

Quest for Love

True Stories of Passion and Purity

Elisabeth Elliot



Fleming H. Revell

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Ask the former generations
and find out what their fathers learned,
for we were born only yesterday and know nothing,
and our days on earth are but a shadow.
Will they not instruct you and tell you?
Will they not bring forth words from their understanding?
Can papyrus grow tall where there is no marsh?
Can reeds thrive without water?
While still growing and uncut,
they wither more quickly than grass.
Such is the destiny of all who forget God;
so perishes the hope of the godless.
What he trusts in is fragile;
what he relies on is a spider's web.

Job 8:8–14

Let us be Christ's men from head to foot, and give no chances to the flesh to have its fling.

Romans 13:14 *Phillips*

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Introduction

The universal quest for love has always had its difficulties. At present it seems to have become a minefield—a very dangerous place through which, in order to thread one’s way safely, one needs a guide who is thoroughly acquainted with the course.

This is mostly a book of stories, stories about how men and women find each other. Some of them, following the best of all guides, did it wisely. Others did not. I hope my readers will discern which examples are worth following.

To marry or not to marry is first of all, gentlemen, an issue for *you*. Most of us women would like to have a husband, and quite a few of us believe that men should do the wooing. We may be as educated, as smart, as capable of making big money as you are, but we were not created to be competitors, and we really don’t want to do the hunting. We want you to do it.

But how? Many are the ways in which a man has won a maiden, but the wisest man who ever lived confessed that this was a matter too amazing for him. If it stumped Solomon (who, be it remembered, had three hundred mistresses and seven hundred wives), what chance has an honest young man today amid the myriad causes of confusion that Solomon never had to contend with?

For our blessing and joy God ordained marriage. It follows, then, that Satan opposes it—craftily, powerfully, hatefully.

People take their cues from stories, but movies and television have destroyed *context*, the associated surroundings within which stories are understood. The meaning of home, fireside, the loyal lifetime love of a man and a woman, the security of a father's lap—the dependable context in which love used to be learned—is gone. How much extra-marital sexual activity goes on because the media portray it as far more exciting than marital love?

During the Vietnam war, tradition was questioned, ridiculed, and finally trashed. What parents had taught no longer carried any weight. The Baby Boomers (those born between 1946 and 1964) stumbled into new territory. Tradition and custom, which have endured because they *work*, became pejoratives—restrictive, irrelevant, uninteresting. What mattered was to do one's own thing, and there were no directives for that.

One Baby Boomer wrote to me, "I was in high school from '68-'72. The world turned upside down. The sexual revolution took full swing, my schoolgirl fantasies of love and romance died a slow and painful death. Courting and respect disappeared. Dating became a battleground, virtue a hindrance instead of a ticket of entitlement. To maintain high moral standards in this world spells a lot of rejection for a woman nowadays. I have prayed for a Christian man with high ideals but never found one. The majority of men in our society do not believe in moral ethics or virginity. Mother always told me men were gentlemen in the majority, and didn't pressure nice girls. Wish I'd been born in that era! To do what is right is a timeless truth."

Feminist doctrine has caused bewilderment about the true meaning of masculinity and femininity. We were told that the difference between the sexes was a mere anatomical triviality that had nothing to do with our respective

places in society, the workplace, the church, or the home. We believed the lie about equality and interchangeability. As women learned self-assertion and aggressiveness, men learned to feel guilty about being men, and began to back off. Those whom God created to be initiators, protectors, and providers no longer understood their assignment, and women wondered why they were not being sought.

A woman lawyer from New York City wrote, "The church is plagued with weak men and strong women (the latter in much larger numbers). It seems that men have become effeminate (some to the point of becoming gay) and women have become overly aggressive, both personally and professionally (myself not exempted).

"The more aggressive 'masculine' men (to whom I find myself attracted) are usually non-Christians. Christian men are afraid of commitment, unduly uptight about their sexuality, afraid to express interest."

As you read the letters and stories that follow, study the revelations of the hearts of men and women. Do they not cause you to tremble at the thought of trifling with such? I found myself turning constantly to God, beseeching His help for my helplessness, asking His wisdom.

Moral blindness and stupidity result from an unwillingness to learn from the experience of elders. "When venturing into new territory," wrote Lance Morrow, "where mere habit will no longer suffice, people require the stabilizing, consoling, instructing influence of other human tales."

The truth of that statement was brought strongly home to me at a student convention in Kansas City. When my turn came to speak I was not surprised to see skepticism on some of those bright young faces. What could this old woman possibly have to say to people young enough to be her grandchildren? My talk was entitled "The Path of Endurance." It was about, of all things, sexual restraint.

They listened—very quietly—because I told them a story. It was the love story of two college students who, though wildly and helplessly in love, endured. They managed to keep their clothes on and stay out of bed until their wedding night five years later. I urged my audience to guard the priceless and irreplaceable gift of virginity with which each of us is born, to keep it intact for the right person, not to squander it on the wrong one. That’s the way it was meant to be. Abstinence greatly enhances the pleasure that the Creator of sex had in mind.

The response was astounding. Total silence while I spoke. Eyes glued to the speaker. You would have thought I had discovered something original.

When I finished there was not only applause. They leaped to their feet. They stamped. They whooped, whistled, and cheered for what seemed a long time.

What did this mean? I believe it substantiates my deep conviction that in every generation there are those who not only hunger for the truth, but also search desperately for a high, even an “impossibly” high, standard. What standards have been held before them for the past few decades? They have watched the movies, the videos, the TV dramas. They have read the romance and adventure novels. They have drunk in the messages, “Everybody’s doing it,” “You’re not a man till you’ve slept with a woman,” “You have a right to your own body,” “Use it or lose it,” and “Who can tell you what’s right for *you*? Do what feels good! Don’t let anybody jam their morality down your throat!”

Those students heard a different story and on that same day bought six thousand copies of a book called *Passion and Purity*. Many of them already knew too much about passion but had hardly heard of purity.

A man named Scott wrote to me, “My life will never be the same after that bitter cold December evening in Kansas City when I sat in the Civic Auditorium and heard the words that changed my life forever. Tears streamed down

my face. I realized my life would never be the same. I know my marriage will be enriched by my abstinence until that special night."

I began to get letters not only from high school and college students, but also from readers of all ages, letters that described crazily destructive ways of going about finding that elusive thing called romance, or, more often nowadays, "relationship." I learned of woeful misconceptions regarding masculinity and femininity, story after story of the calamitous results of the dating game. Many bewailed what they called the "loss" of their virginity, forgetting that they had chosen to give it away. When what had been called repressions and taboos were lightly discarded, that wonderful sexual "freedom" that had held such promise generated unimagined misery. College physicians found themselves treating male students for *impotence*, for when you look for satisfaction in many beds you find it in none.

There was also a surprising number of letters breathing a sigh of relief that someone else in the world believed what the letters' authors believed about purity.

"I agonized through *Passion and Purity*, hating it and loving it. You tell it as God expects it, and it hurts a lot."

"I've decided I won't date any guy until he reads it and tells me he agrees with it!"

"If I ever have a serious girlfriend she'll read P & P."

"It introduced *faith*, a foreign concept to most of my age group."

Of course I challenged the girl who told me she'd read the book two hundred times: "You don't really expect me to believe that, do you?"

"Honestly, Mrs. Elliot, *two hundred times!*"

One girl said that when she reads *Passion and Purity* on the subway she finds people craning their necks to read over her shoulder.

People told me how difficult it was to stand alone among their peers. An officer who had been in the army for eight

years recounted ingenious schemes women had tried in order to rob him of his virginity.

A twenty-two-year-old man wrote, "I've read P & P (one of my all-time favorites) about seven times. Practical, roll-up-your-sleeves Christianity, too often lacking among Christians of my generation. We've had our ears tickled and we are tired of it. We make P & P required reading for all incoming freshmen men in our Christian group at Harvard."

"Why hasn't somebody told us this stuff?" was a question that became a motif in those letters. Why had they not heard it, as I had, from parents, teachers, preachers, college professors? Why had they not had access to the stories of those who had waited, endured, and found the joy of self-denial?

That book had nothing new, nothing innovative, nothing original to say. The story was my own, of course, but the principles were not of my own devising. Were they Victorian? No. Much older. The story was simply the vehicle for some timeless truths that had been articulated over and over, far more effectively than I was able to do. The trouble was these young men and women had been carried away by tales in which self-indulgence and uncontrolled passion were presented as the highway to happiness and fulfillment. Their heroes were athletes and entertainers who regarded sex as a game, the body of one of the opposite sex as a toy, and who boasted of sexual promiscuity as though it were a laudable achievement, even a virtue.

Those letters set me to mulling over this dangerous game called dating. When we were college students Jim Elliot had once bought me a Coke and once invited me to accompany him to a missionary meeting. That was as close as we came to dating. No danger there. It is heartening to hear from men and women who perceive the fallacies of that game, have made up their minds to enhance

their passions by preserving their purity, and have chosen the path of obedience. Read the excerpts from biographies of a few decades or a century ago, when dating was unheard of. Read the letters from contemporaries, stories of a faithful Shepherd's bringing two people together. No two stories are alike, for He knows His sheep, calls them by name, and leads them in paths of righteousness.

I leave it to the reader to discern the better way.

I hope the Scriptures that head each chapter will help toward this discernment. Some individuals or groups may find further help in the reflections that follow the chapters.

1

A Matter of Timing

I trust in You, O LORD;
I say, "You are my God."
My times are in your hands.

Psalm 31:14–15

"I married late, at thirty-three. This was approximately twelve years after the time I first wanted to get married. Twelve years doesn't seem so long now, but then it seemed an eternity.

"For about half of those twelve years, I tried the world's way of getting married. Not being a Christian, I assumed the burden of finding a wife was entirely my own. I never had the stomach for singles' bars and computer match-ups and that sort of thing, but I was ever the eagle-eyed hunter. Whatever business each day involved, a part of my attention was always given to the hunt. Was this the day? Was she the one? Should I have started a conversation? Should I have pressed her for a date?

“This approach created much anxiety and regret. I was haunted by the thought of missed opportunities, or of not having exerted myself enough. Even when an acquaintanceship got going, it gave little satisfaction, since I could tell pretty soon that it wouldn’t lead to marriage. What it did often lead to was emotional entanglements, false hopes, and bruised hearts.

“By twenty-six I was getting nervous as one after another of my friends got married and started families. Then various providences brought me to Massachusetts, where I became a Christian and was baptized.

“When the church’s view of courtship and marriage was explained to me, I was flabbergasted. What? Stop hunting, stop dating, just leave it to God and *pray*? And go through a *minister*? Accustomed as I was to going after what I wanted, this seemed almost a cop-out; it was too passive, practically un-American. Yet it also had an appeal, especially as I observed the happy families of those who had gone that route. There seemed to be some proof in the pudding, and I ventured to try it.

“At first it brought a marvelous sense of relief. For the first time in years I relaxed, letting go and letting God. I fully believed that He wishes to grant us the desires of our heart. I’d waited this long; I could wait a little longer for the perfect wife God had in store for me.

“Then, as lonely weekend followed lonely weekend, my resolve began to weaken. I had a good job and a new circle of Christian friends. I even lived with a godly couple who tried to disciple me. But the ‘old man’ in me began to kick at the new constraints. After all, didn’t God help those who helped themselves? Wasn’t this waiting for Heaven’s choice a little extreme?

“The upshot was that I decided to cheat. I went through the cycle one more time, till conscience gnawed and my relation to God withered. I finally broke free after a timely warning from a minister. Then, leaving behind more hurt

feelings, I moved closer to fellowship with the church people, for my own protection.

“Subsequent years were spiritually rich and emotionally rocky. By thirty-two, being single had become my quiet obsession. I didn’t discuss it much but had begun wondering if God wanted me never to marry. The prospect tormented me. I recognized that many single people seemed fulfilled and happy, that Scripture endorsed either condition and even seemed to give an edge to singleness, that great works of faith had been accomplished by the unmarried, not least by Jesus Himself.

“But still, I wanted to get married. If lifelong bachelorhood was to be my cross I wasn’t sure I could bear it. Each passing year deepened the sense of isolation, of deficiency, of not fitting in. I found myself half wishing I were a Catholic; at least those in religious life who never married got some spiritual ‘credit.’ But to be Protestant and single just meant feeling left out.

“Even as anxiety deepened, God planted a name in my ear. It was of someone who, on the face of it, seemed highly unsuitable. The gaps of age, background, experience were too great. Yet the thought wouldn’t go away.

“God had acted likewise with the young lady. It finally came out, and we were swept together in what felt like an arranged marriage—arranged by God. I never sensed His will so clearly. And His choice was vindicated by a union so blissful that a description of it would sound gloating.

“For me, the most striking lesson of it was the superiority of God’s timing to mine. My wife, revealed daily as an ideal partner, is twelve years younger. At the time I felt ready to marry, she was in the fourth grade. It wouldn’t have done, and so I had to wait.

“Of course I didn’t know that at the time. Like Job, I saw only my own immediate woes. Lacking God’s perspective, I kicked against the pricks. We’re told to trust, given examples of His faithfulness in both Scripture and

our own lives, and yet how easily we forget and begin to doubt Him!

“My advice to singles who want to marry is: hang on. Don’t despair of God’s resources, so infinitely greater than ours. Don’t limit His capacity to bring a mate out of nowhere, when the pool of candidates seems small and hopeless. Don’t chafe at Scripture’s stress on waiting to know God’s will in the matter. He has a will for you, whether you follow it or not. When you get ahead of God and try to force things, the consequences are often tragic. The statistics tell the tale; so do the personal cases we all hear of misfired romances and wretched marriages.

“The way of courtship I learned in our church, as unusual as it seems in these times, appears to me to be God’s answer to today’s confusion. Those who grew up understanding these things do not always appreciate them, and often take sound and happy marriages for granted. They may hanker for a more ‘normal’ approach, whereas those of us who have tried ‘normality’ can testify to its inadequacy.

“In the end, of course, none of us can assure the happiness of anyone else. Nor can we just glibly urge patience on single people, since it may not be God’s will for them to marry. But we can comfort one another and give mutual encouragement in the acceptance of that will. Whether we’re single or married, life will bring sorrows, but our touchstone of joy remains the steady bearing of a yoke that is in the long run ‘easy,’ and ‘light.’”*

* Tom Griffith in *Times of Restoration* (Amherst, N.H.: Kingdom Press, January 1987). Used by permission.

Reflections on “A Matter of Timing”

What Tom did:

- stopped dating
- prayed
- accepted a minister’s help
- stuck with the church
- hung on
- did not despair
- waited
- bore Christ’s yoke steadily

What God did:

- planted a name in Tom’s ear
- timed things perfectly