

Eight

The Sense of Callings

Ask a young woman in her midtwenties to picture herself single ten years in the future, and her heart will likely sink at the prospect (see the answers I got to that question in chapter 2). But what if that fear becomes a reality? What if singleness sticks around until she's into her thirties—or even beyond? How will she be content while one of her major life goals remains unaccomplished? What should she do in the meantime?

Life in-between shouldn't be killing time or spinning wheels. Women like Carli, Emma, and Hilary—who are on the other side of that decade of singleness—convey what it's like to have a sense of purpose in-between. These women share some striking characteristics. Each has walked single for a decade or more, wrestling with her own expectations and those of others while dealing with the practical questions of life on her own. She may spiritually and emotionally struggle with being single at times, but she has found contentment in her present circumstances while hoping for something more. She is living with a heart poised between now and not yet. Here's a closer look at her profile:

- *She lives deliberately.* She is intentional about choices in life, from work to church to friends. She wants to use her gifts to make a difference, both now and in the future. She feels frustration when she observes others not being deliberate about relationships or even life in general.
- *She is reflective about her experiences.* Her struggles have made her evaluate herself, and she uses her experiences to smooth rough edges or to adjust course. She generally owns her faults and talks about men and relationships with a gracious and measured tone; she is sometimes disappointed but isn't grudging. She is reconciled to life circumstances that haven't worked out exactly the way she might have wished.
- *She seeks balance in her life.* Variety characterizes her interests, pursuits, and relationships. She may have had to learn it the hard way through burnout, but her life is about more than her job.
- *She knows her vulnerabilities and makes choices accordingly.* If she recognizes a tendency toward loneliness, bitterness, or jealousy, for example, she takes steps to avoid or overcome it. She may keep a full schedule of meeting friends, choose not to live alone, or avoid spending too much time around others who are bitter about their singleness.
- *She views life as an adventure, not a pity party.* She does not think that she's missed out on life. She has enjoyed the freedom to travel, to pursue her own interests, and to set her own priorities. While she wants others to recognize the

struggles of singleness, she doesn't want others to pity her as though her life were incomplete.

- *She takes reality in stride.* At times, unexpected challenges demand her attention, from family crises to medical issues. "Life intrudes, and you just deal with it," said one thirty-nine-year-old who recently had to help her single mother through a serious illness.
- *She continues to hope for marriage.* She doesn't hide her desire, but she doesn't pine for it either. She is seeking marriage to deepen her life, not to escape it.
- *She has an elastic view of future married life.* She thinks outside the box about how marriage, family, and work would fit together for her, especially as childbearing years wane and professional expertise accumulates. She is not adamant about keeping a career; in fact, she may be quite ready to be done with it. But she can probably picture a whole spectrum of choices that she may not have seen at twenty-two. She views marriage as a partnership, a process of reconciling callings. If she is to marry, it will be to a man she respects, whose leadership she esteems.
- *She is encouraged by what God has done in her life.* She sees purpose in the course her life has taken, even in unexpected singleness. She may realize she would not have been as ready to marry at twenty-three as she thought she was, or that she could not have imagined the places God has taken her or the ways He has stretched her, but she is glad for

how she has changed as a result. Singleness has strengthened her spiritual life, and she may even marvel at the way God has used it for her good and the good of others.

- *She has a sense of purpose anchored in God.* Life has sometimes shifted unpredictably, and she may be unclear about what she'll be doing a few years down the road, but she has a "go with God" mentality that gives her a sense of security, contentment, and even joy. She has developed an outlook that life is a pursuit of multiple callings; the specific conditions may change, but her life is all on track.

What does it take to have that sense of contentment and direction? To begin with, an understanding of God's call, which transcends current circumstances.