

Crocker Versus Friedan: When Neither Betty Will Do

A young woman, from birth to graduation, between reading fairy tales about Prince Charming and hearing that she can be *anything* she wants when she grows up—teacher, doctor, lawyer, astronaut, even president—receives a wide range of competing recruitment messages about what she should do with her life.

Some signals say she should develop her marketable talents, seize professional opportunities, and strive for career satisfaction. Other messages tell women that their highest purpose is to marry and have children. Confronted by these rival perspectives, a young woman may feel not only personally conflicted but also pushed like a pawn in the great cultural debate over whether women's worth should be measured by Betty Crocker or Betty Friedan.

Whatever other answers we may have given about what we wanted to be when we grew up, the fact is, for many of us the waiting period for marriage has been much longer than we would have liked or expected. In the meantime, necessity usually demands that we get on some sort of career track, whether we like it or not.

For the single woman who enjoys her work but also anticipates marriage, the debate over whether to measure a woman's worth by mother value or market value doesn't really connect with life as she currently knows it. On the mother scale she doesn't rank at all, but she hopes to one day. On the market scale she may score high, but she doesn't want that to count against her prospects for achieving the traditional goals of marriage and motherhood.

SHE SAYS: IMAGINING A DECADE OF SINGLENESS AHEAD

"Girls feel unfulfilled, unworthy, missing out, because they're not dating and not on the marriage track and don't see it on the horizon," said Sharon, twenty-nine, who works with university women. "Two of the senior girls are getting married this summer, and the others look at them as if to say, *They're more together, they're on a better road, their life is better than mine.*"

I asked young women to picture themselves single ten years from now. Here are some of their responses:

Wow. I have never considered that. Thinking of that situation I feel sad and lonely.

—Erin, 25

I will have a lovely little apartment and take dancing lessons... Thinking about that is a feeling of rather intense contentment.

—Laura, 25

I would be extremely sad, even slightly depressed, and very disappointed. I would lack confidence in myself and doubt myself as being someone who is capable of finding love and being loved.

—Kate, 24

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It brings a feeling of pain and loneliness. Most of my friends are married with families, so I often feel like I'm being left behind. I feel alone.

—Anna, 26

I am not as concerned with being single as I am with the observation of others: "Why is she thirty-three and still single? What is wrong with her? Who can I set her up with?" The idea of being single for the next ten years does not scare me, but the stigma of being a single thirty-three-year-old sort of does.

—Gina, 23

I have friends at that point, and I often feel sad for them, but I don't think that they feel as sad as I do about it. Today I see that as sad, but at that point I would hope I would have good examples to show me how to honor God through that singleness. However, I very much desire to be married before then.

—Rachel, 25

My initial reaction is just to block this idea out. I know that's not a good reaction, so I begin to think through being single at forty, and I remind myself that God is the One who has numbered my days. He has promised to never leave me or forsake me, and I can trust in His faithful plan for my life.

—Kristin, 25

Ugh! I really hope that's not the case, but if it is, I hope I will have faith enough to know that God holds my every day and path in His hands—and His plan is perfect and will bring me more joy than anything I could come up with myself.

—Ellen, 26

Loneliness, stemming from the fear that I will not have someone to share life with—both the joys and the trials.

—Stephanie, 22

I feel a little discouraged, but only because I would like for my circumstances to be different ten years from now, married or single. I would like to be more independent, living on my own, etc. I guess it's hard to imagine not being married by then... After all, there's always eHarmony...just kidding... sort of!

—Becky, 24

In one sense, I would be disappointed, because I do want to be married. Yet in another sense, I guess it would just depend on what I'm doing instead. If it was something that I loved, then it would be okay. I would need the balance of social interactions.

—Paige, 23

Disappointment and dread.

—Elizabeth, 27

What's more, neither perspective offers solid criteria for making sound decisions about the very practical concerns of her life between college and marriage.

From Twilight Zone to True North

Stranded between the autopilot of adolescence and the anchor of marriage, a girl can feel adrift in some twilight zone between legitimate episodes of her life. That's the risk of fixing our sights on Destination Marriage as the North Star. Rather than navigating surely, we're more likely to be chasing shooting stars and getting more and more disoriented in the process.

By contrast, God's call helps us orient ourselves toward a fixed point of reference: Himself. Not ourselves, not men, and not marriage. From there we can make sense of practical choices about jobs, continuing education, housing, and finances without getting confused by the bombardment of cultural assumptions, others' opinions, or our own feelings.

Choice has come to be regarded as the essential element of the modern American way of life: where we live, how we make a living, what we believe, what we do with our bodies. Choice is the essence of freedom, or so it goes.

But unlimited choice is not the same thing as unlimited freedom. Setting aside choices that are simply wrong or harmful in themselves, choosing from among good options is still a challenge. Too many choices—not to mention the voices of opinion about them—can be dizzying and disorienting. Choice, in and of itself, is

not so liberating as the capacity to choose well. To choose well is to make a decision for the right reasons; *why* we choose something is as important as *what* we choose.

True freedom involves choosing that which allows us to direct our passions and energy toward the purposes for which we were created. The best guidance helps each one of us discern our own path within this maze of options, mapping it out with purpose rather than idling between milestones.

God's call provides that kind of guidance. A heart set on a pilgrimage is poised between what is and what God has yet to bring about after the next turn. It seeks purpose and joy in each part of that journey.

Balancing one's outlook between things here and things hoped for is a constant challenge. We can't control everything going on around us, but we are responsible for the disposition of our hearts toward those external circumstances. We're not responsible for what others might think of us and our decisions, but we are accountable for the choices we make.

The following sections of this book—parts 2 and 3—survey some of the cultural changes that have taken place over the last generation. These changes have resulted in new opportunities for women, but they also have brought with them new confusion. It leaves single women who'd like to be married in a tangle of social assumptions, perceptions, and personal expectations. Following God through that confusion is the challenge of walking by faith in new cultural territory.