

One Single Day by Elisabeth Adams

I want to be married.

I can't help it: I've heard the low voices of my grandparents, praying together every night before they went to sleep. I've seen my mother laughing hysterically, just because my dad doesn't get her jokes ... and his almost-hidden, teasing smile in response.

I experienced wonder and excitement when my four youngest siblings were born, and have helped them learn to walk, to read, and to enjoy God's creation. Yes, my foremothers started young, but at my age, my grandmother had been married for eight years. At my age, my mother had four little girls. I'm old enough to be married, and I want to be married to the glory of God.

Shouldn't that have happened by now?

At first I ask, *How do I change this?* Then, as resignation sets in, I wonder, *How do I survive singleness?* In particularly painful moments, I want to know more: *Why should I be contented? Why should I stay the course? Does God see me? Does He even care?* Turns out I've been asking the wrong questions.

Defining the Relationship

It was an unusual homework assignment: Go somewhere quiet, alone, and ask God one simple question.

I chose the tiny, pink-papered dorm room that fit around me like a hermit crab's shell. The one with a lavish view of flaming fall leaves, a view I often forgot to enjoy. And no wonder: I was depressed; I was restless; I was wrestling with God. I knew how I wanted my life to go, and I was afraid that if I truly gave myself to Him, it wouldn't go that way.

But I had an assignment. So I plopped my notebook on my bed, sat down beside it, and asked, "Lord, how do You feel about me?"

There was no audible answer. There were no words at all. But somehow, that didn't stop a new fact from coming slowly into focus in my heart. He loves me. (I already know that). Yes, but there's more. He sees me, now, as I will be when He's done making me. When He looks at me (fearful, self-willed me?) He sees Jesus. He is ... delighted? He's delighted with me!

There's no other way to put it: it blew my mind.

It was to be another year before I finally yielded to the claims of Christ's lordship on my life, but even then, He was patiently pursuing me. At one of the lowest ebbs in my walk with God, He actually delighted in me. I can only conclude that He's crazy that way: It's part of His character to delight in me!

I'm finally beginning to realize that I cannot show others the truth about God until I tell myself the truth about His unconditional love.

Can I urge you to do something? Ask Him to tell you about it. Make it your job to hear about it, to immerse yourself in it, to pursue a deeper knowledge of it. Ask others how they know they are unconditionally loved by God. Study the Bible on this subject. Draw pictures, sing songs, tell stories, tell others — whatever it takes to cement this truth in your heart.

Knowing His love isn't about making the pain of singleness go away. But without knowing how He feels about you, it's not worth walking the [Emmaus road](#).

Asking the Right Questions

Not only have I spent years asking the wrong questions about life, I've also been asking them in the wrong order. My first question ought to be *Who is God?* When I see His character as it has been displayed in His Word and His actions throughout history, I'll know how unconditional and unchangeable is the answer to the question, *How does He feel about me?* And when I know how outrageously He loves me, chances are that my next question will be *How can I respond to His love? How can I broadcast it?* Yes, I want to live out my love story in light of the gospel, so others can see the pure and unconditional love of Jesus. But since I'm not married at the moment, perhaps the right question is *How can I glorify Him now?*

I begin to glorify Him by telling myself the truth:

- I am primarily defined as God's child (with all the blessings and responsibilities that entails), and not as a single woman.
- The area of romance is not outside the realm of discipleship: God will use it to test me and refine me and bring me joy, just as He does with every other facet of my life.
- Painful singleness can be godly singleness. God does not condemn me when I am upset. Those feelings have to go somewhere, and His ear and heart are the safest place.¹
- Though I'm experiencing a different kind of pain than married people, we are all in the fellowship of suffering.²
- God sees me when I feel forgotten³ and He is intensely interested in making marriages.⁴
- He has not left me without direction in the confusing maze of male/female relationships. He provides specific direction through His Spirit, His Word, and His Body,⁵ as well as broader, but equally practical principles like the Golden Rule.⁶
- My life cannot be perfectly scripted. Only God understands every situation and every person I will meet, and He rarely enables me to figure out all the correct behavior ahead of time. But anytime I turn myself over to Him and trust Him to *be* through me, it works.
- I *can* model true love while I'm single. Every day I continue to walk with Jesus, He gives me opportunity to exchange the "I-wants" stored up in my heart for the happiness of others. Because He loves me so outrageously, I can make a sacrifice, say "My pleasure," and find it is the exact truth.⁷
- Waiting won't stop when I enter a relationship. At each stage of friendship, courtship, and marriage, the future is still God's business. Mine is to habitually counter my imagination with the truth: Who this person really belongs to, what our true relationship is — today — and what true love will do for him as a result.
- When I completely run out of waiting power, my inability to trust is God's problem. If I fix my attention on Him, He'll provide a new transfusion of faith.⁸

Even More Glory

How else can I glorify God as a marriage-minded single? By continuing to tell the truth about marriage to others, just when it is most tempting to denigrate it in order to ease my pain. By refusing to pull away from God when He does not fulfill my expectations. "Fine then," I want to say to Him. "If you won't talk about marriage to me, then I won't talk about it to You." But instead, I pour out our heart before Him.

I can glorify God by showing His outrageous love to others with deferred hopes. "They will believe us," to paraphrase Betsie ten Boom, "because we are there." I know a single woman who makes her desires a reminder to pray for a childless married friend. Another became so overcome with longing for her *sister* to be married that she spent nearly three days fasting and praying for her. We are uniquely equipped to practice the power of intercession: walking in the shoes of those we are praying for. Let's not waste the opportunity.

I can glorify God by recognizing His sovereignty over my love life. This does not absolve me from active participation in the pursuit of marriage; on the contrary, it enables me to release dead-end relationships with a light heart. Why? Because I am not at the mercy of any else's choices; I am in God's hands,⁹ looking confidently ahead to what He will do on my behalf.

Yes, rejection or unrequited love hurts, and that pain should not be downplayed. But in the midst of this genuine grieving, I do well to remember that romantic love cannot be bought, even with the coin of deserving or longing for that love.¹⁰ Ultimately, romance is a mystery. Even Solomon, with all his wisdom, included it in his list of things that were "too wonderful" for him to fully comprehend.¹¹

I can't always explain why I do or don't fall in love with someone; how can I expect this of someone else? The good news is that regardless of its romantic potential, each relationship is an excuse for prayer. If it results in faith for someone's purity, well-being, and godliness, even a five-second crush can be a way to expand the Kingdom of God.

I can glorify God by seeking His Kingdom first,¹² and marriage second. I want to pursue my own relief; He wants me to pursue others' relief. He says, "Give, and it will be given to you."¹³ Give to the hungry what your soul desires, and you will be like a watered garden."¹⁴

In a sense, I run away from my desires, and they run after me! Can preparing a meal for my friends take the place of doing it for a husband? Can caring for other people's kids fill the longing for children of my own? I don't think so. But if my experience is any proof, acts of service were designed, not for escape, but to bring me into contact with reality: fellowship, God's glory, and my joy. I can do these things for their own sake, and find real happiness in them, even if it is a different happiness than the one I seek.

Finally, I can glorify God by continuing to hang onto hope. Either He is the God of the too-good-to-be-true, or He isn't. If I believe that He is, and is the Rewarder of those who seek Him,¹⁵ then I have hope. But hope is not synonymous with demanding my own way. When "I am no longer comforted by God's desire for me," when "I am threatened by it because God's will potentially stands in the way of my demand,"¹⁶ that is a danger signal.

Hope is inconvenient. It is paradoxical. It can be painful. It can search my heart and motives to the very bottom. I don't ask for hope, and often I don't actually want it. What I really want is for the desire to go away, or be granted. But by His grace, I hang onto hope anyway.

I may not have the 58 years of companionship that my grandparents had. It's unlikely that I'll have the eight children my parents had, and I will never be the young mommy that I had. But as time goes on, it grows more clear to me that while my waiting years are irreplaceable, they are not wasted. Ultimately, it's not because of some great adventures they are giving me, some great benefit to others, or some great work I am doing. It's simply by knowing His outrageous love that I'm able to take something that's happening to me against my will — and mark it "Freely given to Jesus."

When Mary anointed Jesus' feet with pure spikenard, she gave something costly, something precious to her, something irreplaceable. It was others who said "Why this waste?" To the one who gave and the One who received, it was pure joy.

He never wastes what is precious to us! Not one single day.

NOTES

1. Psalm 62:8
2. Philippians 3:10
3. Genesis 16:13
4. Psalm 78:63,65
5. John 7:17
6. II Timothy 3:16
7. I am indebted to John Piper for this thought. *Desiring God*, p. 122.
8. II Peter 1:3
9. Proverbs 21:1
10. Song of Solomon 8:7
11. Proverbs 30:18-19
12. Matthew 6:33
13. Luke 6:13
14. Isaiah 58:1-11 ASV, marginal reading
15. Hebrews 11:6
16. Paul David Tripp (*Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands* pp. 85-88) as quoted in *Did I Kiss Marriage Goodbye?* by Carolyn McCulley (p. 79).