HOW TO AVOID THE 10 MISTAKES SINGLE WOMEN MAKE

Michelle McKinney Hammond
This is to all my sisters who struggle on the first day of spring, through many a lonely night while whispering prayers in the dark, and with every tick of the clock that grows louder on the mantel of your heart. Have hope your prince will come.

In the meantime occupy well, look your best, and know that you are not alone.
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Hmm…let’s see…

David Letterman had them. USA Today. MTV. Billboard. The New York Times. Anybody who is anybody has a top ten list for this or that. Most of these lists are cute, funny, and quite entertaining. But, though they clue us in on the state of mind of the general masses, they really have nothing to do with our personal lives. Perhaps it’s time we make a few lists of our own. It’s called taking stock. Locating ourselves. Where we are at present in comparison to where we really want to be. In order to move forward and reach our personal goals, we must acknowledge the stuff, the issues, the habits, and the mind-sets that keep us stuck and hinder our progress.

It’s safe to say that most singles want to be married, and yet they are at a loss to figure out what may be stalling their advancement toward the altar. As I have traveled around the country, speaking and corresponding with singles from around the world, certain patterns have emerged and common threads of conversation and behavior have made me pause for the cause and devise a top ten list of my own. Ten mistakes singles make in their pursuit of love, romance, and personal fulfillment.
I hope you will be brave enough to be honest with yourself, examine your baggage, and get rid of what is not working for you. That is, if you are serious about changing your circumstances. Of course, it all begins with renewing the mind, so let’s walk through this together. Know this: You are not alone, and there is never any shame in making a mistake. It’s only a shame if you don’t learn from your faux pas. So here’s to living, learning, and rounding the bend to a place in the journey of life where you enjoy the scenery much more and finally arrive at your desired destination. Just remember that you are the driver behind the wheel and this is your car. You get to decide where you want to go, so check the map and adjust your route accordingly.

As always with love,

Michelle
Placing marriage on a pedestal next to God
Once upon a time a young man longed to be free from the things that bound him. Feelings of inferiority, isolation, and helplessness overwhelmed him. But God had chosen him to be a conqueror, to defy the odds, to rise above mediocrity and literally free, not just himself from the oppression that hindered him from living the life he wanted to live, but also the lives of countless others around him.

But how would he do this? First, he had to get past what he had always believed about himself. His description of himself did not match God’s description. God called him a mighty man of valor. He saw himself as insignificant, the least among men, someone not to be taken note of. He was amazed to find he did not realize his own power or the power of the God he served to grant him his heart’s desire. Neither had he considered the fact that God was with him and actually interested in his state of affairs. That God wanted him to live a victorious life.

These were truths he had to embrace in order to be empowered to take the next step toward living the bold and victorious life he was longing to live. He had to cast down his own perceptions about himself and embrace the true reality of who he was in the eyes of the One who had created him and knew him best.
He had to acknowledge all of his weaknesses, strengths, and even those things he was just beginning to discover about himself.

It is only when we locate ourselves that we are able to get a vision of our destiny and what we can accomplish. When we come to the full realization of our inherent gifts and the things in our nature that are conducive to God’s design for our lives, we can see the road map and make sense of the directions God is giving us. Of course, there are seasons when we are called to walk by faith, taking one step at a time into what seems to be the dark. But in those times we are held safe in the center of God’s palm all the way. So remember, when you can’t see your way, it’s because you are being held. And when you can see the path before you, keep moving forward, being sensitive to His voice every step of the way. How often have you said to yourself, “Something told me…” and then ignored the instructions because you thought it was just you second-guessing yourself? That is not something; that is Someone whispering, “This is the way, walk in it…” (Isaiah 30:21). As we learn to trust that voice and follow His instructions, we find ourselves on the path of wholeness and living the life we desire with less drama and trauma than when we plot our course ourselves.

Know that getting your dream will always cost you something. We can only hold on to so much collectively in our lives. Often, something has to go in order to be replaced by something better. This is why the Bible tells us that we cannot serve two masters at the same time. We will love one and hate the other (Matthew 6:24; Luke 16:13). If you truly want to be married, there are things about the single life you will have to sacrifice. Life can no longer be as self-centered; it must become others-centered. The focus you once had on yourself must now be shifted to invest in the life or lives of someone else. When we are seeking to estab-
lish a covenant with God or someone in our life, we must be willing to sacrifice anything that would hinder the relationship from moving forward toward a rich commitment in which both people experience the blessing of pouring themselves into one another’s lives.

Back to our young man. After getting a clear understanding of who he really was, it was time to make a sacrifice. He had to build an altar to God, establishing a covenant with Him as well as affirming that it was He who gave him peace in the midst of his turmoil within and without.

After this he had to get rid of some idols. They were hindering his ability to see the endless possibilities for his life. They were distracting his focus from the main point that in spite of what he thought he lacked—strength, wisdom, support, and courage—he served a God who was Lord over all the impossibilities he could list. Idols were robbing him of the life he wanted to live. They had become larger than God in his mind, obstructing his view of a better tomorrow.

After tearing down the idols, he was able to receive instructions from God that directed him on how to make his dream come true. Gideon then led his people to freedom from their oppressors through highly unconventional means. Along the way his faith was tested as God challenged him to let go of everything he assumed would get him the victory he wanted. (Read Gideon’s story in Judges 6–8.)

Perhaps you too feel insignificant and isolated in your longing for victory in the arena of love. Feeling oppressed by the way that life has always been, you’ve grown accustomed to being disappointed. Friends reenforce what you already feel and offer no new hope. Weary from the struggle, you’ve decided that life is “just that way.” That some lucky ones escape from the single zoo
while you remain behind bars, peering through your longings for
a love to call your own.

Perhaps you too have accepted a different view of yourself
than what God has of you. While you are answering to the name
“Undesirable,” He is calling you “Beloved.” Could it be that
you need to make a sacrifice of your old ideals and reach out to
the One who loves you most and discover the peace He brings,
though nothing has changed yet? Perhaps you have a few idols of
your own to shatter and displace from the lofty mantel in your
heart—visions of how life should be and what it will take to
make you happy. Perhaps old habits and mind-sets have kept you
bound in patterns of behavior that invite defeat and disillusion-
ment. God is calling you to think outside the box. To embrace
a new way of thinking and living. To eliminate the things and
people that hold you back from getting the victory you want in
every area of your life, including love.

Change is never comfortable at first, but it is necessary if you
want to alter the outcome you’ve been getting. It’s time to use
new muscles. To stretch, to grow, to even dare to experiment.
How far will you go to get what you really want? How badly do
you want it? If you are truly serious about getting the love you
want, there is work to be done.
LET’S BEGIN WITH A PERSONAL ASSESSMENT

How do you see yourself?

How would you describe yourself to someone else?

What mind-sets have you adopted about why you don’t have the love you want?

What insights have others given you? Are they valid?

What are you willing to change in order to obtain different results?
Solution: Tear down the idols

Oops!

The word “oops” suggests something slipping out of one’s grasp or one’s control, or unexpectedly giving way and spilling, bruising, or breaking an object or a part of one’s anatomy. It’s an exclamation of surprise—part involuntary, part apologetic. It’s a word that is as natural as breathing. It’s uttered without a thought, an unconscious reaction to the occurrence. One does not deliberately allow something to fall, to shatter, or to be wasted. No, these incidences are usually followed by regret and an assessment if repairs can be made or if there is a need for a replacement.

That works for objects, not for life. Yet many singles find themselves somewhere along the journey of life voicing their dismay at their shattered expectations, broken heart, wounded self-esteem, and the fractured view of a life half lived as they wait for their “other half” to arrive and carry them to the land of wholeness, where all things are beautiful and perfect. Ha! This is the first mistake.

I am reminded of a conversation God had with Adam when he hid after eating the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam explained that he hid because he was naked, to which God replied, “Who told you that you were naked?”
Mistake Number One

(Genesis 3:11). Good question. Adam and Eve had been naked and unashamed, unaware that anything was missing from their lives until someone else introduced a different way of looking at their circumstances. All of a sudden the very thing they had been able to freely celebrate became an issue that clouded the beauty of their pleasurable experience in the garden as something that was shameful.

How many times does a perfectly pleasant family gathering get ruined by all too familiar words from some concerned, well-meaning family member or friend? “So why aren’t you married yet?” “Perhaps you are too picky.” All of a sudden you find yourself questioning your marketability as a “good catch.” You begin to wonder, What is wrong with me? You, like Adam and Eve, begin to feel naked. Ashamed, vulnerable, and insufficiently equipped for the journey of life because all of a sudden you are made to feel like part of a motley minority. Which by the way is not true. When you consider the rising number of singles between never married, divorced and widowed people, you’re not so weird after all!

Of course, if you don’t know this, the deeper you will drift into the depths of uncertainty about the worth of your heart, your love, and your presence not only in the life of someone who should appreciate it immensely, but your very existence on the planet! Something else kicks in. It’s the internal pressure that says you need someone in order for you to have any sense of validation or affirmation that you are indeed not naked. That you are loveable. Desirable. All that and a bag of chips. A worthy entity in the earth realm, you must have someone in your life to stamp you fully dressed. Perhaps if we are honest with ourselves, we would have to admit that at times the shame of being a lone ranger escalates our desire for a mate above the more qualitative
reasons for wanting one, such as wanting to be a blessing to someone, a life partner, a coconspirator...come on, you know what I’m talkin’ about! There are right reasons and wrong reasons for desiring marriage. This brings to light the fact that you must have a sense of your own personal value before you can expect someone else to recognize it. Talk about putting the cart before the horse if you are expecting someone to lend you self-worth! It simply won’t happen. Why not, you ask?

First, God will never allow another person to be your affirmation and completion. This is a job He has reserved for Himself. If someone was able to complete you, there would be no need for Him. This is something He will not stand for. Second, the person who could add all that you’re looking for to your life is also looking for someone who can add something to his life. Another person who has nothing to bring to the party but her need for validation will not be an attractive package. Therefore, your only choice would be someone who is as needy as yourself. Not a pretty picture, and certainly not the makings of a healthy relationship.

Now, let’s see what else could be making you feel less lovable and less desirable than the average bear. The media doesn’t help. Everyone is in love in the movies. Love always triumphs and people live happily ever after in Technicolor—or should I say high-definition glory? If seeing is believing, then we will buy into the lie that the norm in society is an oo-some twosome, and yet, generally speaking, most singles in the real world struggle to find real role models of marital bliss. Between peer pressure and media pressure, most people end up marrying for the wrong reasons to the wrong people and find themselves with greater problems than the average single on any given day. Could it be that buying the lie that marriage is the end all, be all and the
completion of all things worth mentioning has caused us to erect false idols that keep us in bondage to unfulfillment and unhappiness?

This being the case, how does one realign her thought life to a healthier and more balanced way of viewing the infinite possibilities that life holds, no matter what her romantic status? If you are tussling with God over the idol of marriage, it’s bound to have a jolting end. Somewhere along the way the idol will slip through your fingers, come crashing to the ground, and shatter into a million unretrievable pieces. It’s called coming to the end of yourself. Where all your preconceived notions of the life you had envisioned for yourself must be put to rest before you can open your arms to embrace the life God has for you in the present, as well as anticipate amazing surprises that will bring indescribable joy to you in the future.

Go ahead and take a deep breath. Open your heart as well as your hands and repeat after me: “Life does not consist of those who make me feel that I count. It consists of how much value I add to the life of others.” At the end of the day, the things that will make you feel the richest are the lives of those you affect for the good. Your worth through God’s eyes has already been determined. In His mind you are priceless. There is nothing on earth that can match your worth; therefore, the price for you had to be paid by heavenly means. Jesus literally had to leave heaven and enter the earth through the womb of a woman in order to pay a price that would be acceptable to God to redeem you. Now you have the awesome responsibility of redeeming your worth here on earth by glorifying God whether you are married or not.

*Your worth will never be measured by whom you attract, but rather by whom you affect and how you affect them.* Whether someone chooses you or not does not determine your worth. If
you go to the store and decide you don't want to pay for something because the price is too high, the salesclerk does not lower the price to what you think is acceptable. If the clerk is really good, she will point you in the direction of things that fit your budget and leave the more expensive fare for someone who is willing to pay the price! Your value can never be estimated based on how others feel about you.

The goal of life must change in order for the idol to be destroyed. No longer should your self-worth hang in the balance on the technicality of the interest of others. You were created on purpose to be a life-changing instrument to all you encounter. The atmosphere should change when you walk into the room. You should be a walking conduit of light and life—God’s light and the life that comes from walking in His Word, because that is truly what life consists of. “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4 NKJV).

Our lives are transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2); therefore, a new mind-set needs to be adopted in order to keep the voices of the idols from drowning out the truth of God’s Word for our lives. The promises of God are where our assurance, validation, and fulfillment must come from. His promises include His view of you as a valuable addition to the citizenry of the world—someone who is vital, alive, and full of purpose. This is the place where being single can work for you. It is only your attitude that will work against you, so choose to master it.

What should you know that will set you on the path of wholeness as a single person?

First, settle the issue that it is fine to desire a mate. This is a natural, God-given desire. Note that there is a difference between
you having a desire and your desire having you. God created you to be in control—not just in the spiritual realm, but also in the natural. This was the first assignment for the man and the woman when they were placed in the Garden of Eden. “Eden” means “pleasure,” yet God expected them to exercise control in order to maintain the pleasure He instituted. He handed the reins to us to be master of our flesh, our emotions, and our desires. To subdue anything that might try to overtake or overwhelm us. We, therefore, have been empowered to have dominion over our flesh and anything that might rob us of our focus or distract us away from living the life God intended us to live. One filled with pleasure and fulfillment.

Second, you should know there is no formula for happiness and fulfillment. Marriage, riches, fame—nothing can fill the spot that only God can fill. Don’t believe the hype or get distracted by counterfeit joy.

Third, there is a time and purpose for every season under heaven, and seasons do change. Make the most of your present; it will ultimately affect your future.

Fourth, your marriage will only be as successful as your single life. Nurture wholeness where you are. The more you bring to the party, the greater a celebration it will be when others join you. All this and more as we walk through this thing together.
GETTING REAL

CR. What are three things you can’t live without?

CR. Are you living without these things at present?

CR. How does their absence affect the quality of your life?

CR. What can you do to flourish in spite of what you presently lack?

Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit
the grace that could be theirs.

JONAH,
after some very uncomfortable days
spent in the belly of a fish.