

CHAPTER ONE



LONGING FOR LOVE

*S*o you want to get married. That is understandable, because God created you to want that. The desire for intimacy and companionship is part of being made in God's image. After creating Adam, the first man, God declared that Adam's solitary state was not good. He didn't merely say that Adam would be better off with a companion; he specifically stated that being alone is not a good state in which to live fruitfully. For many reasons, reasons we will delve into more deeply in the chapters to follow, we crave the intimate bond established between a man and woman in marriage.

First, marriage can alleviate loneliness, God's primary purpose for establishing it. However, there is a big difference between loneliness and being alone. Too often the distinction is blurred or merged. Discovering the distinction between the two goes a long way toward achieving the contentment God desires for you.

Another reason we feel the pressure to be married is that the culture in which we live tells us we must have a sexual relationship to be fulfilled, and for Christians, this can occur only in marriage. Therefore, we fall prey to the conviction of our culture, believing that without marriage we cannot be whole and complete—even in Christ. The church is not exempt from such cultural infection, and as a result, it has contributed to this misconception. We hear many a pastor pray for single Christians in the same breath as he prays for the sick and the dying. At other points down through the age of church history, thinking veered in the opposite direction. During those periods singleness was considered a superior calling. But today the infusion of the culture into the church has radically swung that belief to the other extreme. No wonder we are made to feel that something is wrong with singleness!

Another reason women yearn for marriage is that their friends are settling down, one by one, friend by friend. Either gradually or all of a sudden, panic hits, and a woman whose friends have recently married or plan to marry fears being left behind. The social structure changes. What was once a group of single friends becomes a group of couples, with the remaining one or two single friends feeling that they no longer fit in. The mutual confidences and shared experiences diminish, resulting in loss of companionship and social stability for those who remain single. That occurs because when a single woman is called out of singleness into the exclusive intimacy required in marriage, the close friendships she has shared with other single friends become necessarily secondary. It is often true that commonalities make for friendships, so when those commonalities are greatly diminished, the friendship fades away. When a woman experiences the marriage of several close friends over the course of a relatively short number of years, the perpetual search for new friends with common ground can grow wearisome and discouraging.

Women also want to marry to gratify a desire for procreation and motherhood. For that reason the



desire for marriage can be especially intense. Like the desire for marriage, maternal yearnings are God-given, and because such longing is implanted into our nature, the inability to actualize it can be severely painful.

Finally, since God created us as sexual beings and proscribed marriage as the only legitimate means for realizing that aspect of our nature, our sexual desires increase our longing to get married. Acknowledging the sexual element in our desire for marriage is nothing to be ashamed of. In fact, God uses the desire for sex as a means of bringing a man and a woman together. Too often, however, when marriage isn't forthcoming, women (even Christian women) step outside the legitimate means God established for sexual expression. Always, without exception, heartache is the result.



THE LOVE OF GOD IN OUR LONGINGS

So if you are single yet longing for marriage, it is quite understandable! The issues we've looked at help us see why God's normal ordering for his people includes a non-solitary

lifestyle. Yet since that is the case, since God's ordering most generally includes marriage, why are so many Christians single? Surely some are single by choice, but I dare say the majority of Christian women who are single did not choose that lifestyle. Some have never met a man they love or respect enough to marry. Some have never been pursued by a man they like and respect. Others have returned to a state of singleness through death or divorce. The important thing to do is get beneath all the speculation about why we are single and acknowledge the fact that each and every one of us is alone because, for today at least, God has ordained it.

Longing for what God has not given, or has not given yet, is not only reasonable and understandable; it can also be constructive as a means to draw us to cling more closely to the One who created us to hunger in this way. But living in a constant state of longing can become woe-is-me and self-centered. Most importantly, if we are constantly harping on what we want but do not have, we are declaring that God has not managed our affairs well, because with or without our longing, God wills us to be content in him. In fact, our contentment is of far greater importance to God than our marital status. Contrary to how we think, God also knows that such contentment does not hinge on whether or not we are married.

“Well, then,” you may be asking, “since contentment does not depend on my marital status, how do I reconcile that truth to God’s statement that it is not good for man to be alone?” (Gen. 2:18). When God stated that Adam’s solitary condition was not good, he brought Eve to meet his need. But as we shall see, marriage is not the only legitimate and God-given fulfillment for our solitary condition. So if you are single, take heart. God has not forsaken you.

MAKING IT PERSONAL



Review

1. How do the following factors contribute to our longing for marriage?
 - Being made in God's image
 - Biological inclinations
 - Cultural influences

Questions for Personal Reflection and Group Discussion

1. Are you alone or lonely or both?
2. List or discuss specific ways that the culture and your Christian community have made you feel pressured to find a spouse.
3. Have your friendships remained consistent over the past several months or years? Or have life's changes radically altered your social structure? How have you responded to the changes spiritually and emotionally? What tangible steps have you taken to adjust to any changes?
4. Do you believe today that contentment hinges on your marital status? Be honest!