



Having Faith in God's Timeline

As a single woman, I have come to appreciate that the Lord sustains us in our unique timelines.

BY CATHERINE EDWARDS

When I was 19 years old, one of my best friends was married. The wedding was wonderful, she looked beautiful, the groom was handsome, and they were happy. I, on the other hand, was a little distraught. I was caught off guard by what she was doing. She was altering my vision for her—and for me. I definitely wanted to get married, just not yet. I thought we were both so young, and here she was marrying not only before graduating from college, but before she had the chance to travel much or engage in intellectually stimulating career opportunities. I was up the night prior to her wedding, anxious about what would happen in her future, while she was sound asleep, rightly confident in her decision.

As I look back on my reaction, I have to smile. What was I thinking? I look at her life now: she has two lovely children and a loving home. A few months after her wedding it became clear to me that she had made the right decision, and it is even clearer now. I recognize that she was prayerful and thoughtful and trusted in God's promptings to her.

That was almost 20 years ago. I am still single. The majority of my friends are married; they have husbands and children and homes. I have a home: a rented two-bedroom apartment in New York City. I don't have a husband or children. I've wondered on occasion if people have the same late-night concerns for me as I had for my friend.

I am sure I have made some errors in my life, but I don't believe I have done anything that would preclude me from the blessing of marriage. I admittedly wonder on occasion if my life would be different if I had done better or worked harder or been kinder, and yet I realize I have done good things and that I consistently try to move forward with an eternal perspective. I try to do my part to fulfill my desire for a temple marriage.

I also recognize that God understands the timeline for important events in my life, and it is different from the timeline of many others. I am tremendously grateful to understand this. My appreciation has grown as I have developed faith in a loving Heavenly Father, who understands what I need and what I can give to others.



Recognizing that my life is on a different timeline has been a process. My queries to God regarding His design for me have led to a sense that I have distinct potential and goodness. I find that this sense of assurance is most often challenged not by my own ideas but by the frequently well-intentioned concerns of others. The feelings of others regarding my single state are not dissimilar from the reaction I had toward my 19-year-old, soon-to-be-married friend. I presumed that I understood what she should do, but I was wrong.

Sometimes people suggest possible explanations as to why I don't have a husband and children yet. I know that most often these ideas are kindly offered, and yet underlying them seems to be a sense that I have erred in my eligibility for the blessings of marriage and children. I have been told that perhaps I am too picky, too aggressive, too smart, too career oriented, too independent, too liberal, and—my favorite—too happy. I must say that on occasion I take some of these critiques as compliments, and yet at the same time I recognize that there are married women who are smarter, more aggressive, pickier, and more independent than I am.

A Goal of Discipleship

As I reflect on what I believe is God's timeline for important events in my life, I am keenly aware of my choices and agency. As children of our Heavenly Father, we are given the happy opportunity and responsibility to pursue the blessing of marriage. By working toward that goal, we are doing our part.

As a member of the Church, I have the blessings of prayer, the scriptures, the ward I attend, and the words of the prophets to give me a deeper understanding of Heavenly Father and the Savior. Each of these blessings provides guidelines for using my agency well. I hope that wisdom is reflected in the decisions I make, including in my response to unanticipated joys and challenges.

I regularly take stock of my life and my situation. The most important aspect of that self-inquiry is the question of my worthiness. I have made a dedicated effort to abide by the doctrines and practices of the Church: to attend my meetings and the temple, to pay tithing, to live a virtuous life, and to serve others. I believe in the Savior's Atonement and in the efficacy of lives spent living by the commandments and the directives of the prophets.

Whether we are married, divorced, widowed, or not yet married, we all have the blessing of our common divine ancestry and divine and distinct roles. I am grateful for a loving Heavenly Father, who knows what we can do with our lives—disparate and exciting as they are.



A Rich Life

I am frequently asked how I can be cheerful as an unmarried member of a church and culture that emphasize marriage. I'll tell you what I have done.

My sister Christine and I determined at a young age that we would certainly marry one day, and in the meantime we would live in a manner that would make us more well-rounded and well-developed people. I am so grateful we made that plan—a plan that is tied to our desire to do what we believe God hopes for us. It was, at its core, a plan that relied on listening to the promptings of the Spirit.

My sister married 10 years ago and has two wonderful children. She earned a PhD and makes significant contributions to the Church and to her community. I continue to live by our plan, and I believe that is what God wants me to do. I consistently check in on whether what I'm doing is right—if my

goals in life match the larger goal of discipleship to the Savior. I work to ensure that my pursuits and endeavors, both spiritual and secular, lead me to better understand my role as a daughter of God.

As a single Latter-day Saint woman, I have the opportunity to serve in ways that are wonderful. I have a career that is service oriented, and I am able to fulfill my Church callings. I have developed my talents and have enjoyed unique educational pursuits. My life is rich. Throughout, I seek to follow the Lord's promptings in my decisions.

Several years ago I, along with six other single women in my age range, had the unique and unexpected opportunity to meet with Relief Society general president Bonnie D. Parkin. We spent a little more than an hour together talking about our lives as single women in the Church.

That meeting was one of the real blessings

of my life that year. As we sat around the table in Sister Parkin's office, we spoke of the challenges and the blessings in our lives. At the end she asked us if we had a final comment we wanted to make. I raised my hand and pronounced, "The Church is the best place to be a single woman." Given the opportunity over the course of that short hour to bear my testimony of service and loyalty to God, I had genuinely deepened my testimony of my role in the Church. I knew what my role was before, but I needed that forum to articulate it and deepen my conviction of its importance.

Confidence in the Individual

In the Church I believe there is a distinct need to develop confidence in the individual, not as he or she should fit into some culturally prescribed timeline but as he or she follows personal revelations from a loving Heavenly Father. It is important to have confidence that other people may be doing the right thing and to recognize that even when their lives look different, they have unique offerings we need. It is too easy to assume that one schedule is right for everyone.

Everyone has challenges. Whether we are married, divorced, widowed, or not yet married, we all have the blessing of our common divine ancestry and divine and distinct roles.

Of course I pray that I will marry and that my husband and I will have children. In the meantime I am working to extend and expand my gospel-oriented life. I have blessings as a single woman that I would be ungrateful and negligent to squander, and I am confident that those blessings will ultimately make me a better wife and mother.

I am grateful for a loving Heavenly Father, who knows us and knows what we can do with our lives—disparate and exciting as they are. I am grateful for the life I have and the opportunities ahead of me. I pray that each of us can have confidence in the Lord's timelines for us, timelines that are supported by our good decisions and faith in God. ■

MARRIAGE AND THE LORD'S TIMING



"The timing of marriage is perhaps the best example of an extremely important event in our lives that is almost impossible to plan. Like other important mortal events that depend on the agency of others or the will and timing of the Lord,

marriage cannot be anticipated or planned with certainty. We can and should work for and pray for our righteous desires, but despite this, many will remain single well beyond their desired time for marriage.

"So what should be done in the meantime? Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ prepares us for whatever life brings. This kind of faith prepares us to deal with life's opportunities—to take advantage of those that are received and to persist through the disappointments of those that are lost. In the exercise of that faith, we should commit ourselves to the priorities and standards we will follow on matters we do not control and persist faithfully in those commitments, whatever happens to us because of the agency of others or the timing of the Lord. When we do this, we will have a constancy in our lives that will give us direction and peace. Whatever the circumstances beyond our control, our commitments and standards can be constant.

"The commitments and service of adult singles can anchor them through the difficult years of waiting for the right time and the right person. Their commitments and service can also inspire and strengthen others. Wise are those who make this commitment: I will put the Lord first in my life, and I will keep His commandments. The performance of that commitment is within everyone's control. We can fulfill that commitment without regard to what others decide to do, and that commitment will anchor us no matter what timing the Lord directs for the most important events in our lives."

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Timing," *Liahona and Ensign*, Oct. 2003, 15.