

10 Staying Single

Clearly from Lory's story at the end of the last chapter, people from traditional Muslim societies expect women to marry. Most traditional women will not consider choosing to live as a single woman. In these cultures a woman's identity almost always ties strongly to her husband. In the West many women also have the same issue, though in the West a great deal more progress has been made in this area.

In Western society marrying no longer provides the only way for a woman to live. I have known many successful and happy women who decided not to marry, or who were married and divorced, then consciously decided not to remarry.

Though the Quran encourages marriage it does not require it. God deals with us as individuals as well as couples:

Say, "I ask you to do one thing: Devote yourselves to God, in pairs or as individuals, then reflect...."
(Quran: The Final Testament 34:46)

We each have the total responsibility for our own souls. We will stand before God alone:

All...will come before Him on the Day of Resurrection as individuals.
(Quran: The Final Testament 19:95)

Each has the responsibility for our own decisions and guidance. God gives us what we need to make our choices:

You shall not accept any information, unless you verify it for yourself. I have given you the hearing, the eyesight, and the brain, and you are responsible for using them.
(Quran: The Final Testament 17:36)

Whether we marry or not, we independently make the decision of whether or not to be guided. Even marrying a messenger of God does not guarantee one's guidance or give any help against retribution:

God cites as examples of those who disbelieved the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot. They were married to two of our righteous servants, but they betrayed them and, consequently, they could not help them at all against God....
(Quran: The Final Testament 66:10)

On the other hand, Pharaoh's wife married one of the greatest tyrants of all time but became such a good believer that God uses her as an example of the believers:

And God cites as an example of those who believed the wife of Pharaoh. She said, "My Lord, build a home for me at You in Paradise, and save me from Pharaoh and his works; save me from the transgressing people."
(Quran: The Final Testament 66:11)

Right after citing Pharaoh's wife as an example of the believers God cites Mary as a second example:

Also Mary, the Amramite. She maintained her chastity, then we blew into her from our spirit. She believed in the words of her Lord and His scriptures; she was obedient. (Quran: The Final Testament 66:12)

The Quran tells of Mary's obedience and submission to God, even as a child:

Her Lord accepted her a gracious acceptance, and brought her up a gracious upbringing, under the guardianship of Zachariah. Whenever Zachariah entered her sanctuary he found provisions with her. He would ask, "Mary, where did you get this from?" She would say, "It is from God. God provides for whomever He chooses, without limits."

(Quran: The Final Testament 3:37)

Thus even as a child, Mary provided a good example of a believer. In the verse that follows, 3:38, she so inspired her guardian Zachariah that he prayed for a child who would equal her in goodness. As she grew into womanhood her goodness did not diminish:

The angels said, "O Mary, God has chosen you and purified you. He has chosen you from all the women".

(Quran: The Final Testament 3:42)

God chose Mary from all the women and also uses her, a single woman, as an example of a believer. From this example He clearly does not require us to marry to be acceptable to Him.

The Quran gives quite a bit more information about Mary. In fact, it gives much more information about Mary than it does about most of the messengers and prophets. And the Quran includes a whole sura or chapter named for her, Chapter 19. Please see Chapter 25 of this book for the rest of Mary's story, including the virgin birth as we find it in the Quran.

In the New Testament Paul indicates staying single makes women more pious:

...And the unmarried woman and the virgin are anxious about the affairs of the Lord, so that they may be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please her husband.

(1 Corinthians 7:34 —New Revised Standard Version Bible)

Thus, God does not require women to marry, however, the Quran encourages it. Ultimately, we need to submit to whatever His will is for us (24:32-33). Staying single and submitting to God remains perfectly compatible.

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Many reasons exist for people to decide to remain single. I have many single Muslim friends some of whom would like to get married, and some of whom like being

single and would not consider getting married. I, as sister Iman, share my experience with other single sisters.

Single Women I've Known

Praise God, before I became Muslim I knew a number of women who chose to remain single and concentrate on their careers.

As a child of around 10 two single ladies greatly enriched my life. The first was Miss Alexander as my mother taught my younger sister Sally and me to call her. Miss Alexander was a lovely woman, both physically and in her manner toward others, especially children. I don't remember now what her career was, but I'm fairly sure that her position was a rather important one. When I saw her she always dressed in very beautiful, expensive business suits and high heels.

One year in December Miss Alexander took Sally and me to see a professionally produced performance of the Nutcracker ballet. I'm not certain, but I believe that it probably was the first time I had been to a live performance in a big theatre. Both Sally and I were a bit shy and so we were very well behaved in such circumstances. I think that I can remember sitting in my seat amazed at the beauty of the theatre. And when the curtain went up I felt like I was in fairyland! I don't remember much more except that when Miss Alexander took us home she told our mother that we had been very good little girls.

The second single woman who enriched my life in that period of time was Miss Kaemlein. She was the curator of collections in our local university's museum. She organized a Saturday morning museum group for a few school friends and me. We got to handle some of the museum specimens while Mr. Sales, the director of the museum, told us about them. These sessions were exciting to us kids and I think we were all sorry when they came to an end. Later as an undergraduate, I got to know Miss Kaemlein much better. She became my boss when I volunteered at the museum and then when I was able to get a work-study position there to help pay for my classes. I will always remember her fondly for all her help and her interest in all of her student workers.

When God blessed me to first meet Loretta at our mosque, she was working as a school nurse. She was also a key person in the lives of all of her nieces and nephews. At one point before I met her she had been married, but since that marriage ended she seems perfectly content with the role of beloved aunt and friend to all of the children I have ever seen her interact with. Though she never had her own children, she has a special way with them that I admire greatly. She is also one of the most knowledgeable and spiritual people I know and I think that children sense some of her specialness and are attracted by it.

God gave me the gift of her friendship many years ago and in that time I have witnessed the wonderful modeling she provides for children and for us grownups too. At times I wonder if her remaining single has allowed her to focus more on her spiritual growth than many of us married sisters have time for. However, I also know that God gives each soul the perfect situation for it to grow if that is what the person chooses.

—*Iman, U.S.A.*

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Sometimes sisters end up not marrying because they find their lives complete as single women. Lydia provides such an example.

The Single Life

Growing up I always assumed I would marry and raise a family. I would go to college, not as a career path, just as a time-filler between high school and marriage.

My college romances were fairly brief. I thought one had real potential, but it ended when I wanted more definition to our relationship and his response was, “Long talks mean trouble.”

Post-college brought me to Tucson, Arizona, where meeting guys was a problem for me. I didn’t drink, so I didn’t want to hang out at bars or loud parties. I had fun with guys at work, but more as friends than potential mates. And some blind dates were absolute disasters. I don’t think I’m alone in these experiences!

At some point in my early thirties, I realized that I liked my life. I liked my freedom. I wanted to travel, and I was comfortable and happy to travel alone—no one else got to make any of the decisions of where to go, where to stay, what to see. My dogs were happy to go wherever I wanted to go. They never complained or whined (well, sometimes they whined, but it was mostly because it was past feeding time).

I still thought I might meet someone and get married, but I came to realize that I was very content. I was never lonely. I had lots of friends. There was always so much to see and do. And once I found Islam (Submission in English) and really knew how God was guiding my life, I could relax and enjoy each day as it came. He put purpose in my life, to worship Him, to do righteous works, to be appreciative of all His blessings in my life.

Now, believe me I know that I am very blessed. I had the financial resources to take care of myself and pursue things that made me happy. I sometimes wonder how it would have been had I married and had children. But I’m grateful to God that He set me on this path. And I try to take opportunities to give back to the community in appreciation for all God has blessed me with.

The single life is not for everyone. But neither is the married life for everyone. We just need to be content on whatever path God chooses for us. [74:6] *Be content with your lot.*

[47:5] He will guide them, and bless them with contentment.

—Lydia, U.S.A.

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I have been married to Rafe for over twenty years as I write this sentence, but I spent many years as a single Muslim woman. Though I had not wanted the divorce from my first husband, I found many ways that I needed to grow while in that single period of my life. Much of the growth could not have taken place in a marriage because then I really did not know myself very well. I often found it easier to just go along with whatever those dear to me wanted rather than figure out what *I* wanted, which earlier led to many problems with my first husband.

Those years living by myself forced me to come to grips with some of the most essential parts of my personality. They helped me learn what I really want out of life and to recognize several aspects of myself, like my tendency toward people-pleasing and my lack of confidence. Without that period, any marriage I entered into would have just repeated the old unhealthy patterns. So though it proved a lonely and difficult time, I would not trade it now. God knew I needed the growth.

As long as I struggled with being single I remained single. Once I came to know myself and felt comfortable as a single woman, I could handle a healthy marriage. Then God provided me with the blessing of one.