

Small Group Guide THE CROSS AND CHRISTIAN SINGLENESS

The Church at Brook Hills

Dr. Jim Shaddix

July 21, 2013

1 Corinthians 7:25-35

Use this resource as a tool to help Christ-followers move forward in their spiritual growth. To do this well requires that the Small Group Leader is building a relationship with the individuals in the small group and has identified where the people are in their relationship with God. Are they Christ-followers? Are they growing in Christ? If so, in what areas do they need to grow further? As disciple-makers, Small Group Leaders shepherd people to know the truth of Scripture, to understand why it matters, and to apply it to their lives. Small Group Leaders come alongside those whom they disciple to discover how loving God, loving each other, and loving those not yet in the Kingdom should shape how they live. The structure of this resource coincides with moving people from knowledge (Main Truth) to understanding (Why It Matters) to application (Now What Do We Do?). Utilize this Small Group Guide as a flexible teaching tool to inform your time together and not as a rigid task list.

GETTING STARTED

Welcome – Incorporate time for greeting one another, enjoying any refreshments, and making announcements. If guests are visiting, make introductions and help them feel welcomed. Ask for their contact information, so you can follow up with them.

Looking Back – Provide an opportunity for small group members to share what God is teaching them, how they are applying what they are learning, and how He has given them opportunities to share the gospel with others. This can be done as a whole group or in smaller groups. Do the people know each other well enough to share more than surface level information? How can time together be used to foster deeper relationships among those in the small group? Also, what are the struggles and needs of the people in the small group? How can the people in the small group sacrificially serve each other?

Looking Up – Hold prayer as fundamental to small group time rather than supplemental to it. Give adoration and thanksgiving to God in prayer. Submit yourself to Him, confessing sin. Petition God for personal needs and other requests. Pray for the disciple-making efforts of those in the group and for the salvation of the lost in each other's families, spheres of influence, and in the world. The Weekly Prayer Focus below can also be incorporated in the group's prayer time.

Weekly Prayer Focus (from Our Worship Guide)

- *Pray for Our Lives:* Pray for God to sustain single adults in our faith family who are content in their singleness. Ask Him to grant spouses to those single adults who feel compelled to desire marriage. Pray we will look to Scripture to teach us and to help us teach children and students how to pursue godly relationships. Pray we will all maximize any advantages to our situations in life for God's glory and Kingdom. Ask God to help all of us find our identity in Christ and not in our relationship status. Pray we will all celebrate singleness and all the advantages it brings with it.
- *Pray for Our City:* This week we are praying for the ministry of The WellHouse. The WellHouse is a Christ-centered non-profit ministry that offers immediate shelter and transitional housing to women who have been trafficked, are prostituting, or are otherwise sexually exploited (www.the-wellhouse.org). We are also praying for First Baptist Church of Alabaster and Steve Andrews, Pastor.
- *Pray for Our World:* This week we are praying for Brook Hills field partner Stacie serving in East Asia. Stacie serves as an English teacher at a local university. She

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spends the majority of her time engaging students in English by teaching stories from the Bible and hosting gatherings at her house. Stacie hosts many Brook Hills teams who come and strengthen the long-term work she is doing there. Join us as we pray for Stacie and the Brook Hills teams that are serving with her this week. We are also praying for our short-term team led by Ralph Parrish serving in East Asia.

MAIN TRUTH

Message Outline

The Cross and Christian Singleness 1 Corinthians 7:25-35

Admonishments to Single Christians...

- If you and your body are compelled, consider marriage one of your goals.
- If you and your body are content, consider singleness your status quo.

Advantages of Single Living...

- You can be completely assured of Jesus' favor.
 - He says singleness is "good."
(1 Corinthians 7:1,8,26)
 - He says singleness is a "gift" from God.
(1 Corinthians 7:7)
 - He says some people "do even better" to remain single.
(1 Corinthians 7:38)
 - He says some people are "happier" if they remain single.
(1 Corinthians 7:40)
- You can be better prepared for Jesus' coming.
(1 Corinthians 7:26-31; cf. Matthew 6:19-20; 24:3-51; Luke 12:32-33; 20:34-35; Romans 13:11-14; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; 5:1; Colossians 3:1-3; 2 Timothy 2:4; Hebrews 10:34; 1 John 2:15-17)
 - You have fewer family responsibilities.
 - You have fewer emotional connections.
 - You have fewer earthly possessions.
 - You have fewer worldly attachments.
- You can be totally given to Jesus' service.
(1 Corinthians 7:32-35; cf. Matthew 12:46-50)
 - Your attention and devotion are attractive.
 - Your attention and devotion are undivided.

Message Summary

In this passage, Paul addresses a question posed to him by the Corinthian church concerning singleness. His response is couched in the truth that singleness is a good assignment by God and has many advantages.

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Particularly for living in pursuit of what is eternal, singleness has many advantages over being married with a family. Although Paul clearly stated that marriage is not sinful or undesirable, he frames the advantages of living single in light of Christ's call for believers to be on guard and ready for His return. In view of the eternal, singleness allows one to be fully devoted to Christ without the distractions of a family. However, if one is compelled by biblical purposes and motivations to marry, then he or she should consider marriage a desirable goal to prepare for and to pursue.

WHY IT MATTERS

Digging Deeper

This week's message continues to discuss Paul's admonishments to the Corinthian church to live in a holy manner, particularly regarding one's sexuality and marital status. In this passage, Paul continues with the theme of "status quo" that was discussed in last week's sermon by advising those who are single to remain in that status if they are content to do so. Paul was not teaching that marriage was undesirable but that we are living in times when eternity is at stake for souls around the world. As such, one should not marry because it is expected but because singleness is not an option. What are some reasons that people give for getting married? **Review Dr. Shaddix's purposes and motives for marriage from "The Cross and Christian Marriage (Part 1)": proclamation, procreation, partnership, pleasure, and purity.** Paul clearly stated that marriage is neither a sin nor something that should be viewed as less desirable than singleness. However, unless one is committed to those purposes of marriage and is motivated for marriage for those reasons, he or she should be content to remain single for the sake of the gospel. **Encourage single members to evaluate their motivations for marriage or singleness. Encourage married members to evaluate their purposes for marriage in the past and to address how they can make any necessary changes in their lives to better reflect a biblical purpose of marriage.**

Many who read Paul's letters consider his words about marriage and singleness with an errant attitude. Some even argue that Paul hates marriage, and, therefore, we should pay little attention to his teachings about it. Giving more fuel to this fire is the fact that Paul clearly stated up front that these teachings were not directly from Jesus. It is at this junction that we must be careful to remind ourselves and our small group of a high view of Scripture. When we view the Bible as God's inerrant Word, we believe that the Holy Spirit guided all of the writers and the circumstances in which they were writing to deliver God's inerrant and sufficient Word. Therefore, we can accept that Paul's instructive writings about marriage just as his teachings about deacons or salvation, were guided by the Holy Spirit and protected by the hand of God over millennia to be available to us today. **Invite members of your small group to discuss possible implications of rejecting Paul's teaching about marriage and singleness as part of Scripture.** How would that affect how we interpret other parts of Scripture not containing direct quotes or teachings of God the Father or Jesus? What does that indicate about our tendency to interpret Scripture with a personal bias?

In our culture, both secular and church, amorous relationships are often the end goal of personal relationships. **Lead members to discuss this tendency and how it impacts our views of marriage and singleness.** How is marriage often elevated over singleness? How is this thinking destructive both to marriage and to singleness? How does our church culture (not the Bible) often influence us to view singleness as less desirable? How and why is that a disservice to single believers?

If you have single members, consider inviting them to share how they either believe or oppose the thought of singleness as a calling of God. Encourage them to share how others have spoken lies into their lives about the goodness of singleness and about the truth of singleness. **For groups with both single and married people,** discuss the theology communicated by statements people make to singles (i.e., "As soon as you're satisfied with God alone, He'll bring someone special into your life" or "Before you can marry someone wonderful, the Lord has to make you someone wonderful"). Are there any specific needs of singles in this faith family? How can this church come alongside singles to encourage and serve them well?

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Encourage the singles in the group to evaluate whether they are making the most of their singleness for the glory of God or if they are wasting time either waiting for a spouse or perpetuating rampant immaturity. Point them to examples in the Bible such as Paul and Jesus as examples of those who remained single and how they used their singleness for Kingdom purposes.

If you have married members, consider inviting them to share how they deal with challenges of living a life focused on wholehearted devotion to the Lord. Explain that God ordained marriage, and He can use it for His glory. Encourage them to brainstorm ways that they can specifically use their marriages as a means by which the gospel is spread. Examples in the Bible include Aquila and Priscilla in Acts 18.

The glory of God and the furthering of His kingdom is the focus of every Christian, whether single or married. According to Paul, if one is not content to remain single, then he or she should pursue marriage to glorify God and to further His kingdom. If one can remain single, then it is God's will that he/she be single, at least for a period of time, because his/her singleness should be an instrument of glorifying God and furthering His kingdom even more so than if he/she were married at this time.

As you lead members to discuss these questions, be sensitive to the fact that many married members may be in a difficult marriage and many singles are single because of hurtful circumstances such as divorce, heartbreak, or death. Also, be cognizant that marriage may definitely be a part of many single's lives at some point down the road, but that, for whatever reason, they are single now. Encourage those members to be confident in God's sovereignty and timing in their lives and use Paul's exhortation to be fully devoted to Christ as He reveals His plan to them in His time.

NOW WHAT DO WE DO?

Group Discussion & Application

Use the following questions to help review the application of God's Word to our Head (What does God want me to know?), to our Heart (What does God want me to desire/value?), and to our Hands (What does God want me to do?).

- The Corinthians had questioned Paul about singleness, and his response is contained in today's Scripture passage. What are the implications of the very existence of this passage concerning the value of singleness in God's Kingdom?
- Considering Paul's multiple teachings about singleness, marriage, and family, as well as the overarching message of Scripture, why can we not entertain the idea that Paul considered singleness to be better than marriage or vice versa?
- How many times in 1 Corinthians 7 does Paul indicate that singleness is good and desirable? What does this reveal about God's work in the life of a single person?
- How does our culture (including our church culture) often ignore or refuse the truth that God legitimately calls people to singleness—either for a time or for a lifetime? Why do we ignore or refuse this truth?
- What comments or actions do we make (or hear) that reveal an attitude that expects marriage of all people? What does this imply about our belief about the value of singleness in God's Kingdom? How can we create a culture that embraces God's temporary or permanent call to singleness?
- How can those who are compelled with their bodies and hearts to marry pursue marriage according to biblical standards? Practically, how should single men biblically prepare for marriage and pursue a wife? Practically, how should single women biblically prepare for marriage and respond to a godly pursuit?
- In general, all people are single for a time in their lives. In light of this truth, how can those who are parents teach our children and encourage our single friends to utilize their singleness for the gospel?

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- In view of Paul's teaching that God may assign some to be single for a lifetime, how can our current culture often pervert this calling and lack of desire to pursue a relationship with the opposite sex? Why is a clear teaching and valuation of singleness, therefore, highly important?
- What are the advantages that Paul gives for being single in light of the importance of having an eternal focus in preparing for Christ's return?
- How can we capitalize on our singleness to be better prepared for the return of Christ? Why is it so easy to waste this time?
- Considering Scripture's teaching about the importance of the gospel in marriage, why would it be better to remain single than to marry and leave our family in shambles?
- How can we fulfill our God-given responsibilities to our marriages and families while continually putting God first? How can we avoid a broken and disheveled family while pursuing service to Christ?