

a
single
life
to
live

STOP WAITING FOR
YOUR LIFE TO BEGIN
+
THRIVE
WHERE GOD
HAS YOU TODAY

HANNAH SCHERMERHORN

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AND THRIVE WHERE GOD HAS YOU TODAY

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BakerBooks

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Hannah Schermerhorn, *A Single Life to Live*
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Published by Baker Books
a division of Baker Publishing Group
PO Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.bakerbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Schermerhorn, Hannah, 1992– author.

Title: A single life to live : stop waiting for your life to begin and thrive where God has you today / Hannah Schermerhorn.

Description: Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, [2023] | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2022023116 | ISBN 9781540902733 (paperback) | ISBN 9781540903075 (casebound) | ISBN 9781493439621 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Single people—Religious life. | Christian life.

Classification: LCC BV4596.S5 S34 2023 | DDC 204/.408652—dc23/
eng/20220706

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022023116>

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23 24 25 26 27 28 29 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To Penny, Jack, Otto, and Tessa Schermerhorn.
And to Kazu and Ruah Treuden.
May you always know
how much God truly loves you.



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introduction

B-TEAM

Being single can feel a lot like being picked for the B-Team. The A-Team (aka your married friends) are celebrated people. Beautiful parties are thrown with presents and fancy dresses when they get engaged and married. Everyone loves their cute couple photos that are plastered all over social media. They are leaders at work and in church. They are admired by their community, and children hope to grow up to be just like them.

But what is left for the B-Team? All we get are pitied looks from friends and family when we go by ourselves to the weddings and celebrations for the A-Team. At work we are easily chosen for the extra projects and late nights because we do not have a family to go home to. At church we are given all the tasks and service projects other people do not want because we are “blessed with so much free time in our singleness.”

At some point, everyone in our lives decides that they need to help us get promoted from the B-Team to the A-Team. Conversations then turn from things we care and dream about to the only

acceptable topic of conversation—“Who are you dating?” and “I know this great person I think you should date.”

Being on the B-Team can be exhausting. But what shatters my heart even more is that I never wanted to be on the B-Team in the first place.

I thought I was going to grow up, get married, and live happily ever after. I even thought I had made it onto the A-Team. I had the beautiful engagement ring, the specially chosen wedding dress, and a man I was thrilled to be marrying.

Unfortunately, just a few months before my wedding was supposed to take place, Satan stepped in and caused enough destruction to end my engagement. My wedding was canceled. My relationship was over. The chalkboard with all my plans and dreams for the future was erased, and I was full of anxiety, depression, and overwhelming disappointment that I was once again stuck on the B-Team.

I have been single for six years since that horrible day and have found myself in some pretty dark places. At my best, I tried everything to end my singleness—from going on set-ups to praying to always looking my best when I went out in case I happened to run into the right guy. At my worst, I have lain on the floor with tears streaming down my face, begging God to just let me go to heaven because I was so sick of living a life I never wanted.

I have struggled with so many parts of singleness:

- Feeling like I have done something wrong to still be single
- Wishing I could just be happy like everyone else
- Asking, “If God loves me, why is He letting this be the reality of my life?”
- Wondering if I will ever get married and have kids like I have always longed for
- Feeling tired of being the third wheel

- Growing sick of spending free time alone
- Wishing I had a significant other to share news with, help with my problems, and truly understand me
- Harboring jealousy for friends' relationships
- Waiting for life to begin at marriage
- Feeling angry and untrusting toward God for allowing me to suffer alone for so long

The bullets could go on and on.

Have you felt any of those emotions? Have you asked yourself any of those questions? If so, can I tell you something that I have been learning?

In all my struggles, in all my pain, God has been guiding me to a realization that could change my entire life.

Right here and now in my singleness, God is offering me a life of true fulfillment and love that could completely overwhelm me and gently wrap me up. It is a life full of purpose in discovering how I am uniquely designed. It is a life where I can wake up in the morning and be exhilarated with what the day will bring. And it is up to me to either ignore it and chase after my own ideas of happiness (which clearly is not working) or embrace what God is offering.

You know what the best part of that life is? God is not just offering it to me. He is offering the same beautiful life to you, my friend. You and I have the choice to embrace it every single day.

I understand if you are skeptical. I have been sitting on the B-Team for a long time, and I know that finding joy in singleness can feel like trying to find a missing contact lens or the Loch Ness Monster. But I have started to take steps on this path, and I am already amazed with what I've found.

Are you ready to join me? I promise that if you go on this journey with me to find that beautiful life, you will not be disappointed. But I must warn you right now, if you say yes to going

down that path, God is most likely going to greatly exceed your expectations like He has already done for me.

If you are ready, in these pages we will explore stories of the many bachelors and bachelorettes in the Bible and see how aspects of their lives apply to modern singleness. I am going to share my story of singleness and why I struggled for so long. We are going to wrestle with our own lives, hopes, and disappointments in order to arrive in the beautiful destination that God has made for us to enjoy.

To make the most out of these pages, here are two recommendations:

1. *Grab a journal.* Many of the chapters have little quizzes and activities to work through. If you are like me and do not like writing in books (except to highlight favorite quotes), a journal will be a great place for you to work through these exercises, along with any other thoughts you have as you read this book. Also, at the end of each chapter there are questions to help you apply the content. You can record your thoughts, observations, and answers, then pray about them or discuss them at brunch with other friends who are reading this book.

2. *Consider counseling.* We are going to unpack some big and heavy topics. I promise there will also be light and fun parts, but I am going to ask you to challenge yourself and think about some uncomfortable things. You do not need to do that alone. Counseling is a wonderful way to work through these subjects so you can continue to grow and thrive. In fact, the reason I can share most of the information in this book is because a counselor helped me through it all first.

That's it! Are you ready to see what God has in store for you? Let's dive into these pages to discover the truth: Happily ever after does not begin with marriage. It begins right now.

1

identity

MY FRIEND, I do not know your story. I do not know if you have been single for many years like me or if you have recently gone through a heartbreak. I wish I could grab coffee with you and understand all the pain and disappointment you have gone through in your singleness. I would love to hear about your scars and let you know how much I admire you for who you are right now and how you continue to show up in a life you had not planned.

Your pain does not scare me, and the questions you are afraid to admit to anyone live in my head as well. Questions like, “What is wrong with me that I am single?” “Does God not care about me?” “Have I done something wrong to be single?” “Will I be single for the rest of my life?”

These questions—along with so many more—rumble through my mind much more frequently than I would like to admit. Sometimes I do not see them for many weeks. Other times they are waiting for me when I wake up, follow me throughout the day, and haunt me at night when I cannot sleep.

These unwelcomed questions run through my head quite often, but there is one overarching question that always pops into my mind: “How did my life turn out this way?” Being single was never the plan.

When you were a kid, did you dream of what your “happily ever after” adult life would look like? Maybe you imagined how you would meet your significant other while traveling abroad. You would be lost and bump into this local who would help you and then give you a majestic tour of the city. As you connected deeply, you would find out they were a Christian millionaire who volunteers to help orphans. You would fall in love, get married, and have a social media perfect life together. Or maybe you had a more realistic, vague idea of being happily married by now, perhaps with a few kids running around.

How do you feel as you look at your life compared with that dream? Like mine, does your heart fill with sadness as you realize that your actual life could not be more opposite to the one your younger self imagined?

Sometimes I ask myself what the younger version of me would think if she met me now. No husband, no kids, not even an eligible prospect to date in sight. I am single, and the only running around in my house is my cat chasing an avocado toy filled with catnip. I never expected my life to turn out this way.

So how did you and I get to this “single” point in our lives? Especially when we had hoped and planned for a very different life. And why do we have to live this way, especially if we do not want to? Over the past six years God has been showing me the answers to all those questions. He has been opening my eyes to the wonderful possibilities of this single life, and I am hoping that you will be able to experience the joy of singleness with me. But the journey to get to this place has not always been smooth. It has been full of crushed hopes, exposed fears, and plenty of questions for God. So let’s start at the very beginning.

BECOMING SINGLE

This is not an easy story for me to share. People I have known for years have not heard it. Sometimes if I am sipping wine, I can get through it without crying, but normally the tears come out as I share this. But I trust you, and sharing my story is the first step to walking toward our beautiful destination together. A destination where we can be more than just content in our singleness. We can be truly thrilled with our lives.

So here I go (gulp).

My story began in college. In my freshman year, I met a guy who seemed to check most of the boxes on the ridiculous list of what I wanted in a boyfriend. Thankfully I no longer have that list and cannot embarrass myself by sharing dating expectations of freshman Hannah (having a British accent may or may not have been one of them). I do know that some of the more *realistic* items on the list included being smart, kind, cute, and deeply passionate about his faith.

I had a crush on this guy for months. Of course, he liked someone else, so I went to every event I knew he would be at, tried to have normal, nonawkward conversations with him, and begged God to make him like me. Eventually it worked (but please do not take my life as a dating formula).

When we started dating, I was thrilled. I had never fallen in love before, and it was an emotional roller coaster that I loved being on. Holding hands, taking late-night walks with deep conversations, making dinner together, having someone who cared about the mundane details of my life, having someone to hug when I was (always) stressed out, and having someone who loved me filled me with happiness. It was not all sunshine and rainbows though. There were also plenty of tears and fights as we figured out how to make our independent lives work together.

But eventually, after three years of working to align on every belief and detail of our hopes for the future, we decided we were

ready to take the next step into marriage. One beautiful, sunny vacation day on a Florida beach, I got the custom-designed engagement ring and was ecstatic about the next chapter of my life. I could not believe that things was turning out just like I had always hoped. We planned when we would get married, where we would work, where we would live, and how many kids we would have. We booked our venue, told our friends and family the wedding date, met the photographer, chose the color palette, and ordered the dresses.

But then we got a package in the mail. It contained two little booklets from our photographer. There was a “his” booklet and a “hers” booklet of “How well do I know my fiancé/fiancée?”

I thought I would get every question right. I thought we had talked through every detail of each other’s lives, but I was wrong. Most of the pages were filled with lighthearted questions like, “What is their favorite color?” or “What is their favorite movie?” But on one of the pages in my booklet, there was a particularly serious question. It asked, “Has he gotten over an addiction?”

I felt pride as I answered the question. You see, when we had first started dating, my fiancé and I had put in some relationship work after he, heartbroken, admitted to me his struggle with addiction. He hated it, my heart felt for him, and we worked through books, went to counseling, did some soul searching,—everything we could find to get him through it. By our third year of dating, I thought the addiction had been gone for a long time. But the problem with addiction, I learned, is that it can come back with a vengeance.

So when I told him the answer to “Has he gotten over an addiction?” was yes with a big smile on my face, he admitted that the answer was actually no. The addiction had come back, and he had been struggling deeply for the past few months without my knowledge.

I have never experienced anything close to the depth of the sinking feeling I had in that moment. I dealt with his addiction in dating, and I knew it would break me in marriage. From the

truth of a small booklet, my life suddenly shifted as I realized the future would not match the beautiful picture I had imagined. My dreams shattered as my confidence in our relationship was broken. I felt betrayed. I felt so naive. I even struggled with blaming myself for causing his relapse. I was furious and heartbroken and wrestled with what to do. Why was this happening to us? I lost it. I sobbed and went home without saying a word to him.

I want to pause here and say something very important. If you are dealing with an addiction or have dealt with one in the past, you are not unlovable, and you are not unworthy. A counselor would be much better help than I, but if you stick with me through the full story of this book, I will also share the parts of my story that tell you how truly valuable you are. I pray that this small piece of my story does not make you judge yourself in a negative way, because that is not in any way my intent.

After he admitted his relapse to me, we tried to make our relationship work for a couple of months. There were so many conversations where I tried to give back my ring and he would not take it, promising not to let his addiction hurt me again. But Satan kept on pushing at him, and it would be only a few days or weeks until we had to have the same tear-filled conversation again.

The hardest part was that I did not know what to do. Should I keep fighting with and for someone I loved, or should I give up on him, and then what would happen to him? I knew he was a good person, just someone who had a sin that overtook him, like all human beings experience.

The struggle to figure out what to do allowed my anxiety to take control of me, which spiraled me toward depression, panic attacks, and a complete numbness to life. My fiancé and I tried more counseling. We tried taking breaks. But nothing was solving our problem. Meanwhile, apparently we looked totally fine as a couple to bystanders. People would tell me how excited they were for my wedding, and I would try to respond without crying. It made the entire situation hurt even more.

Eventually God made the choice of what to do very clear for me. One day, “after a break,” my fiancé and I were eating lunch and talking. My memory of that conversation is that it was my fault that our situation had turned out the way it had. Other girls would be accepting of his addiction, and it was my fault that I was not. Once that was established, I grabbed my stuff and walked out of his room, knowing that our relationship was over for good.

After I walked out, adrenaline was pumping through me, so I naturally decided to go to class. I acted normal, laughed at jokes, and answered questions as if my world had not just changed. It was not until I was home alone at night that it all hit me. I thought I had done everything right to find my significant other. I thought I had found my person and would never have to search again, but to my horror, I realized this was not true. Every single piece of me loathed the fact that I was once again single. It felt like a prison sentence.

THE STAGES OF SINGLENESS

In the time since that first dreaded day of singleness, I have struggled with so many aspects of being single. The first difficulty was the post-breakup phase. Obviously having an unused wedding dress in my closet continuously reminded me of how my plans and hopes had been crushed. Then there were the smaller things I did not expect. The first time I had exciting news after the breakup, I eagerly pulled out my phone to tell my ex only to realize that he was no longer the person I could talk to about things. It was just me now. I desperately missed companionship and simple things like having someone to converse with each day.

I had no desire to date again, but my sadness was combined with jealousy as my friends’ own love stories began and blossomed into marriage. I hoped my fake “congratulations!” smile would conceal my overwhelming jealousy. At the umpteenth wedding RSVP of marking “no guest,” I wondered, *What did all*

these other people do to get the life I have always wanted? Am I being punished for something?

Next came the “it’s time to start dating again” phase. Society decided that my relationship mourning phase was over, and I needed to get back into the dating game. Kind humans in my life grew excited as they schemed setting me up with any eligible bachelor they could think of (even if it was my “great-aunt’s ferret-sitter’s dentist”).

It took me almost a year after my breakup to feel comfortable trying to date again. Of course, going on dates was easy. All I had to do was put on a fake smile and pretend that I had my life together to impress someone I was meeting for the first time in order to see if we would spend the rest of our lives together. Walk in the park, right? I hated it.

I would agree to go on dates and then stupidly get my hopes up as I heard how amazing my great-aunt’s ferret-sitter’s dentist was. It normally took only a few dates (if not a few minutes of a date) to realize that I should not have let myself be excited about the person—“No, I’m not getting tattoos over every inch of my body.” “No, I don’t want to learn how to do taxidermy.” “No, I’m not going to quit my job to raise baby tarantulas with you.” (OK, none of those were the real reasons, but you get the point.) I despaired that all the good people were already taken and I had somehow missed out on ever finding my person.

Then there came the “I’m done with this” phase. When three years of singleness went by with no lasting relationships, I grew completely worn-out by the “gift” of singleness I had been given. I felt like my life did not matter. Everyone else seemed to be in relationships—friends, family, people on TV, and that couple obnoxiously making out at the park. Had I missed the sign-up sheet for the “relationship” life milestone that everyone else had filled out?

I wondered, *Why did God give me hopes and dreams of marriage only to not fulfill them? I thought God loved me, so why is He letting*

me be alone, growing hopeless and broken? I begged and pleaded with God to stop my singleness, and He kept answering no. I did not understand that no. I absolutely hated that no, and I grew increasingly frustrated, angry, and heartbroken.

Do you relate to my struggle at all? Maybe you have never dated, maybe you just went through a breakup, or maybe you are widowed or divorced. No matter how you got to this place, being single can be completely exhausting, especially when you never wanted to be here in the first place.

Have you asked God to change your relationship status and gotten a no? Maybe you bitterly laugh at the thought of asking God because you know it will not change anything. You are not alone. We have suffered through this dilemma together.

And you know what? We are not alone in our struggle. There is also another very important person to whom God gave that smack-in-the-face answer, and His story gives me hope when God continuously tells me no. It might surprise you to learn who that person is. He is our very first bachelor. The one. The only. Jesus Christ.

The Bachelor: **JESUS CHRIST**

OCCUPATION: Carpenter/Savior

HOMETOWN: Nazareth

TATTOOS: Nope

PIERCINGS: Hands, feet, and side

TALENTS: Turning water into wine, raising people from the dead, *actually* being perfect

God told Jesus no.

That doesn't exactly match the heading of the story that was explained to me in Sunday school. The coloring sheet had a much

less edgy title: “The Garden of Gethsemane.” But that is the fateful place where Jesus (just like me, over and over) received His no from God.

Jesus went to the garden of Gethsemane with His disciples the night before He was crucified. As Jesus was walking through the garden with Peter, James, and John, He became deeply distressed, telling His disciples, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me” (Matt. 26:38).

Let’s pause the story right here.

Have you ever woken up in the morning and felt your heart sink as you realize what day it is? The day you take the test, give the presentation, get the results from the doctor, or have that difficult conversation you have been avoiding.

Every single morning of college finals felt that way for me. The days spent studying and preparing did not matter at all. When that alarm clock went off, I felt that getting out of bed to face the day was the equivalent of lining up to have an old-fashioned pistol duel. Anxiety flowed through me as each second brought me closer to the impending doom of finals.

Now imagine waking up in the morning, knowing your day would bring betrayal by one of your closest friends, abandonment from the rest, public mocking, gruesome torture, rejection by the people you love, punishment for all the sins of the world, and then death in one of the most excruciating ways possible. Jesus knew all that unfathomable misery would come to pass—the rejection, the pain, the loneliness, and the suffering. All those tragedies are the “sorrow to the point of death” He was describing.

As Jesus was thinking about what the near future would bring, He continued to walk in the garden alone. After He went a stone’s throw away from Peter, James, and John, He fell in sorrow with His face to the ground. He said, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:42).

When Jesus said “cup,” He was referring to all the terrible things that were going to happen to Him over the next day. Jesus was

saying, “God, if there is another way, let it happen that way, but if not, I will face My future.”

Jesus prayed this three times, and Luke writes, “Being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground” (v. 44).

I have prayed for God to end my singleness, but I have never experienced “sweat like drops of blood” while praying. Crying and anger? You bet. But never have I come close to the intensity that Jesus had in His prayer in the garden of Gethsemane.

He prayed one of the most passionate and heartfelt prayers to God. But as we know (spoiler alert), there was not another way for Him to pay for the sins of the world. God said no to removing the loneliness, the sorrow, and the agony that was coming for His Son.

Does this make you relate to Jesus a little more? Jesus knew how a no felt, but He was facing a fate far worse than singleness (even though I know that can be pretty bad). The no Jesus received meant betrayal (yes, that is applicable to dating), rejection (yes, that is also applicable to dating), physical and emotional torture (yes, that can also be applicable to dating), the wrath of God (Jesus wins the pity party here), and death (if you are alive and reading this, then Jesus wins here too).

But the no Jesus received, and the path He took over the next twenty-four hours, meant He would face the worst possible circumstances willingly, because He knew that you would be born two thousand years later. Yes, you. And Jesus knew this path was worth it because He wanted to save you. The no was part of a much bigger and beautiful plan for *you*.

Jesus knows exactly what your loneliness, your sorrow, your heartbreak, and your rejection feel like. Spend a few minutes thinking about everything that happened from the garden of Gethsemane to Jesus’s death. How Jesus went alone to be tortured, mocked, jeered at by crowds of people who hated Him, and killed with people watching in satisfaction at His death. And it did not

end there. Jesus is still being rejected by billions of people every single day who do not want to believe what He did for them. His heart is full of love for these people, and they reject Him.

Jesus knows what it is like to be in life circumstances that seem completely overwhelming and depressing. He has felt all our emotions at a depth so much greater than we will ever know. But He faced it all because He loves you, and that is the most important piece of information. It's the key that has started to change my experience with singleness and can change yours as well. The key is not only understanding that Jesus knows what you are going through but understanding your identity in Him.

IDENTITY QUIZ

If I asked you to tell me five things about yourself, what would you say? What makes you, you?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Unfortunately (or fortunately?), this book is not Tom Riddle's diary, so I cannot directly respond to you through these pages. However, I am going to walk alongside you as you learn to understand your identity. Not having a magical book just means that you will have to do more of the thinking rather than let the book think for you, which is probably better in the long-term anyway. (See diary outcome in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*.)

Now, will you share what is on your identity list? What differentiates you from the other seven billion people in this world? Is it what you study or what you do for work? Is it your hobbies, special talents, accomplishments, or unique experiences? Is it personality traits or habits that define you?

Those identity pieces can all be positive things in life—and I hope your identity consists of positive things—but I know that they can also be very negative things. Maybe you were bullied as you grew up or given a label like “uncool,” “unathletic,” “under-achieving,” “ugly,” or something else. Are those the words you have written on your list—are they informing the way you see yourself?

If you are honest, is “single” a key piece of your identity right now? Perhaps you did not write it down because you were afraid that someone would pick up this book and see what you wrote, but is how you see yourself at this present moment largely focused on your relationship status? You are self-conscious when you go places alone, you want to cringe when you see couples showing affection for each other, and so on.

When you look at your list and reflect on how you see yourself, does it answer the question, “Why do I matter?” Or does it answer, “Why don’t I matter?”

Now that you have thought about your list, I will share mine with you. Throughout my life, I have answered this question of “Who am I?” many different ways. When I was young, I thought, *I am a Schermerhorn*. That did not just mean I had a last name with far too many letters; it meant that I belonged to a family I was proud to be a part of, and I wanted to act in accordance with that feeling. As I grew older, my identity became defined as I compared myself with others. I would label myself with things like “the smart one” or “the hard worker,” and then I eventually added items like my grades, my friends, my athletic ability, my college, my degree, and my job to my list of identity markers.

We are such emotionally fragile human beings. We come into this world with an empty list, and we hunt and search for our

identities—our sense of value and purpose on earth. We feel lost not knowing who we are and why we matter. When we find something we are good at—something that makes us stand out from those around us—we drench ourselves in it, making it our identity, simply because we are better at it than our peers. Yet after a lifetime of searching and trying to give ourselves value using our families, our careers, and our hobbies, we still end up feeling empty.

The problem with that approach is that your list can be completely wiped clean in a matter of seconds, and then what are you left with? Who are you, why do you matter, and how are you supposed to live your life? When I was in college, I allowed my list to become the core of who I was. I derived my meaning from my list, and my list defined why I thought I was important. My culmination of life experiences led me to base my identity in these things:

1. My abilities
2. My family
3. My relationship
4. My intelligence

I was a thriving (well, more like a struggling) engineering student. I prided myself in the fact that I was a hard worker, and even if I was surrounded by people smarter than me (which was always true), I could work extremely hard to get on the same level as them. I had a fantastic family that supported me. I was also engaged to be married and happily planning a wedding. I felt like the world was mine. My dreams were coming true, and I was very excited as I would soon add “wife” to my list of labels, as well as my future job title after graduation.

Then a series of bad events happened in a very short period of time. First, I was diagnosed with a rare combination of eye

diseases that made me lose my vision in one eye. Up until that point, I felt somewhat invincible. I assumed my own abilities could get me through anything that I faced. But then I was forced to realize that some things were out of my control. In fact, if I was honest with myself, very few things were in my control—I could not even make my eye work correctly. I could not control my own body, so what could I really control in my life? The first strike came in my identity list.

1. My abilities

Then, after battling many different health issues, my grandfather passed away. Months later, my mother had a cancer scare. These things made me realize that the family I prided myself in could be taken away from me in an instant. A second item got taken off the list.

2. My family

During this same time, as you now know, my relationship went to smithereens as I called off a wedding and was thrown into singleness. I was heartbroken and alone. My third item was gone.

3. My relationship

When all this was happening, I became extremely anxious and depressed. I would have panic attacks throughout the day and nightmares that would cause me to wake up and puke. It was war for me to get through each day, let alone each hour or minute sometimes. With these sorrows weighing me down, the grades and school achievements I used to care so much about began to slip away from me.

4. My intelligence

Within weeks, each item on my list was made irrelevant, leaving me completely broken. There I was, realizing I had no control over my health, my family's lives, my relationships, or even my own talents. The foundations of everything that once defined me became unstable. I had no idea who I was or what I should do with my life now that I realized all the core pieces of my identity were able to change in an instant.

This was the hardest time in my life. I was a Christian and knew God loved me and was there for me, but honestly, that just led me to many prayers, with me begging Him to take me to heaven because I could not see any purpose left for me on earth. I did not feel like there was any meaning left in who I was or what my identity was. I felt better descriptors of my identity would be “broken,” “failure,” and “alone.”

Take a look at your list again and start going through each line. What if you lost those pieces of your identity? What if you lost one of your talents or one of the other things that defines you? What if you lost them all? Maybe you already feel broken because there is something on your list that you wish were different. Is singleness so overpowering in your mind that it is ruling who you are and how you see yourself? Is it making you think you are not as important as other people?

Putting our identity in things that are beyond our control sets us up for failure, and I am a prime example of how terribly it plays out. Enjoying the blessings God has given us—our talents, people, experiences, and possessions—is wonderful. But if we see ourselves as a reflection of those flimsy things, our identity can easily disappear, then it is only a matter of time before we will have an identity crisis, because without them, who are we?

I found out how catastrophic it was to put my identity in the talents God had given me, the people He created, and the experiences He had given me. I was wrong to base my identity in the positive things, and I was wrong to base my identity in the negative things.

What I have learned is this: I felt my life was broken when my identity list was irrelevant. I tried to fill my list of who I was with so many reasons why I mattered. When those were gone, it seemed like they were only replaced by negative things. In reality, there is only one thing that should be written on my identity list.

LOVED BY GOD

I am not my successes. I am not my failures. I am not the positive things that people think of me, and I am not the negative things that people think about me. I am not a failed relationship, a crushed dream, or a broken heart. I am loved by God, and His love does not depend on my successes or failures. It is completely independent of my circumstances and can never be taken from me.

I am nothing more or nothing less than loved by God—the One who made the universe and loved me so much that He died for me because He thought to Himself, *You know what would make eternity so much better? Being able to spend it with Hannah.*

I am “loved by God.”

A God who knows me better than anyone else, even myself. He knows everything that has ever happened to me and every thought that has ever crossed my mind. He understands exactly what I am going through. He has lived on earth; been betrayed and abandoned by His closest friends; faced loneliness, sorrow, and pain; and is still rejected by billions of people He cares about every single day. He knows what I am going through, He loves me through it all, and He is with me in every single breath of life.

An eternity of perfect love is ahead of me. What else could I need? What else could I want?

John, one of the biblical authors who wrote the book of—can you guess it?—John, had the chance to write a description of himself in Scripture. He had a blank slate to write what he would be known for. He could have written “John, the best-looking disciple” or “John, the most successful disciple” or “John, the disciple with the best dance moves,” but what did he write about his identity? John 13:23 says, “the disciple whom Jesus loved.”

I used to laugh at this sentence, thinking it sounded like bragging: “Oh, I’m the disciple Jesus loves. Not Peter, not James, but I, John, am the one He loves.” I was very wrong with that interpretation.

John had the chance to say anything he wanted about himself—to tell future generations who he was—and he shared his entire identity in one sentence: “the disciple whom Jesus loved.”

What a powerful statement!

I know that being single is hard. People are constantly putting you into the single category. Even when you fill out taxes, you have to tell the government you are single. Do not be consumed by the identity that the world has assigned to you. You are not your relationship status. You are loved by Jesus, the One who has agape love for you that does not change based on what you do. He is the One who loved you before you were born. The One who takes every step with you. The One whose heart breaks with yours and who knows every thought and feeling that you experience.

The One who wants you forever.

You are loved by God, and nothing can ever change that.

Go back to your identity list. How do you feel about surrendering your list to God? Pray about it. It is not easy to give up control of your identity list, but it is the first wonderful step you can take on our journey together. Can you give your relationship status, your hopes, your dreams, your successes and failures to God and then see yourself for who you really are?

“Loved by God.”



DIVING DEEPER



1. As a child, what hopes and dreams did you have for your future?
2. What is your “story of singleness”?
3. What are the most difficult emotions you feel as a single person? Can you think of examples when Jesus had these same emotions?

4. Why is it hard to let go of the things that form your identity?
5. What would your life look like if being loved by God was your only identifier?
6. If your full identity rests in God, how does your relationship status affect you?
7. What other ways does God describe you? Look at John 1:12, John 15:15, and Ephesians 2:10 for some hints.
8. If you were to receive a letter from God telling you how He feels about you, what would it say? Try writing it down: "Dear [insert name]." Do not think too hard about it. Just start by writing what you would tell yourself if you were God and see what happens.