

Why We Fear (and Crave) Commitment

Recently, I attended my friend's bachelorette party. It was tasteful compared to typical bachelorette festivities, but one thing kept us talking.

That night, my friend received a plethora of congratulations, too many to count. This might be as expected considering her mock wedding veil and the sash that read, "bride to be."

So what was striking? It was found in the congratulations.

Some quickly wished her well. But most took another look and said, "Better you than me."

One young gentleman, after giving his congratulations, remarked to me, "she knows that means she's stuck with that one guy for life, right?"

Many couldn't comprehend how this educated, friendly, beautiful young woman could throw away her freedom. They marveled at her excitement for marriage, at the tender age of 22.

"Marriage is a good thing, and I'm marrying a great guy," she said simply, smiling. (This is true, her fiancé is stellar.)

They didn't argue with that. Instead, the conversation shifted. They assured her they were *totally happy she's happy* ... adding that they themselves *just weren't ready yet*. (Which, for the record, was never suggested.)

At that point, many of the well-wishers turned wistful, "I wish I was ready, I want to be, someday, just not yet."

It was amusing yet heartbreaking to hear the progression of their sentiments. It ended in searching self-reflection. Guys and gals alike engaged in an inner dialogue right in front of us. What was it that fascinated people with my friend? Why did they turn from an apprehension to a longing of marriage?

Start with the first question, why the fascination?

My friend and her fiancé hold a traditional view of marriage.

They will say yes to a life-long, committed, exclusive

relationship, so important they will vow it to each other in front of God and man. With [marriage rates](#) falling and [divorce rates](#) around 50 percent, that is becoming rare, and intriguing to young people.

Why the apprehension?

English writer G.K. Chesterton critiques the modern man as having an aversion to vows. He suggest that the modern man is mistrustful of himself to keep any vow, painfully aware of his weakness In an [essay](#) he writes,

“The man who makes a vow makes an appointment with himself at some distant time or place. The danger of it is that himself should not keep the appointment. And in modern times this terror of one’s self, of the weakness and mutability of one’s self, has perilously increased, and is the real basis of the objection to vows of any kind.”

Another English author, C.S. Lewis, suggested that fear comes into play.

In his book [The Four Loves](#), he says,

“To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken...”

If this is true, then why the longing?

Allan Bloom, author of [The Closing of the American Mind](#), thinks commitments enrich our lives,

“The young want to make commitments, which constitute the meaning of life, because love and nature do not suffice.”

And Chesterton says we don’t understand the nature of love if we believe it ties us down. In the same essay he says,

“They (modern man) appear to imagine that the ideal of constancy was a yoke mysteriously imposed on mankind by the devil, instead of being, as it is, a yoke consistently imposed by all lovers on themselves. They have invented a phrase, a phrase that is a black and white contradiction in two words—‘free-love’—... It is the nature of love to bind itself, and the institution of marriage merely paid the average man the compliment of taking him at his word.”

Those who claim to not be prepared for marriage may indeed be wise to wait. It is reasonable to say that not everyone will, should, or can be married. But does the modern culture leave young people with a narrative that they must fear and mistrust love? Wouldn't it be a pity if that's what kept them from taking the step forward?

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