

## Singleness Testimony 5.16.15

### Courtney Hopkins

#### **Breakup Grief**

I closed the door and stood there with my back against it, still in shock. Did that really just happen? I thought we were about to get engaged. Weren't we just talking about ring sizes in the car on the way home from a winery a few weeks ago?

As an introvert who's always enjoyed taking care of a home and family, those who know me well would probably tell you I was the kid they expected to get married first. I've always been a planner. In third grade after my family went on a college tour, I sat down with the catalog and mapped out all four years of classes to earn my bachelor's degree in education. In middle school, after I had been dating my first boyfriend for two years, I assumed that in ten years we would get married, have a couple kids, and live happily ever after. So there was no need to worry about *that* anymore. What was I supposed to do now? I didn't plan for this.

My family was away for the weekend, so it was just me and God. I talked to him, cried with him, and sat in silence with him. Confident that he was with me and that he would never leave me, I could feel his comforting presence. He allowed me to experience the presence of Christ in a way I never had before. Our God is a suffering God. So I leaned into the pain. I asked him what he wanted to do through it. I asked him to make me more like Christ, to reveal any sin, to help me forgive, and to lead me according to his will.

I found a little book about grief on the shelf, so I started reading. I was surprised to find it so relevant for my own loss. As I moved through the different stages, I brought my emotions to God and wrestled with them there before him.

#### **Surrender**

Along with the disappointment, embarrassment, shame, and guilt, I also felt a sweet sense of relief. One of the first things we discovered when we met was that we were both planning to go the same seminary and then to the mission field. I decided pretty early on that this was a "sign" from God and that it was clearly his will that we would get married. It was only a matter of time. (As a side note, I no longer think this is the way God usually works.) Blind to the deceitfulness of my own heart, I ignored any red flags along the way, shoving them over into the corner out of sight. It was only after the relationship ended that I realized I had been arrogantly trying to manipulate God's will.

But God's grace showed up in the midst of my brokenness and sin. He is gracious. He is faithful. His love is steadfast. And He was after my heart. So much so, that he pursued me and he was there, waiting for me when I turned and repented. He was

there rejoicing with me when I finally surrendered control to him and submitted to his will. He was there, already having forgiven me, scooping me up in his arms and teaching me how to rest in his love. God was always with me, even in the death of what I wanted most.

I was teleworking on Thursday, sitting in the breakfast room, when I looked out the window and saw a bunny stretch out, snuggle down on spot in the grass, and go to sleep in the morning sunlight. That's what I imagine when I think about God's love for me—that peace, that childlike trust.

Was the pain worth it? Yes! John Newton wrote, "Everything is necessary that God sends our way. Nothing can be necessary that he withholds." I have to give up the comparisons. What he's doing in other peoples' lives is his and their business. This is what God is using in my life, and whatever he uses to make me cling to him is worth it. It is a gift of mercy.

## **Struggle**

There was a release of power when I surrendered control to God. He was inviting me back to fullness of life, to share in the joy of his love. But it required death-like surrender. I began a journey of discovering who God made me to be, growing in dependence and prayer, and becoming more fully alive and awake.

I can still struggle with the expectations and pressures of our culture, including the elevated importance we've attached to spousal, parental, and extended family bonds over the past century and our romantic ideal. I've wrestled with questions like:

1. Is singleness second-class?
2. Am I too picky?
3. Is something wrong with me?
4. Should I have married that guy who was willing a few years ago?

When I'm feeling a little abnormal or incomplete, I remind myself, "C.S. Lewis didn't get married until he was 58, and lots of people think he's a pretty cool guy." And then of course there's Jesus.

But a calling also means you're saying "yes" to something. It involves affections and passion. It is consecration. This is something I'm still in the process of studying—what it looks like to live wholeheartedly as a single.

## **Marriage**

Do I still hope to get married someday? I certainly grew up with the romantic ideal. Even my brother can quote the six-hour *Pride and Prejudice*.

When I was in college I read John Piper's book *This Momentary Marriage*, and it was then that I first saw that marriage, the way God designed it, is stunning. When a

couple lives as God intended, the possibilities for sanctification, mutual self-giving, forgiveness, and loyal love are ravishing, not to mention the picture of Christ and the church.

But right now I'm called to be single. How do I know this? Tim Keller says, "If you're single today, God is calling you to be single. *But* God can change your assignment."

While I enjoy certain freedoms and opportunities that come with the single life, I'm not a wreck everyday because I'm pining for marriage, and I know that marriage comes with its own challenges, I wouldn't mind if God changed my assignment

It was only a couple years ago that I realized I could talk to God about my desire for marriage. That doing so doesn't reflect discontentment or weakness. He doesn't want reluctant compliance. He wants my heart. And he already knows what desires he will find there.

So I'm following the advice of John Stott, the lifelong bachelor, evangelical statesman, and British pastor/scholar who said to be patient, develop rich friendships, and, "Pray daily that God will guide you to your life partner or show you if he wants you to remain single."

## **God is Good**

The question, while I was in the dating relationship, was, "Can I trust God?" The most important things I've learned over the past few years may sound basic. They're that God is good and He is trustworthy.

Paige Brown wrote, "Can God be any less good to me on the average Tuesday morning than he was on that monumental Friday afternoon when he hung on a cross in my place? The answer is a resounding NO. God will not be less good to me tomorrow either, because God *cannot* be less good to me. His goodness is not the effect of his disposition but the essence of his person—not an attitude but an attribute." And so, "It is a cosmic impossibility that anything could be better for me right now than being single."

I am a daughter of the Living God. He has called me to live faithfully, to grow in dependence, to love Christ, know him more, and pour out the love and beauty of Christ in the world around me. And I am certain of this: God loves me more than I could possibly imagine.

## **Eschatological Perspective**

We were made in the image of the Triune God for community. The Bible calls us not to fulfillment, but to service. We are called to live lives of sacrificial love while maturing in childlike trust.

Just because I'm single, doesn't mean I can't have rich relationships. I am thankful for friends, teachers, kids, older women, elders, and families who are part my life here at Grace. You are my family. We are on this journey together.

I know that while I am unique, my situation is not. Barbara Hughes wrote, "All believers, both married and single, are waiting. All are enduring and persevering through their own unique trials for the blessed hope. Waiting is an active occupation for believers. As we wait, we're to grow in godliness and live self-controlled, upright lives in this present age—for the sake of the Gospel."

Oftentimes when I talk with you, I imagine we're already there, where, "we neither marry nor are given in marriage" (Mt. 22:30 ESV). We are all just sons and daughters of God, brothers and sisters in Christ, who delight to worship him and know him more. We're going to spend most of our lives there anyway, right? (This is especially helpful when talking with married guys. There's no pretense, no flirtation, just enjoying our God and each other.)

The life we currently have is not all there is. We're groaning as we eagerly await the redemption of our bodies (Rom 8:23). Life is not the way it's supposed to be. This life is vapor, a mist, a blade of grass, fading away. There we will live forever. C.S. Lewis wrote, "All joy...emphasizes our pilgrim status; always reminds, beckons, awakens desire. Our best havings are wantings."

God is enough! For now I live with the wondrous hope of that future wedding supper of the Lamb when all of our desires for community will be fully and finally satisfied.

## **Prayer**

Let's pray.

Gracious Father, I pray that from your glorious, unlimited resources you will empower us with inner strength through your Spirit. Then Christ will make his home in our hearts as we trust in him. Our roots will grow down into God's love and keep us strong. And may we have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May we experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then we will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God (Eph. 3:16-19 NLT). Amen.