

CHRISTIAN HEADS, HEARTS, AND HANDS

ARTICLES TO HELP FORM US AS FOLLOWERS OF "THE WAY"

Fight For Joy on Valentine's Day

by Chris Smith

You know the routine. It's Valentine's Day, that special holiday set aside to celebrate love and romance. But you're single. You don't have a girlfriend, a date, or even a female friend willing to be seen in public with you. So you invite over a few buddies to watch *Braveheart*, play *Halo*, and talk about how you don't understand girls. "Happy Singles Awareness Day" is your Facebook status. You tell all your married friends you're content, enjoying the freedom of your singleness, and that you're glad you didn't have to plan a date and pay for a fancy dinner this year. You do all these things and yet, at the end of the night as you climb into your empty bed, loneliness and despair come crashing in, leaving you wondering why no one—perhaps not even God himself—loves you.

Valentine's Day is hard for many single people. The cynical humor of the typical Christian single offers little more than a thin veneer over the pain and worry lurking within his heart. Cultural pressures to find his worth, identity, and security in a romantic relationship only exacerbate the inner struggle. And those pressures are often amplified in conservative Christian communities, as singles become collateral damage in the battle to defend marriage and the family. To many married believers, the singles in their midst are pitiable at best, dangerous at worst. But in the face of all these worries and pressures, Christian singles can lay hold of some glorious biblical truths to propel them in their fight for joy this Valentine's Day—and every day thereafter.

You Are Loved

God loves you. That simple statement should blow you out of your chair. Sadly, however, the truth has lost its power for many Christians. Our culture assumes and even demands God love everyone the same—no exceptions. Even within the church, God's love can be tossed around so lightly believers begin to think he's *required* to love them. If we're honest, his love rarely shocks us anymore, since we rarely pause to ponder the scandal of a holy God embracing a rebellious people.

We've all sinned and fallen short of divine glory. We were children of wrath, dead in trespasses and enemies of God. But God, being rich in love, while we were yet sinners, gave up his Son as a bloody substitute for us. And now, resurrected and ascended to the right hand of the Father, he intercedes for us and has sent his Spirit to be with us.

God's love is unearned, unfettered, and unending, and it's given to everyone who relies on Jesus as Savior and Treasure—regardless of your relationship status. It's easy to feel unloved when you're single. But the truth is that as a Christian single on Valentine's Day, you couldn't be more loved. Rejoice that the Lord of creation has delighted to set his affection on you!

You Are Not Alone

Not only are you loved, you are, in fact, never alone. God built you to be in relationship with himself. Again, let that sink in for a moment. The one lacking nothing, the one surrounded by a heavenly court that praises him without ceasing, and the one who's been satisfied in love and communion with his triune self from all eternity, that God made you by hand and wants a relationship with you.

Of course, we're all relationally broken because of our sin. But if you're trusting the Son, the Spirit dwells inside you, and you can commune with the Father at all times. An overflowing fountain of joy—God himself—is within you. Friend, you are not alone.

You Are Family

Jesus didn't die to save just you; he died to save his bride. Your relationships within the church, then, surpass mere friendship. Jesus said those who do his Father's will are family (Mark 3:35); "brothers and sisters" is the most common way of addressing Christians in the New Testament; Paul went to Thessalonica "as a nursing mother" (1 Thessalonians 2:7); he became "a father through the gospel" to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 4:15); and when he wrote Timothy, he called him a "true child in the faith" (1 Timothy 1:2; cf. Titus 1:4).

The New Testament reveals that family ties—the strongest human bonds—are redefined not by biological relationships, but by mutual faith in Christ. Even human marriage is limited: the institution won't continue into the next (Matthew 22:30) but will instead give way to the reality to which it was all along pointing—the marriage of Jesus and his bride (Eph. 5:22-33; Rev. 19:6-10; 21:1-4). This means that in your church you're interacting with men and women who are closer to you than your biological brothers and sisters. You're forming relationships that will carry into eternity, in fellowship with one another and the Godhead forever. What joy is there to be found in the communion of the saints! Christian single, you are far from being alone.

So be honest with yourself, your friends, and, most of all, with the Lord about how you're feeling this Valentine's Day. When you begin to feel unlovable, ponder the height and depth and breadth of God's love for you (Eph. 3:14-19). When you begin to feel lonely, spend time communing with him through his Word and prayer and surrounding yourself with brothers and sisters who will lift you up and encourage you, as you do the same for them. And most of all, when you feel the urge to make that cynical "bachelor till the rapture" joke, fight it. Fight the bitterness, the loneliness, perhaps even the despair. Fight for joy in the Savior.