



small groups

Discussion Guide



A Family For All

1 Cor. 7

Front Porch

(Ice Breaker — 5 minutes)

Discuss

- Betsy Nichols is the only single member of the IBC preaching team, but the team purposely made the decision not to assign this message to her. Do you think that was a good decision? What did it mean to have Andy deliver this message instead of Betsy?

Sitting Room

(Lesson Review — 45 minutes)

Christian Singles Are Essential To God's Family

Andy equated singles with the Army's Delta Force, which was created in the 1970s as a group of "highly adaptable and completely autonomous small teams with a broad array of special skills for direct action."

Read 1 Cor. 7:32-35

Discuss

- What parallels do you see in Paul's observations about singles and the Army's definition of Delta Force?
- Jesus was single and Andy suggested that he probably had well-meaning friends and family members who tried to set him up. Ask the singles in your group if this happens to them and how they feel about it.

Christian Singles Are Fruitful In God's Family

Andy made an interesting point about singles making a unique contribution to future generations. IBC Interim Young Adults Director Chris Spalding, who consulted on this week's message, agrees. He says, "When I hang out with my married friends and their kids, it's good for me, for them, and for their kids. And since we're in relationship, what's important to them becomes important to me. Don't feel bad for us singles or worry that we'll have 'more cool' things to do. We might really enjoy a Kindergarten graduation. Ask us."

Read Mark 10:29 and Mark 3:31-34

In his book *When The Church Was a Family*, Joseph Hellerman asserts that this teaching of Jesus was revolutionary because Jesus was requiring loyalty to one's church family over loyalty to one's natural family. Our modern litanies of loyalty that say we should value God, family and country in that order are not in line with Jesus' words here. To Jesus, loyalty to the family of God was part and parcel with loyalty to God himself. If that was our practice, Christian singles would feel much less left out in churches.

Discuss

- What do you think of Hellerman's assertion that Christians are called to love one another more than they love their very own families?

Christian Singles Are Deserving From God's Family

Andy outlined significant contributions to Christianity by single people down through the centuries – from the Apostle Paul, Timothy, Dorcas and Phoebe in the New Testament – to Augustine, Francis, Joan of Arc, and Teresa of Avila in early church history – to Martin Luther and John Calvin, the great reformers – to modern-day servants and shepherds at IBC. He listed several IBC singles who serve faithfully in our church and around the world.

And he said the church should bless them in return, not by pushing them toward marriage, but by inviting them into fellowship.

"One of the best ways Christian communities can support chastity is to ensure that married people and single folks are in relationship with one another. Fostering relationships between married and

single means not assuming that “couple” is the basic unit of Christian identity. It means asking the single person not only who are you dating? but how is God calling you to be faithful now as you are? It means making sure you have an odd number of chairs at your dinner parties.”

– Albert Hsu, *Single at the Crossroads*

Andy said, “Both estates are purposeful and beautiful in God’s economy. Marriage proclaims the intimacy of God’s love, but singleness proclaims the sufficiency of God’s love. Both messages are desperately needed.”

Discuss

- If your small group is homogeneous, ask everyone in the group how they would feel about adding some diversity. If you’re a couples group, who are some singles you could invite to visit or join? If you’re a singles group, what couples would you like to hang out with?
-

Kitchen

(Application – 10 minutes)

Even if it doesn’t change the roster of your small group, this teaching can change our attitudes about singleness and diverse community at IBC.

Discuss

- What’s one step you can take this week to reach out to someone from the opposite estate? (Married, if you’re single; single if you’re married.)

Close in prayer for the IBC family.

Recommended Reading

One of the best books of recent years on this topic is *When The Church Was A Family*, by Joseph Hellerman. It’s a great read. If you’d like a free copy, contact Katie Geurin at kgeurin@irvingbible.org.