

Are You Looking for Love in the Right Places?

Hardly a day goes by that I don't see a TV commercial advertising a site where you can meet Mr. or Mrs. Right. Some cater to young singles, others to the more mature and still others to those of like faith or ethnic background.

I know of a few couples that actually met and courted their spouse online and have successful marriages. I'm not sure of the percentage of failed ones.

Valentine's Day is coming up, and we are bombarded with hearts, flowers, decorations, candy and sweet recipes. Restaurants and jewelry stores gear up for what will be a busy and lucrative time, while children exchange "Valentines" in school or other functions, and even "Charlie Brown" gets in on the act with a TV special.

Invariably there will be the surprise proposal with man on bended knee being photographed as he pops the question to his intended amid sighs of "Aw" and cheers from onlookers.

For some, it's an exciting time and, for others, not so much. There are those who may not hear the words "I love you" or "Be My Valentine," and for them it may be a *very long and tedious day*.

All of us are born with a need for love and acceptance. God made us this way. Studies show that babies who are held and loved do far better than those who are not.

Because of this innate need, many of us spend our lives looking for love—sometimes in all the wrong places. We want to belong, to be part of something or someone. We seek acceptance and a sense of belonging wherever we go.

Being driven by this need can cause all kinds of problems. It might lead us to cling to our children, smothering rather than loving them and stifling their growth and development. Or it might tempt us to live in a fantasy world, dreaming of a knight in shining armor who will fill the void in our lives.

This need may cause us to look to *others* for affirmation: family members, friends, co-workers and so on. We rely on their esteem to convince ourselves we are worthy of esteem.

The truth is that as Christians, we are already fully accepted in the Beloved. We are members of God's family, precious daughters and sons of the King who are totally and unconditionally loved!

There isn't anything we can do to earn this love and acceptance. Jesus assures us, "All whom the Father gives Me will come to Me, and he who comes to Me I will never cast out" (John 6:37, MEV). We are secure in Him.

We have no need to look for satisfaction anywhere else. Yet there were times I had sought affirmation from others—and felt unloved and rejected when I didn't receive it. Has that ever happened to you?

When I asked the Lord about my actions and responses, He said: "Whenever you look to *others* for love or acceptance, you *will* be disappointed. You are *already* loved; you are *already* accepted by Me. Come to Me and receive your fill, then you will be able to be a giver of love. Share My love with others rather than looking to receive it from them. As you give, you will receive because you will reap what you sow. Accept others even as I have accepted and continue to accept you—not because you're perfect but because I love you and count you worthy of the price of My blood. You are a gift to me, bought and cherished. Cherish others as I cherish you. Love others as I love you."

Wow! That gave me a new perspective, and it was very

liberating. Because I am *already* accepted and loved beyond measure, I don't *need* others to love me. I can love them without any expectation of reciprocity. I can release them to be who they are without placing demands upon them.

I can set them free not to do something for me just because I did something for them. In fact, Jesus told us it is better for us to invite those to dinner who *can't* repay us. What He meant is that we actually receive a greater reward when we do something for people who can't or don't pay us back—it is a greater indicator of our love.

Make a decision today to stop looking for love in all the wrong places and find it in God. Then you will be a vessel through which His love can flow out to others. Receive it from Him that you may give it out—and watch how you reap what you sow!

Prayer Power for the Week of Feb. 7, 2016

As you pray this week, embrace God's unconditional love for you, let it fill you heart, express it back to Him and share it with others. Ask Him to direct your steps to those who desperately need to know they are loved so that you can be a vessel of reconciliation and acceptance. Pray for those struggling through personal and economic loss as well as the ravages of winter weather. Continue to pray for worldwide revival and the soon return of our Lord. Lift up our nation and its leaders, the upcoming elections, more laborers for His harvest fields, Israel and the persecuted church (Jer. 31:3; John 6:37; 1 John 1:4; 1 John 4:19).