

I (Susan Bruce) follow a blog on facebook – Carolyn McCulley

I liked her latest post

" So I think our goal is to be godly, to make sure that we are serving in faith, that we are not hiding out nor promoting ourselves, to be praying, and to be encouraging and serving our brothers; to be known as a woman who is an encourager to her brothers in the church."

It was a link to an interview she did called - Practical Counsel on Singleness, Is It Okay to Pursue Men?

It was featured on the website - www.reviveourhearts.com – calling women to freedom, fullness & Fruitfulness in Christ – you can download the full transcript or listen to it.

I've done a shortened version of the bits I liked.

As a single woman, do you live your life sitting at home just waiting for a godly man to come find you?

He will hopefully be secure enough in his masculinity to risk that interruption to say, "This is a godly woman. She's busy. She's doing a lot of stuff. She's being fruitful in the meantime. If I'm to be her husband, I am to be a big interruption, and that's okay."

Do you just trust God and do nothing as a woman and say that if God has a husband for you He will bring the husband to you? Do we have any responsibilities to do something to make it happen—just to express availability or to even get into flirting?

The question that a lot of us as single women have. What's our role? What's our responsibility? What's appropriate pursuit? Is there any such thing as appropriate pursuit, or do you just sit at home and wait for a man to come and pursue for marriage?

This is a hard thing to discern at times because it requires an understanding of the temptations in your own heart as well as the particular circumstances that are unique to each of our lives. There are clear biblical mandates for us that **godly women are to cultivate a quiet trust before the Lord**. That's not dependent on your personality type, that's a trust before the Lord, a trust that can be expressed in a vivacious woman or a quiet woman.

We are told that there are traits that we are to **cultivate like kindness and faithfulness and gentleness**. Then I think it is helpful at times to **get feedback from those who are close to us and watch us as we interact with men**. Are we being encouraging, or are we being flirtatious? Are we being defensive and cold, or are we being warm and encouraging and inviting and soft?

because each of us is different. We stand and fall before our own master. Some of us are going to need to be restrained from being too encouraging because we are falling into being flirty and others of us need to be encouraged to be more receptive and warm and to respond to a man when he talks to us instead of just turning around and walking the other direction.

That's why **living in community is so important**. If we are in a season where we are tempted by bitterness, there is going to be a cynicism that rests upon us. We are going to need to have people to encourage us to take more initiative toward our brothers as brothers just to be seen as an encouraging sister in the Lord. Then there are times we are going to need to have people look at us and say, "You know, in that conversation you were really working hard to draw a lot of attention to yourself."

So this is where I can't give a one-size-fits-all answer. I can say there are some things that we should do though if we desire to be married. **We should be looking at ourselves in the sense of saying, "How am I expressing that in prayer before the Lord?** Have I just given up? My God, I've prayed enough. You know what's on my mind." Or are we continuing to pray.

I think, too, it's important to consider where are we and what are we doing? **How are we serving?** Now, I don't want to be misunderstood on this, but I recently had a man who serves as accountability and covering for me. He asked me, "Are you just always around single women?" or "How are you serving in the church? If you still desire to be married, **are you putting yourself in a place to serve where single men can meet you?"** And I looked at my calendar and I thought, "Nope! I'm stuck in the pink ghetto. I'm with women all the time." His question to me was one of care. He just wanted to make sure that I was achieving balance in my life.

Now to some women, somebody who is expressing care to you might be pulling you back saying, "You're really running around a lot. You're trying to stick your face out there for every man to see you. You need to spend more time serving others." So this is a way that we need to approach the people who are closest to us in our church and our friends and our family. We should say, **"How do you perceive me? Am I encouraging and warm? Am I receptive? Or am I cold? Am I being flirtatious? Am I drawing attention to myself?"**

So for every rule that we've set for ourselves, "This is how God works." There are millions of testimonies of how God loves to surprise and delight His children. So I think our goal is to be godly, to make sure that we are serving in faith, that we are not hiding out nor promoting ourselves, to be praying, and to be encouraging and serving our brothers; to be known as a woman who is an encourager to her brothers in the church.

The role that married couples can have as part of the body of Christ in showing a concern for singles

Our culture has denigrated marriage. We are experiencing that in the church. We need the church to stand up and be counter-cultural on this topic, to say marriage is good, it is valuable, and it is worth pursuing. We need married couples to step in and to help us when all around us we see people who are pursuing immorality, worldliness, and selfishness. **We need someone to set the standard high and to come along side and to help us.**

So for married couples, I would appeal that **married men take the time to befriend single men and to disciple them about marriage and to ask them questions about who are they praying about;** who are they pursuing; why are they attracted to some of the women they are; to invite them into their homes and to show them what a godly marriage looks like. I can't tell you the number of marriages that have started because a man, a godly married man asked another man, "So, I notice that you are good friends with so and so. Have you ever considered her?"

So I would encourage married people to please invest in the singles. Do not continue to allow an artificial divide in the church that separates people by marital status but invest in singles in the church. Invite single people over to provide opportunities so people can get to know each other in a more godly context and to build friendships. Too often I've heard, particularly from single men, how discouraged they are at times when people they don't even really know come up and say, "How come you're still single? What are you doing about it?" And they haven't really earned the right, so to speak. They haven't **built the relational bridge to be able to carry that freight of such a heavy question across the bridge.** So I would not be encouraging busy-bodyness. I would not be encouraging the grand inquisition. **But I would be encouraging developing friendships, and in real fellowship so that you can earn, so to speak, the right to ask good penetrating and helpful questions.**

And for single women, I would say, let's ask some of those hard questions. Let's ask people, "Where do I need to grow? What could I do to change? Where have I gotten slack in any personal habits or in faith or in not exercising hospitality and not inviting people into my home and **taking risks to make new friendships?**" Whatever it is. Those who are around you can be very helpful in providing good feedback in bolstering your faith to keep on trusting God and investing in the lives of others around you.

there should be humility in the way we receive the pursuit of men. I think that we shouldn't be quick to say "no." I think we should honestly tell a man, "I'll pray about it." And then really pray about it. Tell him, "I'll seek counsel." And then really seek counsel.

I have so many happily married friends who would have told their husbands "no" at the beginning simply because they had certain expectations or ideas about what their husband would be like and even some of them who were listing, "I want to have a man with these very qualities." They seemed not to see the fact that this man had those qualities. Helpful parents and friends and more mature couples in the church, pastors and their wives, small group leaders, etc. were involved in being able to help them look at this and say, **"This man is a godly man, and he is worth your time and consideration."**

If we aren't initially drawn to a man, that is not necessarily a bad thing either. **It's his job to win our hearts.** So if we aren't at the beginning of a relationship going, "Here's my heart. Have my heart. It's right out there for you." Then it puts him in a position of working, not in a sense of earning, but laboring to win our hearts as the relationship progresses.

Woman: John Piper was recently writing on singleness and **how it is such a great gift to serve and propagate the kingdom of God through salvations, not through birth, like how to encourage each other toward that and toward still displaying biblical femininity, masculinity as they pursue that call that may not include a spouse.**

Carolyn: I appreciate Dr. Piper's focus on **living a God-glorifying, radical life for the sake of the Kingdom.** I think that for those of us who wake up in the morning and find ourselves single once again, a message like that is incredibly inspiring. **There are blessings enumerated in Scripture for those who seek to serve the Lord as singles.** We are not left in the cul-de-sac of adulthood. We are not in the waiting room of adulthood. There are blessings there for us in Scripture. We are not forgotten by God.

This doesn't mean that it is exclusive to ever being married. Sometimes I think this dialogue can take that path where it is either one or the other. **I think for we who are women who are not in charge of pursuing anyone or initiating any relationship but waiting in faith on the Lord, a message like Dr. Piper's is incredibly inspiring.** There are purposes for me today. They are not necessarily imitating sort of a more masculine life of giving myself entirely to one cause. But I think **we are required to exhibit a femininity that says I can give my life to this job, this work, this mission, this cause and to cultivate a love for the home because the home is a mission field.**

We see that the early church was founded in the home. We know that you can reach out to others and invite them into your home. We can share the gospel in a way in our home that is so much harder to do in a restaurant. In restaurants every time you get to the punch line or to the prayer, a waiter is guaranteed to interrupt, show up and ruin your joke and ruin your prayer. Sometimes it is just hard to hear in restaurants. **But if you take the effort to cultivate a love for the home and you bring others into your home, you have an opportunity to serve and to share and to care in a way in the private realm that is much harder to do in the public sphere.**

So I don't think it is an either / or situation. Living for the glory of God now while you are single does not exclude you from becoming married. Nor do I think that you have to live in such a way that is not inherently feminine because you are single. **I think we are as we see in Scripture, called to cultivate femininity, and it looks different in every season of life.** But it's not, "Sell everything and go to Africa," just because you are single. Are you called? It's an important question. Are you lining up with the training that Scripture has laid out for women?

I think if you go back to 1 Corinthians 7 where there is a lot of teaching on different aspects of marriage and singleness. It talks about marriage, singleness, divorce, widowhood. There is a lot in that chapter. I think the passage does seem to indicate that for some believers God has particularly gifted them to be single. Some have one gift, some have another. In that context marriage is a gift, singleness is a gift.

But Paul who was presumably single himself indicated that those who were able to be single, who were able to stay morally pure and on whose lives God put that call would have freedom to serve the Lord in some different ways than married people could. Now, it is not a slam on marriage. The same apostle Paul wrote that beautiful passage in **Ephesians chapter 5 about the mystery of marriage and how it reflects the redemptive plan and heart of God.** So he wasn't promoting singleness over marriage. But he also said to some God has given the gift, the calling to be single.

I think about the history of missions, for example. How many women and men, for that matter, God has set apart and has put His hand upon their life in a specific way. I think Amy Carmichael was an illustration of this. Gladys Aylward was an illustration of this. These were people that God has used in a particular way to advance and further His kingdom and for whom God gave just that single focus of serving Him.

That lifestyle is clearly not God's calling for most. I think it's clearly the exception. But I think we probably have some listeners who have that call of God on their lives. I'm often asked, "Do you think you have a call to be single?" And I don't know until I look back on the end of my life that I'll know for sure the answer to that question. But I have had since I was a very young girl **a strong sense of God putting His hand on my life and setting me apart for what has turned out to be single service. And God has given me great joy, great freedom, great delight in that.**

I am so pro-marriage. I am very pro-family. I don't think singleness is a state to be pursued unless God puts His hand on your life for that. But I think for some He does that. There needs to be in our day those who would answer that call and would say, "Lord, if that's what You have for me, then it's a privilege. And it really is a joy."

Learn more from Carolyn book, Did I Kiss Marriage Goodbye?

Revive Our Hearts with Nancy Leigh DeMoss is an outreach of Life Action Ministries.