

The God of Lonely People

1. Please – don't close down your hearts, ears, or your browser tab when I tell you that we are taking a one week break from Ephesians to bring you a special message. You see, this is a day on the calendar that brings some people great joy and other people great sadness. We want to give you a new story for today, a new way to view February 14th.
2. Yes, it is St. Valentine's Day. And there really was a Saint Valentine. In fact, there were 11 of them and the stories about them get all mixed up and give historians headaches. The one we best remember was killed by the Roman Emperor Claudius II when Valentine refused to renounce his faith in Jesus Christ. So why do we name today after him? That's difficult to say for certain. We DO know that no one connected his name to love and marriage until a thousand years after he died so...
3. Let's set him aside for now and deal with a very real and cruel fact: the reason Valentine's Day is all about love, chocolates, flowers, love poems, jewelry and Helen Steiner Rice cards is because that works out very well for people who sell those things. It has nothing to do with the historical, brave man who refused to deny Christ and was killed for it. It is about commerce.
4. Single people, the widowed, and those in loveless relationships go through serious and soul crushing pain on Valentine's Day. Everywhere they look, they see depictions of love, romance, and non-anatomically correct hearts. They feel incomplete, left out, unloved, and left behind because our culture's message is very clear: pair up or you are a loser. And that's a shame because God, our God, is the God of the lonely and left behind.
5. Have you read Genesis 29 lately? God tells us Leah's story. Sad thing is, everybody thinks it is about Jacob. He thought it was, too. He always thought it was about him. Or some will say it is about Jacob and Rachel. And it kind of is...and kind of isn't.
6. Jacob is in search of his extended family so that he can find a wife. (it was a land use thing) He sees Rachel and they both get very excited

about the fact that they are a good match. In fact, this is the only marriage in scripture where it is said that the man loved the woman he married (**Genesis 29:18**). Huh.

7. When Rachel takes Jacob home to meet her father, Laban, Laban offers him a job working with their flocks but asks what wages he would want. He asks for Rachel's hand. He agrees to work for 7yrs for the right to marry Rachel. So far, very Valentine-y, isn't it? But, unlike a Hallmark Channel movie, this one is unpredictable. A very heartbreaking event is about to occur.
8. The time came for the wedding and...we need to step aside here and talk about some realities of that time and place. Women were given protection by father, son and husband. They were not the stars of the wedding. In fact, most of them didn't attend any kind of wedding at all. The men would gather and party and dance with each other and drink a lot and then, often days or more than a week later, the man would enter the tent where the bride had made herself ready (see Song of Solomon for details), and they would consummate the marriage and that was you married. Not very Valentine-y. And here's the twist.
9. Laban was not a good man. Jacob wasn't either, but Laban was even worse. Tradition said that the males and females in a family got married in turn, oldest to youngest. Laban had an older daughter named Leah and she...wasn't attractive. **Genesis 29:16-17**
10. That phrase "weak eyes" has been and continues to be a real puzzle to translate. This was a time in history where eyes were about the only thing you could really know about a woman (though Rachel was able to show off her figure...which may not have been the shape you think it would be). Back to "weak eyes", the top two guesses are that 1) she was just not pretty or 2) she was too intelligent. Seriously.
11. Whatever that culture in that day said was beautiful, Leah wasn't it. She was fobbed off on Jacob on the night of the consummation. He was stuck with her and she was stuck with someone who didn't want her. Can you imagine the heartbreak in her eyes and heart when her father put her into this situation and when she saw the disappointment in Jacob's eyes the next morning?

12. She knew Jacob loved Rachel. She knew she didn't want him. She knew her father didn't want her. Every single time I read this story, my heart breaks for Leah.
13. Take a moment to think of the others – the unlovely. They are never seen on the covers of magazines and their YouTube and Instagram pages aren't ever going to be popular. They aren't celebrated on Hollywood's red carpets. What is it like for those – men and women – that the greater culture declares are the wrong height, shape, weight, color or age? Many of you know because that describes you. So...stay tuned for a bit.
14. Look at this passage: **Gen. 29:25-31**. God SAW her. The next few verses are also very important. **Genesis 29:32-35** God saw her and gave her sons – a lot of them.
15. Imagine a dance. The pretty girls have surrounded themselves with the “less than” pretty girls so they will stand out. The men line up and decide who will approach what girl and who will have to settle for “that” girl. I know this is horrible and painful and wrong at every level but it happens every day in every gathering place.
16. Now, back at that dance. We now see the strongest, bravest, most handsome man in the whole city walk in. He could have his pick of any dance partner he wants...but he crosses the dance floor and approaches the least lovely among them (in that culture's eyes), and asks her to dance. This is no cruel joke, no smirking dare. This is God and this is us even on a day like today.
17. God sees Leah. He remembers her. He blesses her, not only in her eyes but in the eyes of that whole culture. The community was shocked when it was Leah who was blessed with children, grace, status and position. But that's because they didn't know God.
18. God wanted you to know this story because you need to understand and grasp a great and serious truth: the world lies. It is not your friend. It pushes even something as precious as romantic love as a way to get you to buy their stuff and give them your money. If you feel alone and unlovely this Valentine's Day, remember Leah.

She was not treasured by men but what do men know? Seriously – what do men know? She was treasured by God. And so are you.

19. This is no one-off, either. Jesus protected the woman caught in adultery, sent out the Samaritan woman who'd been thrown away repeatedly, openly forgave and showed love and grace to a sex worker who cried over his feet at a party given by a Pharisee. I guarantee you, none of the other men present would have dared to acknowledge her presence...but Jesus forgave her and loved her.
20. Because that's the God we have. He strides across the dance floor and steps in front of the one everyone else ignores, and asks her to dance. Because she, and you, are deeply and truly loved by the only One Whose opinion matters.