up I will get married to the perfect husband, I will have wonderful children, I will live in a beautiful home and life will be happy.

Touchingly, the matter felt like a given. The girl grew up, and playing with dolls got left behind. Her time was consumed with going to school and various other interests—still now and again she would escape to her dreams.

The time came for study and a life of independence. Her studies seemed like a priority and learning was pleasant. The young woman met many new people. There were infatuations and “interests” but they changed to disappointments. It felt bad when her hopes were not realized. Her construct from childhood began to sway. Perhaps no one, no family, has been set aside for me. The future that had seemed touchingly clear began to fade.

In time the studies ended. The woman continued to live alone. Her friends got married—one after another. Loneliness brought tears. Her educational achievements weren’t sufficient content in life. Is it true that there’s no one to share this beautiful, difficult life with? Her very skin ached to be touched. No one had held her since childhood. Her heart ached that no one loved her, did not see her uniqueness, the beauty of her mind and soul. No one admired her as a woman; she had to live her best time for herself. Hopelessness began to overcome her: if not a believing spouse, there are many unbelievers around. It felt difficult to stand up straight when from co-workers she got the attention and appreciation she craved. The question arose, “Did God really say so?”

When it was very difficult, God sent help, a friend in the same life-situation. The friend remembered to ask how she

was managing—and blessed her. The friend cared, made her feel valued, warmed her heart. The adult woman experienced as truth what is said in Proverbs about a faithful friend: “He who finds such a person, finds a treasure.” Gradually the woman understood that God does not give the same kind of path to everyone. Even if one’s own path is not traditional, it is good and rich. Joy was found in one’s own privileges and the freedom to enjoy them.

Now the woman, who has reached middle age, no longer expects anything. Life has evened out. God has openhandedly given good things to her. Nevertheless, it’s like a stinging wound that she has never been able to feel what it is to have been in love, to have been loved, and to be someone’s all in all. There are no arms into which she might take refuge when the world threatens or treats her badly. She is neither spouse nor mother to anyone. However, time has been merciful and taught her to see the uniqueness of her own life and the innumerable opportunities—all of which she can’t even fit in. One cannot find joy and happiness in another person, from material things, or from anything that you touch with your hand; it is just given without one’s own merits. One receives love and warmth from the people around you, if you are ready to receive it. It feels secure to live a day at a time just as God gives it to be lived. Earlier dreams have disappeared but joy and hope have been given to replace them. “Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing” (Isa. 43:18,19).

Sailaritta Vuorisalo

Translated from *Yksin Yhdessä* (Single but Not Alone), SRK 2003

1. What does God’s Word say about marriage and single life?
2. “But godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Tim. 6:6). Single or married, what gives you contentment in your life?
3. How have you reached out to someone who’s not in your immediate circle of family or friends—single or married?
4. How can you respond to someone who teases you about your lot in life, perhaps encouraging you to “check out” so-and-so, especially at a time when this “advice” is not welcomed or appreciated.
5. If you are someone who hasn’t experienced lengthy singlehood, reflecting on some of the experiences related in these articles, how might you change your approach to teasing, ribbing, matchmaking, etc.?
6. Sing and then discuss the message in song of Zion #469. Why are believing escorts so important? How can we support each other, regardless of our station in life?