

How does divorce destroy the picture of marriage by God's design?

Looking at the life of Hosea, how is he a good "picture" of Ishi?

Think over Scripture...list incidences of God's "bride" being unfaithful over and over.

What was His response?

I don't know about you, but my heart just grieves for Him. His heartache compares to nothing that we have ever seen, even Hosea's heartache! We see His continual heartache all throughout the Old Testament...then, as we follow the His life here on earth, we see the rejection and heartache anew.

Oh, that is not all. His heartache continues today. He longs for us, yet we get too busy for Him. He wants to pull us close to Him. We want to "talk," but we share our hearts with other lovers, leaving Him out of the details of our lives. We pull back from Him, then think that HE has left us or forsook us in the midst of our greatest needs. We long for intimacy and adventure, but instead of finding it in Him (where we can find both), we look for other "lovers" that leave us the next day feeling empty and further away from Him. What we thought was alive and full of life just proves to be a false aliveness, a false passion, and a false euphoria! That thing that we don't want to miss just leaves us full of shame, guilt,

and very, very empty. All that time, our Ishi is wooing, waiting, and wanting us.

I love that our "love story" with Ishi is never over! He does not walk out on us. He never forsakes us for another. We never have to worry about His unfaithfulness. We can count on Him FOREVER! I don't know about you but that makes me want to be a pure, holy, spotless, worthy bride. Take a moment here to search through Scripture for verses that will help to give you some "how-to's" for becoming that virtuous woman, that spotless bride... List them below...

⇒ **Jesus**...Yes! This brings me to our PERFECT Bridegroom. Search through the New Testament to find references to Jesus as our Bridegroom. List below what you learn about the PERFECT Bridegroom that we all are searching for...

Are you familiar with the Hebrew Betrothal or Marriage Ceremony? How does this symbolize the "Betrothal" or "Marriage" of Christ and the Church? What are the similarities?

Oh! You are going to love this! I believe that there are certain themes that you see all throughout Scripture. For example, we see over and over the revelation of Who God is... What love is...Redemption...etc. Well, another theme all throughout Scripture is marriage. One of the reasons that I believe God holds marriage so dearly is that it is the closest relationship to compare the spiritual relationship He desires to have with us. It can show the process of becoming His...the day-to-day relationship struggles (on our end!)...true Agape Love...complete satisfaction by one and only one...etc.

Well, that is not all! We can see the WHOLE of History as preparation for one big

marriage ceremony with the PERFECT Bridegroom!! Before you think I am a complete nut, let me explain more about the similarities...

1. The couple is betrothed in a sweet little ceremony. We were betrothed to Jesus at our salvation.
2. After betrothal, the bride and groom would enter a period of separation while the groom prepared a home for the bride and the bride prepared to be a wife. We are in a period of separation while our Groom prepares a home ETERNALLY for us and while we prepare to be His wife! (John 14: 2-3)
3. During preparation, one thing that Hebrews did to prepare for the wedding was to make an elaborate wedding gown for their daughter. Their desire was to be breathtaking when their grooms arrived! In the same way, we are creating a beautiful wedding gown for our Groom. Of course, our wedding gowns are not lace, satin, and sequins. They are composed of our characters, our purity, our radiance, our integrity, and our growing devotion to Him.
4. Finally, when the Groom was ready, a great processional gathered with him to get the Bride. The final part of the wedding ceremony would take place and he would carry her to a wedding feast that lasted 7 days! Now, are you excited? Read Revelation? Yes! We await our Heavenly Groom. He will return for us with a great processional for the final part of the wedding ceremony! Oh, and then He will carry us away for the Great Wedding Feast that will take place for 7 years! Hoot, hoot, holler, holler! Our minds cannot fathom the joy...the celebration! We cannot even fathom the place He is lovingly preparing for us! Oh, and that is nothing! We will be WITH HIM, face-to-face forever!

Getting Ready for the Wedding...

Oh, does this excite you as it does me? Actually, our Bridegroom has gone away to prepare our eternal home, yet the awesome thing about this perfect Bridegroom is that He has left His Holy Spirit to be with us, to woo us, to protect us, and to prepare us. We do not have to wait until the "wedding" to have an awesome relationship. Today, we can get to know Him, grow close to Him, and work alongside of Him! Want to grow that relationship? Have no idea how? Well, here are some tips—straight from a real live marriage...

- ⇒ **Take Time Together...** There is no way to get to know another person except to take time WITH that person! Talk. Listen. Ask questions. Pour out from the depths of your heart! In what ways are you taking time with Ishi?

Do you know Him better today than last year? Last month? Last week? Yesterday?

What are some new ideas that you have to take more time together with Ishi?

⇒ **Best Friends for Life (and eternity)...** Who do you run to? Why not Ishi! Satan's greatest lie is that we inconvenience God with our problems. He accuses us of only going to Him when we need Him. Well, good news! God doesn't listen to your accuser! He wants YOU! He wants you anytime! He wants you all of the time! Go to Him at any time! Each and every day! Take Him those little praises all along the way. Let HIM be the first place we run, whether we are just ready to giggle or we cannot stop the tears from flowing. How can you develop your friendship with God?

⇒ **Commit to a deeper, more passionate relationship...** Don't settle for a relationship that is just hum-drum! Don't settle for a relationship that is "just duty" or "routine." Pour all you have into the relationship! Abandon all! Don't stop at anything! Go higher! Go deeper! Speak your love. Write your love (journal). Tell Him your commitment. Write your commitment. Constantly let Him know about your devotion! Then, sit still long enough to hear Him tell you of His love, commitment, and devotion. Fall in love with His voice, His Words! Decide today to commit anew to a deeper, more passionate relationship than ever before! Is this your commitment?

What are some practical ways that you can commit to a deeper, more passionate relationship than ever before?

⇒ **Enjoy His Presence!** When Harold and I were dating, I did some pretty unconventional (for me!) things JUST to be around him. I went hunting...fishing...even joined the Junior College Band! Just to be WITH him! Even today, we went to breakfast, took my car to

the shop for repairs, and went to Lowe's. Now, I am not wanting to offend anyone who loves to go to Lowe's, but the **ONLY** reason I went inside was to hold his hand! Honest! I put aside my agenda, my plans, my preferences **ALL** to be by his side, in his presence! Ishi wants the same desire for Him. He wants for us to enjoy His presence. He wants for us to bask in His presence. He want for us to enjoy His face shining upon us. His desire is for a relationship that will bring us to sacrifice all, just to be in His presence. To be satisfied just being there! What are some of your current hindrances to enjoying His presence?

How can you adjust your priorities so you have **TIME** to spend with Him?

⇒ **Keep the Fire Alive!** Stay connected! The best way to stay connected and keep the fire **HOT** is to make a concentrated effort to do the "little things." Oh, having breakfast together to talk, pow-wow, share a devotion, really dream, pray and give insight to one another. Regular dates... walks...ministering together... hobbies together... take the time! You won't regret it! How can you adjust your day so that you snag "quality time" with your Beloved?

Sooo, What Do YOU Think???

So, what do you think? Is Ishi the answer to that cry for soul satisfaction for you too? Is He the One you have looked for all of these years? Have you missed the soul satisfaction that is yours for the "taking?" Beloved, I pray that you will find that soul satisfaction that you have longed for! I pray that you will see God in a new way, that *this* is the day that you too will ***"call Me Ishi [my***

husband], and you shall no more call Me Baali [my Baal (God)].” Why not draw closer today! You, too, will find that soul satisfaction that you have longed for!

Would You Like More Teaching On The Names of God NOW???

THE GREAT I AM: Everything We Will Ever Need: A Study Through the Names of God...NEW! Do you just want to KNOW God? Do you sometimes wonder why things happen the way they do...Why God allows bad things to happen to good people...Where is He when bad things happen? This set was recorded JUST for you! This is probably Cindy's most favorite topic as she shares about her Greatest Love in life...the love of her God! In this set, Cindy shares names of God and what they mean TO us and FOR us in all of the situations we may face in life. Don't miss this one...you will want to listen to this on those dark days AND you will find that this is the set that you will want to use to introduce others to your AWESOME God!! Audio set. Comes in a vinyl binder. **Price: \$10.00**

Seeing the Unseen

By Janet Birkey

Dear Ladies,

I have been so busy in my home this week...decluttering, figuring out what to buy a fourteen-year-old for her birthday, and doing some computer work for a dear friend. I was able to do these fun things in addition to the "usual stuff" that goes on around here.

One particular afternoon, my Darlin' came home and looked in the refrigerator and said, "Did we get a new refrigerator?" I made the comment that I didn't feel like I had gotten too much done that particular day, but I guess I did...I was able to get my 'fridge all cleaned out.

I filled the sink with hot, soapy water and took out the shelves and bins one by one to clean them. This way, I was able to tend to children as they needed me and I was not overwhelmed by the mess. I wiped everything down inside before putting the shelves back and now it looks so clean and sparkling. A sure incentive to try to keep it that way!

As you know, it's hard to do those tasks that few people see. We tend to look so unproductive when others cannot see a product. Then that spirit of inadequacy begins to take over and we strive to be more product-oriented and able to accomplish any and every task. The problem is that instead of becoming more productive, we lose sight of the reality of the time and resources God has given us to accomplish His work. When we try to do it all, we surely must grieve a Heavenly Father Who did not design us to do everything.

As time goes by, I see that I need to spend more time doing the things that others do not see, so that the things they do see count. Just as in cleaning out my 'fridge, my kitchen feels clean from the inside out, when I spend time with Jesus and sit at His feet, I feel clean and "right" from the inside out. I am more easily able to deal with my kitchen activities when the insides are cleaned and organized, so I am more able to deal with the circumstances of my life when I have spent time with Him.

We hear the world speak so often about nurturing our inner selves that we tend to shy away from that idea. It's not New Age or selfish to get alone and feed that part of ourselves that gets lost in the shuffle of "dailies." Jesus got alone to pray, and be quiet and commune with His Father. Certainly no New Age or selfishness on His part!

Here are a few ideas that might encourage to get alone and take care of the things that no one else sees...but they can see the difference that it makes.

- ♥ **Pray!** I have begun writing out some of my prayers. I have a notebook where I write them and sometimes I draw little flowers and things to dress up the pages. Use your computer and download some (free!) graphics to dress up your pages. You can even journal on the

computer!

- ♥ **Write a poem or love song to God.** Don't laugh... everyone has something creative in them to offer the Father. And remember, He thinks we all sing pretty!
- ♥ **Keep your bedroom cleaned and pretty.** Be sure to keep your husband in mind. You may not want to go too feminine here, but a clean, pretty room is such a bonus to your quiet time. You may choose a room other than your bedroom, but try to make sure that you can be undisturbed for a little while everyday.
- ♥ **Keep a little basket** with pens, pencils, highlighters, and paper near your special spot. You might also include a pretty journal.
- ♥ **A light blanket** for cold mornings helps you feel secure and warm in the Father's presence.
- ♥ I love **French Vanilla Coffee**, so I try to always have some on hand. Your favorite beverage can add to that cozy feeling when in His presence.
- ♥ **Don't underestimate the power of music!** "Shout to the Lord" brings me into a worshipful state of mind quicker than just about anything else can. I've even made up my own sign language to it.... God speaks my sign language, even when nobody else does!

Whatever "does it" for you, bring it into your quiet time with God to feed your soul. He is the Giver of good things and good gifts, and all that He has given us is to draw us closer to Him.

Now, go grab that basket and get "your lovely place" in order so that you are ready to visit with the Master, in body and in spirit. And always remember, it's what others don't see that they wind up seeing...think about it!

With Joy Unspeakable, Janet

Church Marquee Signs:

- "The best vitamin for a Christian is B1"
"Under same management for over 2000 years"
"Soul food served here"
"Tithe if you love Jesus! Anyone can honk!"
"You can give without loving but you cannot love without giving"
"Beat the Christmas rush, come to church this Sunday!"
"Don't wait for the hearse to take you to church"
"We should be more concerned with the Rock Of Ages, instead of the age of rocks"
"Reputation is what people think about you. Character is what people know you are"
"Don't give up. Moses was once a basket case!"
"Come early for a good Backseat"
"Life has many choices - For Eternity, two. What's yours?"
"Seven days without prayer makes one weak"
"No Jesus - no peace, Know Jesus - know peace!"
"Worry is interest paid on trouble before it is due"
"A man's character is like a fence. It cannot be strengthened by whitewash"
"Wal-Mart isn't the only saving place!"
"Preach the gospel at all times. Use words if necessary"
"Delay is preferable to error"
"Prevent truth decay. Brush up on your Bible"
"It's hard to stumble when you're down on your knees"
"What part of "THOU SHALT NOT" don't you understand?"
"A clear conscience makes a soft pillow"
"The wages of sin is death. Repent before payday"
"Never give the devil a ride. He will always want to drive"
"Can't sleep? Try counting your blessings"
"Forbidden fruit creates many jams"
"Christians, keep the faith... But not from others!"
"Satan subtracts and divides. God multiplies and multiplies"
"If you do not want to reap the fruits of sin stay out of the devil's orchard"
"May is God's apology for February"
"To belittle is to be little"
"God answers kneemail"
"Try Jesus. If you don't like Him, the devil will always take you."
"Laughter is good medicine...don't bottle it."
"I will go anywhere, provided it is forward."
"Laughter is like needle and thread...It can patch up anything!"

"A cheerful word picks us up."

Proverbs 12: 25

The Message Bible

Dreams for Sale...

By Larry Wright

I read about a man who had high hopes for his life. He chased his dream all the way to Colorado where he purchased a beautiful five-acre parcel of land with a beautiful stream at the foot of some mountains. It was a simple, but perhaps naïve, choice to exchange a complex life for an undemanding one. In contrast to the ugly and concrete of the city, he sought to be surrounded by the beauty and solitude of nature.

However, as is often the case, hard winters, loneliness, and isolation brought an eventual end to his dreams. He discovered the cruel meaning of a common saying among natives of Colorado: "The mountains don't care." Neither does life.

After giving the mountains a good try, the man packed up and moved back to the city. On a corner of his property he placed a sign that read: "FOR SALE: A Dream With A Stream".

It's hard when life forces you to put a "FOR SALE" sign on a piece of your dreams.

What happens when your dreams of a perfect life, marriage, children, health and career are shattered? When life doesn't turn out the way you had planned, what do you do? What happens when you get the HOPE stomped out of you?

One Sunday night after church I was watching Mesquite rodeo when a cowboy took a nasty fall off the back of a bucking bull. While they attended to him one of the announcers said, "Donnie, I think he is going to be fine. It looks like he's just got the wind knocked out of him." His sidekick replied, "Yea. Ain't that amazing. All that air out there and he can't get none of it."

Ironically the birth of Jesus is the birth of hope but there are a lot of people out there that can't get none of it. In fact, some people have experienced such disappointment in life that they have given up on HOPE. The cynic and English poet Lord Byron once wrote that hope is "nothing but the paint [or the makeup] on the face of Existence; the least touch of truth rubs it off, and then we see what a hollow-cheeked harlot we have got hold of."

Yet when you open the pages of the Scriptures, it's clear that "hope" is one of the cornerstones of living the Christian life.

One day Jesus met a woman whose dream of a perfect world was nothing more than a shattered memory. As she stood beside the well of Jacob, if you look close enough, you can see the pieces of her shattered life lying in the dust at her feet. It was high noon when she met Jesus but the sun had already set on her hopes and dreams.

Her dream of a perfect life, the one with a wonderful husband, loving children, a nice house

with a white picket fence, and a walk-in closet, was all just a shattered dream. On the day she met Jesus, she had staked a "FOR SALE" sign on a corner of her once beautiful life. She discovered the one thing that men and mountains have in common: "The mountains don't care", and neither do some men. There was always someone willing to buy, even a person with shattered dreams. There is always someone ready to take advantage of the shattered life of others.

This woman was a walking contradiction: she defended herself and discredited herself at the same time. She turned to men to find fulfillment in life, and if there had been a men's magazine, I feel sure she would have posed for it. Her moral life was the joke of the community. Her dreams were shattered. Still, she talked to Jesus about religious issues.

She was a pretender who walked to the well alone in the heat of the day, probably having fantasies of a make-believe world. Little did she know her world was about to change because on that day she met a Man who caused her to dream again. She met a Man who lit the candle of HOPE in her dark world.

The first step in reclaiming your dreams is to STOP PRETENDING!

In the Bible, whenever people encountered Jesus they were stripped of their pretenses and made vulnerable by the truth. Some of those individuals ran from the truth, others were staggered by it, and still others embraced it. When a person is confronted by the truth, they must make a decision. This sinful and broken woman was forced to face the truth about herself. She had to make a decision about what she would do with the revelation.

The first step on the road to HOPE where dreams are restored is usually not a very pleasant one. It was not a pleasant thing to see the darkness of her life exposed by The Light.

She thought that since Jesus was a stranger He would be easy to fool. She could continue to pretend to be someone she was not and He would never know the difference. That plan didn't work as Jesus quickly unmasked her pretense when He said, "Go, call your husband and come back" (4:16). Her scheme began to unravel as her true self was laid bare. She said to Jesus, "I have no husband." He said, "The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true" (John 4:18). She told the truth but it was a lie!

Jesus knew the truth about her. He skillfully forced her to see and admit the truth about herself. When His light shines on us and reveals the truth, including all the broken pieces, it is painful and like this woman, we look for a place to hide. Sometimes it is easier to live with shattered dreams than it is to do something about it.

Human tendency is to cover up and conceal the broken pieces of one's life. So, so we hide the truth from others and from ourselves. We wear our mask and go about our make-believe world playing the role of the pretender, just as the woman at the well did with Jesus. She presented another self to Jesus, the one she wanted him to see, and hid the broken and shattered one. That is what she tried to accomplish.

Because it is impossible to fool Jesus, He removed her mask and confronted her with the truth of her broken life and shattered dreams. When you hang out with Jesus He makes it impossible to play the pretender game any longer.

What was just as unnerving was the fact that when she realized Jesus saw through her facade, she did not feel in any way condemned by Him. He knew all about her sin and her shattered dreams, yet she felt his pure love for her and she was drawn to him. After her life-changing encounter with Jesus, she went to the others in her town and said, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" (John 4:28-29).

Jesus revealed the complete truth about her and completely accepted her at the same time. That's a Jesus thing. The saving factor in this woman's life was that she did not deny the truth. She was able to dream again because she accepted the truth about herself. Jesus will forgive our sin but only if we face the truth and respond in honesty. Jesus will not tolerate our deceitfulness. He will not allow us to play the role of the imposter.

We discover HOPE when we admit our weaknesses, face out failures and bring the broken pieces to the Stranger at the Well.

"Do you want to be right or do you want to be WHOLE?"

Over the mantle of a halfway house where those addicted to chemicals come to find new direction in life, there is a sign that reads: "Do you want to be right or do you want to be whole?"

Wholeness begins when we are willing to admit our brokenness. Wholeness is not the absence of brokenness. Wholeness is facing the truth of our brokenness and shattered lives and finding healing in that act of honesty. It's denial and dishonesty that gives sin its power. When we hide our brokenness, we empower hopelessness. Admitting that we are broken people with shattered dreams is the in reality liberating.

There is no other way to find HOPE. When we encounter Jesus Christ and He reveals the truth about us, and we understand that He sees us as we really are, broken dreams and all, it is decision time!

The first step on the Road to HOPE is to STOP PRETENDING!

**The Second STEP on the road to HOPE is to
START EMBRACING THE SAVIOR..**

The second thing we must learn is this: we will find HOPE when we discover the truth about Jesus. When Jesus revealed the truth about her, this woman realized that He must have had some kind of supernatural ability. They had only spoken a few words and he saw right through her. She assumed that he was a prophet so she asked a religious question. This is always a good technique to divert the spotlight off of yourself and onto something more comfortable, even if it is controversial.

Engaging the disillusioned woman in conversation, Jesus skillfully created an opportunity that

Godly women will get tired and weary! Making a home is tough work. Often this is the

allowed her to dream again. They started out chatting about water and ended up talking about a satisfying life, the kind of life everyone dreams about. She was surprised to discover that this mysterious man satisfied the unquenched thirst of her life, the one that had driven her to polluted streams. The Messiah she longed to meet was sitting on the well beside her. The kingdom of God was there and He was wearing sandals like an ordinary man. Imagine that!

Jesus was concerned about the false lifestyle of this woman's life but He more concerned about the faulty foundation of her life. He lovingly confronted her with the truth, and then let her decide what to do with it. And herein lies the final point. When Jesus encounters us, we are challenged with the responsibility to act on the truth. We are almost surprised by this woman's reaction. She had seemed silly and shallow, even superficial at times. She had no education or religious training that we are aware of, yet she opened her heart to the truth Jesus presented.

I love the way the story ends. It is interesting that the Bible says, "Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, 'Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?'" (John 4:28-29).

She left her water jar either because she was so overtaken by what she had experienced that she forgot it, or she knew she was coming back. I believe she left her jar because what she received from Jesus couldn't be contained in a jar. She found a reason to hope again and you can't put hope in a jar! You put hope in your heart.

Either way, she left Jesus unceremoniously and without explanation because she became a woman on a mission. After dropping her water jar and running into town, she excitedly shared her new discovery with anyone who would listen. Having her hopes restored by this Man, she was anxious to stir the hopes of others.

Jesus is like that. His words caused her to dream again. He brings hope into hopeless situations. He puts hope back in a broken heart and it is hope that causes you to take down the "Dreams For Sale" sign and dream once again.

Purity The Only Way...

and making none any to shame. Shame therefore, marking your sins get down

By Matthew Roushton

I would like to start this article by saying that I AM NOT "FINISHED" BEING PURE. I have only begun this journey of a lifetime. Purity is to last our entire lifetime. I am in the middle of this journey with you. I struggle just as much as you do. We are in the midst of this "NEVER-ENDING JOURNEY." It is never to be taken lightly or for granted.

Once we are on this journey, we can't just stop being pure even when we grow up. I found this Bible verse when seeing what the Bible said about purity. God says here that He wants us to be faithful, blameless and pure all the days of our life. I think it is one of the best verses in the Bible to say that YOU CAN NEVER STOP BEING PURE...

"To the faithful You show Yourself faithful, to the blameless You show Yourself blameless, to the pure You show Yourself pure, but to the crooked You show Yourself shrewd." 2 Samuel 22:26-27

The Bible shows here that God honors the faithful, blameless and pure above all others. He thinks of the others as crooked or wicked. As for me, I want to be considered faithful, blameless, and pure. I want to be pleasing in all areas of my life for God. I never want to stop being faithful, blameless or pure any of the days of my life. Even though the crooked and wicked can change, it is better to stay away from that swampy path.

I also believe that the "PURITY JOURNEY" is only beginning once we grow-up. Purity is not just related to "dating" or finding a spouse. It is to be a lifestyle for all of life.

Nothing Before God...

One of the most important ways of being pure is not to put anything before God. This can be anything from other gods, boy/girl relationships, careers, accomplishments, possessions and much, much more. The way to know when we are dealing with one of these issues in our life is by looking at what we put first in all or at least most of our life. Starting by looking into our minds, then by checking our heart, and last by looking at what we are spending our time doing and what we are spending our time thinking about. This is a sure-fire way to know what is first and foremost in our life (I know it works for me).

The biggest one of these things for me is the possessions part. I have always had a thing for buying expensive but "essential" things such as guns, civil war re-enactment equipment, knives, boats, computer stuff, clothes and much more. The way I have always gotten these things has not been through the black market like I am sure you are beginning to think; but by working for our family business and through the charitable donations from all my generous grandparents! Instead of letting my grandparents buy me a lot of junk (and believe me I mean JUNK), I just ask them to send me the money they would spend on this junk instead. I use this "junk money" to buy my "essentials." The way this distracts me from God is by my thoughts being more on what to buy next rather than about the freedom God bought for me through His Son.

~~and making sure you're doing it right. So, therefore, making your love get down~~

The Boy/Girl Thing...

One great area in which most have trouble being pure is the area of male/female relationships. I found this Bible verse when I was looking for everything that the Bible says on purity and I think this one is most appropriate verses for this part of the article...

"How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to Your Word. I seek You with all my heart; do not let me stray from Your commands. I have hidden Your Word in my heart that I might not sin against You." Psalms 119:9-11

This is the most important area to me because I feel it is not loyal to the spouse God has planned for me to give my heart away to anyone that comes along. This is one of the top "Marriages Breakers" of all. This is also an area it is best to guard your heart and ask God for strength in daily.

God wants all of us to be pure in the area of male/female relationships. I feel this is what He meant when He said in Matthew 5:8, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." He also wants for us all to have no regrets at all going into marriage and to have no problems talking to boys or girls in the meantime. God wants us to treat the other boys and girls in the Church/School/Support Groups/etc. as brothers and sisters. No, I don't mean for all of you boys and girls reading this to start having a boy/girl wars or as the parents would say "sibling rivalry." I mean just don't go and drool in the corner over all the good-looking guys/girls at your church/school/support group.

I have found that many Young Adults that do not "Date" while at... youth groups, classes, schools, support groups, etc. are usually treated "like aliens" by other members of these events who do not understand the beliefs of those who "don't date." The best thing to do if you are the "alien" is never be discouraged by the attitude others may have toward you at first. Often, it is only because they don't understand your beliefs.

I, myself, had this very same problem. I had to deal with all this at church about 5 or 6 years ago. Nobody at that church could understand what I believed, or why I believed it. For just a short time until I explained it all as clearly as an 8-year-old could! Not everyone understood. But, a good number of them began to understand what I believe, and in the end came to realize that God was dealing with them on the very same area as this "Alien."

Although it is not easy, there is going to be a cost for whatever we choose, whether right or wrong. My pastor ended a sermon not long ago by saying...

"There is always a small cost to pay for something why not pay it to do right and serve God!" Bro. Larry Wright

We all know that Satan tempts everyone, even his own people. Why not choose to flee from his temptation, even if it makes you an "alien" for a small period of time. The cost is very small considering how precious our hearts are.

Dating...A Sticky Situation!

~~and making sure you're doing it right. So, therefore, making your love get down~~

I used an illustration in another article I wrote called *Commitments of a Homeschool Pre-teen* that I want to share with you. It is the best way to describe what happens when our hearts do a thing called "dating." I have found that "dating" is early practice for divorce. It teaches two people to get attached, then when they know each other good enough to know all the dirt on the other person, they just dump each other.

The illustration I made in the article I wrote is that if you have ever wore a sticky name tag, you will know that you can only stick it to something so many times before it will not stick at all. Usually it only sticks well the first or second time. This is exactly what happens to the heart of those that are always out after some "new boy or some new girl." Sooner rather THAN later their heart will not stick to anyone in the way that God designed for the husband and wife to be, usually not even to the person God created for them to marry.

Never Too Late...

I want to say here that if you have had relationships with boys or girls that you regret, there is not much you can do about the past, but you can allow God to change your future and help you to erase the past from memory. He is a Redeemer. He can "buy" back any of your regrets through His Son Who has bought our freedom from sin and death already. It is never too late to begin again. He will give us all a totally clean slate. After we repent of our failures, we can be comforted in knowing that the Lord only keeps a memory of the good things we say and do, not the bad things. Take a look at what the Lord says in the following Bible verse I "stole" from my mom's "Notebooking" workshops...

"Then those who feared the Lord talked with each other, and the Lord listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in His presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honored His name." Malachi 3:16

I wanted to share with you a little word that the Lord has laid on my heart just for you. The Lord assures us that when we come to Him in repentance of our sins, He is faithful to forgive us completely. Romans 8: 1 tells us that those who are "in Christ Jesus" now have "therefore now NO condemnation." God forgives completely. He removes our sins as far as the east is from the west. He has a Book of Remembrance. But, in that book, He only keeps up with all the good things that we say and do not the bad things! (Praise the Lord!) Isn't it going to be just wonderful to be in heaven and to be allowed to hear God read aloud all the good things all the famous people like Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, Billy Graham, Corrie ten Boom, Elisabeth Elliott, and all the others that are too numerous to list anywhere but in heaven?
Please! Wait For The Lord...

The next very important part of becoming "Pure From Normal" is patience. I began looking for verses on "patience" and "waiting." I could not find quite what I was looking for, but I found one or two verses that are great encouragement...

"Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord." Psalms 27:14

Patience is not only an important issue and part of the purity journey, it is a big part of our every day lives as Christians. If we don't have patience at the beginning of our Christian walk, we will

soon acquire it or have a hard time until we do. I have an illustration and one more Bible verse for you to look up as I close.

The biggest struggle I have ever had with patience was in the area of buying my very first Glock Autopistol (I told you earlier that I love expensive things.). As long as I can remember, I have always wanted a Glock Model 23 in 40 caliber S&W. I bet by now I have lost all of you girls who are reading. Let me just say on your behalf that it is the "ultimate" handgun. As long as I have wanted this handgun, I was also trying to save money in order to buy it. Finally in the month of May 2001, I had saved all the money I needed in order to buy this "Super Gun" from a local gun shop in Florence Alabama (where I live) called The Gun Runner. So, I started asking my parents to go by this place to see if I could get one. Let's just say I asked probably close to 1,000 times if not a million times to go by this gun shop. Well, it seemed the more I asked the farther away from going I got. I was asking every time I woke up each morning till the time I went to bed each night.

Finally, in early August I was able to go to this gun shop and look around. The Glock Model 23 in 40 caliber S&W (this is the compact or medium-size handgun) that I had found fit so well when I was 9 and even 12-years-old had become too small for my freshly 14-year-old hands. I continued to look through the guns under the glass case to see if I saw one that could fit any better and looked at a few more in different calibers such a .45 auto (A BIG BULLET AND A BIG GUN), 9mm Parabellum (a little smaller bullet than what I had originally wanted but it would work if I just had to have one).

After I had finished looking at (and holding and drooling over) all the guns under the glass "up close," my dad said we had some more errands to do before five and we must be going. I began to think, "How could we leave when I have got to spend all the money I have saved to buy a Glock with?" We got in the truck I almost felt like crying because I had went one more day without getting what I wanted. Then, to my surprise, my dad asked how I had liked the Glock Model 21 in .45 auto (a much larger gun than I had originally wanted to buy, but much more powerful of a bullet). I began to remember just how well it fit my hand and how even though it was heavier than the one I wanted, it all balanced out to me. It was in my opinion the "ultimate" American man's handgun. I ended up buying the Glock Model 21 .45 auto.

Well Worth the Wait...

I have never been more pleased than I am after waiting to get the "right" handgun for me. If I had purchased a gun immediately after I had saved up enough money, I would not have the same gun today. Sure, I could have been happy with the other gun. It is not that the other gun was or is not a good gun, it was just not good for me for the rest of my life. I also learned from the gun shop owner that before I had bought the gun a policeman owned it for three months and then sold it to the gun shop, which subsequently sold it to ME. This gun was not even in the store at the time I first wanted to buy one. If my parents hadn't put off going by the gun shop, I might have got impatient and maybe bought a gun that would not suit my needs or fit my hands in less than just a month.

I think this story has some very good points to be taken from it. The first is that what I thought I needed, I had no clue that it did not suit all of my needs (holding onto it, keeping for more than a

month!). It was not the size I would need permanently either. Although these are not things that are wrong with this gun, they are the things that could really seriously affect the shot placement during a pistol competition and could cause me to lose by mere inches to someone who has got a handgun that fits their hand.

I know that most 14-year-olds like myself have most likely not met their spouse yet. If by some chance they have, they are definitely not ready to get married and accept the responsibilities of a family (like driving, buying and maintaining a home, or even having a job!). In my opinion, I thought I was ready to buy the gun I wanted when I was 9 or 10. Now, I know I was not ready to have a Glock until I actually got one. I was not as educated in some areas till I had a Glock. One major reason I was not allowed to have a Glock was because Glocks do not have an external safety. All you have to do to shoot one is pull the trigger and it goes BANG! I know that there is much I have not yet learned about marriage and family (much more than I did not know about a Glock). I just pray I will be more patient in waiting for my wife than for my Glock. Even though I may have not even met my wife to be yet, I think I can say that I know God has made her like the Glock He gave me—in the right Model, Size, and Caliber!

Stay Pure...It's The ONLY Way!

The last verse I have for this article is from Isaiah 30:18...

"Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; He rises to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for Him!"

My prayer for you is that you will wait patiently upon the Lord. Seek to stay pure. It may not be the EASY way, but it is the ONLY way to be blessed richly! I pray that each of you reading this whether young or old may learn that you are never too old to become pure and you are never too old to stay pure! Wait. It is all well worth the wait! God Bless you all!

Some Funnies Just to Lighten Your Heart...

*...He who has a glad heart has a continual feast [regardless of circumstances].
Proverbs 15: 15*

YOU KNOW YOU DRINK TOO MUCH COFFEE WHEN——

1. Juan Valdez named his donkey after you.
2. You grind your coffee beans in your mouth.
3. The only time you're standing still is during an earthquake.
4. You can take a picture of yourself from ten feet away without using the timer.
5. You lick your coffeepot clean.
6. You spend every vacation visiting "Maxwell House."
7. You're the employee of the month at the local coffeehouse and you don't even work there.
8. Your eyes stay open when you sneeze.
9. You're so jittery that people use your hands to blend their shakes.
10. You can jump-start your car without cables.
11. All your kids are named "Joe."
12. Your only source of nutrition comes from "Sweet & Low."
13. You go to AA meetings just for the free coffee.
14. You've built a miniature city out of little plastic stirrers.
15. People get dizzy just watching you.
16. When you find a penny, you say, "Find a penny, pick it up. Sixty-three more, I'll have a cup."
17. The Taster's Choice couple wants to adopt you.
18. Starbucks owns the mortgage on your house.
19. You're so wired, you pick up FM radio.
20. Your life's goal is to "amount to a hill of beans."
21. Instant coffee takes too long.
22. When someone asks, "How are you?" you say, "Good to the last drop."
23. You want to be cremated just so you can spend the rest of eternity in a coffee can.
24. You go to sleep just so you can wake up and smell the coffee.
25. You're offended when people use the word "brew" to mean beer.
26. You name your cats "Cream" and "Sugar."
27. You have thought about getting drunk just so you can sober up.
28. Your lips are permanently stuck in the sipping position.
29. You can outlast the Energizer bunny.
30. You don't even wait for the water to boil anymore.
31. You think being called a "drip" is a compliment.
32. You don't tan, you roast.
33. You can't even remember your second cup.
34. You introduce your spouse as your "Coffeemate."
35. You think CPR stands for "Coffee Provides Resuscitation."

36. You are down to half of a 3 lb. can and have to go buy more so you don't run out.

"Laughter is the medicine intended to cure the disease of self-importance. It's hard to puff yourself up to weather balloon size if you can deflate yourself with a good prick of self-directed humor. How many laughs *are* you having--some at your own expense? Have you, as a couple, claimed the promise, "***He will yet fill your mouth with laughter, and your lips with shouting.***" (Job 8:21) Before the wedding ceremony, many couples need to have a bold objective for their first year of marriage: **Over the next year, we will be found guilty of having too much fun rather than too little fun.** That is not a bad objective for any year of marriage."

Dennis and Barbara Rainey, *Starting Your Marriage Right*

Betrothed in the Desert

By Beth Holland

Have you ever felt that your life was out of control? Have you ever wondered where God was in the midst of the turmoil and confusion? There have been times in my life when I wondered just what was happening and if God still cared; if He was even involved in my world and circumstances. Through this time of stress, strife, and turmoil, I learned some valuable lessons, the most important of which is that God was not only there, He was in the midst of my journey and that He is SOVEREIGN!

Let me take you through a short history to give you a perspective of my view of my world. My second child, a daughter, was born when I was 30. Little did I know that she would be my last. I contracted an infection in the hospital when she was born. This contributed to various health problems, including a thirty-five pound weight gain, which, no matter what I did would NOT come off!

Since I teach Biblical nutrition, carrying around extra weight was a big deal to me! Before becoming ill, I had kept my weight within a five-pound range. Even after my first daughter was born, I got the baby weight off and again, kept my weight within five pounds of my ideal weight. My husband would say, "Don't worry about your weight! Just get healthy, then the weight will come off!" He was concerned for my general health, and so was I, but the thing constantly in front of my eyes was how I LOOKED! How would other people judge me - the one who speaks on Biblical nutrition and claims that God has all the answers?

One day, I was doing a Bible study and God greatly convicted me through this passage:

"...Our brethren have made our hearts to melt, saying, 'The people are bigger and taller than we:...' (Deut. 1:28)

The Lord showed me that I had feared man vs. fearing God!

"The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever leans on, trusts and puts his confidence in the Lord is safe and set on high." (Proverbs 29.25)

I had to repent before the Lord for this and to ask His forgiveness for putting what people thought ahead of what God thought and my husband's counsel.

During the years of my illness, I felt I walked in a desert; feeling alone and as though I was getting no where. I sought God for answers, yet did not find the answers I sought. God could not give me the answers I sought with the sin of the fear of man in my heart! As a pastor once stated, "It wasn't that God could not heal, it was that He couldn't without denying His own holiness and giving us a leavened gospel that would say we could keep our sin and receive His blessings."¹

Recently, the Lord reminded me of my favorite Christian book, *Hinds' Feet on High Places* by Hannah Hurnard. The main character, Much Afraid, is from a family named "Fearing" who live in the Valley of Humiliation. She is very Much Afraid, but loves the Chief Shepherd, (whom the rest of her family hates) and wishes to follow Him. She has a crooked mouth, a crippled leg, yet wants to leap about the high places on hinds' feet like the Chief Shepherd does. She asks to enter His service, and He plants the seed of love in her heart, which is shaped like a thorn. Then, He puts her feet on a path to the high places, and gives her two very interesting companions to help her along the way. (I won't tell you who they are; it would ruin the book for you!) Any time she needs Him, all she has to do is call and He will be there. Throughout the journey, Much Afraid comes to various places where the Shepherd shows her something about herself, or teaches her a truth. In each of these places, Much Afraid builds an altar and sacrifices something. She puts what she has on the altar and it is burned up!

What have you to put on the altar? Your fears, your health, your marriage, your children, your walk with Christ? What is so before your eyes that you cannot see anything else? What have you magnified to be so large it makes the Lord seem insignificant? Instead, let's magnify the Lord and put these other things in their proper, insignificant place when compared to God!

I will bless the Lord at ALL times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul (mind, will and emotions) shall make its boast in the Lord; The humble shall hear it and rejoice. O magnify the Lord with me, And let us exalt His name together. I sought the Lord, and He answered me, And delivered me from ALL my fears. (Psalm 34: 1-4, emphasis mine)

When each of Much Afraid's sacrifices are done, there is always a remnant on the altar, which she is to keep in her bag as a remembrance of each sacrifice. At the end of the book, when she has arrived on the high places, the Chief Shepherd asks her to give him her bag of stones of remembrance that she had gathered on her journey. She gives it to Him and He tells her to hold out her hands. Then, He empties the bag into her hands and she gasps when she sees that the common, ugly stones that she had gathered from the altars along her way were now transformed into "a heap of glorious, sparkling jewels, very precious and very beautiful." ² He says to her,

"O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colors..." (Isaiah 54:11)

Then, He takes the stones, places them into a crown for her and sets it upon her head.

"Hold fast that thou hast, that no man take thy crown." (Revelation 3:11)

We need to hold fast those things that we learn along the way, for one day, they will be transformed into the jewels of OUR crowns! Knowing this gives us the ability to not despise the trials of today, but to TREASURE them as we see that they come into our lives to transform us just as the rocks of Much Afraid's life (her trials) were transformed into precious stones.

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, which is infinitely

more precious than perishable gold which is tested and purified by fire. [This proving of your faith is intended] to redound to [your] praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One, is revealed. (I Peter 1:6-7)

There is a truth in the walk of the believer which we don't hear about and indeed, don't really want to know, and that is that in order to get where God is taking us, to go to our "Promised Land", we HAVE to go through the desert! Not only do we have to go through, but in many ways, we must go through ALONE! This is so hard for us! Since it is so hard, why is it necessary?

Because the only way we will get to REALLY know God for who He is, is to be ALONE with Him, totally dependent upon HIM for our "daily bread", just as the Israelites were dependent upon Him for the manna which kept them alive in their desert. We'd like to be able to listen to a sermon, or hear a testimony or listen to Joyce Meyer (whom I really like!) or another Bible teacher and get what we need, but you know what? We can't. Can you build a relationship with your husband or with your children through someone else? No, you can't. And neither can you build a relationship with God this way. This was seen in the desert where each Israelite had to go out and gather his OWN manna!

This is what the Lord has commanded, Gather of it every man as much as he should eat; (Exodus 16:16)

Just as the Israelites gathered their own physical food, we must each gather our own spiritual food; the sustenance we need to walk with God! I'm not saying that you will never get something from someone else, but you will never survive off of someone else's leftovers!

There is an old expression, "God has no grandchildren", meaning that each person has to accept Christ for himself, that he cannot appropriate the faith of his parents or grandparents. Each of us must also walk in our own relationship with the Lord.

If you look at the people in the Word of God, you'll see that the vast majority, if not all, walked through some type of desert experience in their life, and so will we. This is the Master's choice for His children. He knows that during times of stress, when we are in the desert or in the fire which is necessary to refine us, we cry out to Him, we SEEK Him, and then He can expose things to us about ourselves which we might normally not be willing to see. Jeremiah says it this way:

The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is exceedingly perverse and corrupt and severely, mortally sick! Who can know it [perceive, understand, be acquainted with his own heart and mind]? I, the Lord, search the mind, I try the heart... (Jeremiah 17:9-10)

So, we see that ONLY God knows our hearts and minds and only He can reveal them to us. Many times, it takes either the desert or the fire to bring us to the desperate point of really seeking God and being willing to hear what He wishes to say to us!

I remember the time when I had been in the desert for (seemingly) forever! I would stand in worship and tell the Lord, "Lord, I don't know where You are, I just know that the Bible promises

me that You won't leave me or forsake me. I don't know why You aren't talking to me, but I am still here, clinging to the hem of Your robe for all I'm worth and I won't let go! DON'T YOU LET GO OF ME!!" I could see myself in my mind's eye jerking on Jesus' robe; jerk, jerk, jerk; persistently trying to get the Lord to speak to me.

He had talked to me during the course of this desert experienced, but it was never for me. It was always for someone else. Within a day, I always knew for whom that word was; God was always faithful to bring them across my path and under my very nose! At times I despaired of Him ever speaking to me, personally, again. When God broke this silence, it was in a unique and powerful way; a way I could not and did not miss.

I was in a Bible study called *Experiencing God* by Henry Blackaby and Claude King. I had reached the end of a chapter and spun my wheels for three days with the questions there. No matter how long I looked, I had no answers for them. Then, on the fourth day, which was a Saturday, it occurred to me, "Just skip them!" This was a revelation to me, the "filler-inner" of all blank lines! I began the next chapter and had just begun a subsection when my youngest daughter called me for something and I never got back to the study that day. In church the next morning, one of the pastors was filling in for the senior pastor, who was out of town. He ONLY said this in my service! (I know, I checked) He said, "There are times when God is silent. You aren't sure where He is, or what is going on. All I know is that when this happens, God is doing something VERY deep." As he began this statement, I began crying on the front row. I KNEW God was talking to ME! I knew it was an answer to my years of clinging to His robe, but I still didn't understand.

The next morning, when I opened the *Experiencing God* study, I found that the subsection I was beginning, (where my daughter called me and I never got back to it) was entitled, "The Silences of God!!" Had this sequence of events not happened in JUST this way, I would NOT have gotten the message God had specifically for me! In this section, Henry Blackaby begins,

I went through a lengthy time when God was silent. You probably have had that experience, too. I had been praying over many days, and there seemed to be total silence from God. I sensed that heaven was shut up. I didn't understand what was happening. Some folks told me that if God does not hear my prayer, I have sin in my life...As far as I could tell, I was okay. I could not understand the silence of God.

These were MY circumstances! I had prayed and prayed, I had confessed sin, I had done ALL I knew to do, yet nothing had changed the silence I received from God.

Then, Henry Blackaby goes on to say that, as he continued seeking God and doing his daily quiet time, he was convinced that God would help him understand what He was doing in his life. One morning, he was reading the story of the death of Lazarus. He states how we know that Jesus loved Lazarus, Mary and Martha, yet, upon receiving word that Lazarus was gravely ill, did not go to them, indeed, He didn't even respond! Jesus was silent. There was no response from the One who said that He loved Lazarus!

Lazarus died!! The funeral was held; no Jesus. They fixed his body and put him in the tomb; no Jesus and no response. After all this happened, Jesus finally said to his disciples that it was time

to go to Bethany. When He arrived, Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:32) At this point, God revealed something interesting to Mr. Blackaby. It was as if Jesus had said:

"You are exactly right, if I had come, your brother would not have died. You know that I could have healed him, because you have seen me heal many, many times. If I had come when you asked me to, I would have healed him. But, you would have never known anymore about Me than you already know. I knew that you were ready for a greater revelation of Me than you have ever known in your life. I wanted you to come to know that I am the resurrection and the life. My refusal and My silence were not rejection. It was an opportunity for Me to disclose to you MORE of me than you have ever known." (emphasis mine)

I saw in a very powerful way something I'd never have dreamed! That God was using the time of His silence to get my attention and to bring me into a deeper relationship with Him than I had ever walked in before! He wanted to reveal MORE of Himself to ME! I had missed this message for many of the years as I had fretted that it was my sin, or that there was something wrong with me. Sin CAN separate you from God and bring His silence, but if you have searched your heart and have nothing revealed to you, then I submit to you that God wants your attention to bring you into a deeper walk with Himself. The God of the Universe wants your attention so that He can build a deeper and BETTER relationship with you!

There are different types of desert experiences we may face in our lives. I can't cover them all in this article, but here is another important reason not to despise the desert, another reason why God brings us to the wilderness. You may face some of these other journeys first, but ultimately, God will bring each of us to the desert for a very specific reason: to become betrothed to Him!

Therefore, behold, I will allure her and bring her into the wilderness, and I will speak tenderly to her heart...And it shall be in that day, says the Lord, that you will call Me Ishi or My Husband, and you shall call Me no more Baali or My Baal (my Master)... And I will betroth you to Me for ever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, and in steadfast love, and in mercies. I will even betroth you to Me in stability and in faithfulness, and you shall know -recognize, be acquainted with, appreciate, give heed to and cherish - the Lord...And I will sow her for Myself anew in the land, and I will have pity, mercy and love for her who had not obtained pity, mercy and love, and I will say to those who were not My people You are My people, and they shall say, You are my God! (Hosea 2:14, 16, 19, 23)

God took Israel to the desert and kept them there until a generation was raised up who were worthy to enter the Promised Land. Repeatedly, the nation of Israel was taken through desert experiences in order for their hearts to turn to God. We see in the word that God calls and repeatedly tells Israel that they have gone "whoring" after another, (other gods) giving them the love and affection due to Him. Why does He say this? Because He viewed Israel as HIS!

The book of Hosea is an eye-opening read on how God viewed Israel. Hosea the prophet is told to take Gomer, a prostitute, for his wife as a picture of God's relationship with Israel. God wanted His relationship with HIS people lived out in a highly visible way before them so that they could
