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**Ten Things a Childless Woman Lives ‘Without’**

Around one in five women (18%) will go through life without having any birth children[[1]](#endnote-27297). For some this will be a choice - for many others this will be a great sadness and struggle. Some will be single, divorced or widowed. Others will be married with one partner being infertile, or perhaps - through disability or sexual dysfunction - unable to have children.

The sense of loss can be enormous. Women often speak of a deep grief. But, sometimes, those who haven’t experienced childlessness struggle to see what has been lost. It’s not immediately obvious what a woman in these circumstances has – or feels she has – to live without. Here are ten losses someone who is involuntarily childless is likely to feel:

**1. Living without children and having a family**

This is the obvious place to start. There are not the joys and sorrows of birthing and building a family of your own.

**2. Living without the life assumed and dreamt of**

To meet someone, marry, have kids and live happily ever after is a basic dream for many. At whatever stage that doesn’t happen, it is disappointing, perhaps devastating. Broken dreams, and unfulfilled basic assumptions for how life will go, can be extremely hard to handle.

**3. Living without an identity that feels integral to being a woman**

Being a parent, especially a mother, is often assumed to be a core part of human identity. In light of Genesis 1, it can feel like a God-given role and calling we are all expected to fulfil. When this is not part of who you are it can be a huge struggle to know who you are!

**4. Living without the life and friendship of peers**

When life takes a different course to what you would choose, it also tends to take a different course to that of your friends and peers. They are meeting, marrying and having children. While they may not be living happily ever after, it can be isolating when their lives are child-focused. You can feel excluded from the many conversations and activities everyone else seems to be eagerly engaging in. Being around them can feel awkward for them, as well as you.

**5. Living without the emotional energy to cope**

Either the continual sadness at not being able to have children, or the monthly cycles of hope and disappointment, can be emotionally draining. It can be a roller coaster which never stops and from which you cannot get off. At times this can lead to emotional exhaustion, and sometimes depression. This is an experience often expressed by the psalmists, such as in Psalm 73:26 where we read ‘my flesh and my heart may fail’.

**6. Living without a spouse who gets you**

In some marriages, the spouse can be incredibly supportive and wonderfully sensitive. In others, it can be the opposite, or somewhere in between! Feeling alone, with even the person closest to you not really getting you and what you are going through, is perhaps the hardest burden to bear. Childlessness can be a marriage breaker.

**7. Living without understanding God and his purposes**

God could give you a child if he chose. He could work a miracle – you, and many others, have asked repeatedly for that. All of the Bible characters experiencing childlessness, such as Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Hannah and Elizabeth, eventually have a baby. Yet you have not. Doubting and questioning the goodness, wisdom and power of God is very common.

**8. Living without the sensitive care of a church**

It’s not that our brothers and sisters in Christ are trying to be uncaring but few seem to get the pain and losses of childlessness. Fewer still seem able to speak sensitively and comfortingly into this struggle. While many childless couples long for biblical counsel and comfort, it rarely comes. When it does, it is not always helpfully or sensitively given.

**9. Living without the baby(ies) that miscarried**

Miscarriage is a tragedy and grief at any time. When it comes in the middle of a deep and long running struggle to have children, it can feel particularly cruel. When the life you so desperately long for is given and then quickly taken away, it is so hard to bear. When it reoccurs a number of times, the pain only increases. This is sadly common with couples struggling to conceive.

**10. Living without the financial resources to pursue medical treatment**

Couples will often feel they would do anything to have children. Medical treatment such as IVF tends to be very expensive: it is either beyond people’s financial means, or involves great sacrifice, and perhaps debt. Most have to limit the treatment they can pursue. Others will limit their medical options because of ethical considerations. To make those choices, or to realise you don’t have the financial resources to pursue your greatest dream, is so very hard.

Each of these, and others besides, are areas we need to consider as we care for someone struggling with childlessness. And doing so needs to be done with sensitivity and wisdom. Living with Christ is the ultimate hope we have when we are living without so much. When we are without natural families, for whatever reason, Jesus teaches that the church family can be very real brothers and sisters, mothers and children (Mark 10: 30). However, this does not happen automatically, and even at its best, this remains only an imperfect picture of a reality that awaits us in the world to come. Awareness of what people may feel they are living without as they struggle with involuntary childlessness is helpful as we seek to bring comfort and support.

1. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/conceptionandfertilityrates/bulletins/childbearingforwomenbornindifferentyearsenglandandwales/2020> [↑](#endnote-ref-27297)