




TALKING POINTS WALKING POINTS

Leaders' Guide

A publication of , the adult discipleship ministry of Triangle Community Church.

Talk together about the glory of God's kingdom. –Psalm 145:11
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. –Joshua 22:5

Questions for Discussion & Reflection

- Think for a moment how singles and singlehood are portrayed by Hollywood:
How are young singles (say, eighteen to twenty-five) presented?
- 1** How are single women in their thirties presented? Single men in their thirties?
How are single women in their fifties and beyond presented? Single men at that age?
- 2** What is the **underlying value statement** that is being made by each of those characterizations?
Evaluate each of those value statements biblically.
- 3** Which of those "Hollywood values" have you found yourself buying into?
- 4** Think for a moment how singles and singlehood are viewed at TCC.
How much of that view is shaped by Hollywood? By the Scriptures?
- 5** What role could/should each of the following play in bringing our views in line with Scripture:
♦study ♦repentance ♦faith ♦love ♦fellowship
- 6** What steps do you think married TCCers can and should take to enfold and encourage singles?
- 7** What can and should single TCCers do in order to be better enfolded into the life of TCC?

Application-Challenge

8 As a Community Group, what's **our** next step?

Note: The following applications flow from the six observations concerning singleness. The bracketed numbers correspond to the numbered observations (see Sermon Summary):

- [1]** Know that your marital status here has no bearing on eternity.
- [2]** Know that being single and celibate doesn't make you less whole as a human being.
- [3]** Use your freedom and flexibility as a single to fully pursue your relationship with Jesus Christ.
- [4]** View singleness as a gift rather than as a burden; thank God for this opportunity to serve Him.
Determine to live a morally pure lifestyle.
- [5]** Look to meet your legitimate relational needs through your brothers and sisters in Christ.
- [6]** Don't fret over the question of a future mate. Allow God to work that out in his way and timing.

- 1 In this series of questions you're guiding your group to identify the major cultural "evaluations" of unmarried men and women. At this point, just focus on "what" is observable. For example:
 - Eighteen to twenty-five year olds generally are presented as too young to marry. They're still "finding themselves"—and they certainly must not "settle"!
 - An unmarried woman in her thirties is under the pressure of the biological clock. An unmarried man in his thirties often is portrayed as afraid of commitment. (These statements may, or may not, be true.)
 - How are singles in their fifties, sixties, and seventies presented?
 - Encourage your group to brainstorm all of the various messages Hollywood gives for different age groups.
- 2 Dig deeper than the surface representation. What is each portrayal saying is good, true, right, or advantageous in each characterization? Follow up each observation with a **biblical** evaluation of it.
- 3 This will take some personal vulnerability—be prepared to "prime the pump" with your own story.
- 4 Be careful with this question—it's easy to "generalize" one experience or comment into a trend. We want to be charitable in our evaluations (who among us hasn't put our foot in our mouth?). Look for objective evidence of TCC's values, and then evaluate them Scripturally. As a leader, bear in mind the impact of circumstances on shaping church culture—the reason why one church doesn't emphasize (for example) young adult ministry as much as another may be because one church is located in the suburbs, while the other is next to a university or downtown condos. Churches have to **take into consideration** their God-ordained audience, while at the same time not **allowing** demographics to put blinders on all that a church may be **called by God to do**. Use wisdom in guiding your group's discussion.
- 5 God uses a variety of things to reshape our views to conform better to Scripture. Take for example, Romans 12:1-2. Personal consecration (involving repentance) plus Bible study are clearly involved—but what led a person to repent and study? How did God use fellowship with other believers, and growing in love for folks "not like themselves", how did those things motivate a believer to repent and study? What role did faith play in being willing and able to trust God for deep, heart-level change? Play around with this question a bit, turning it over and looking at it from multiple sides, so that your group explores **the dynamics of** personal growth and change.
- 6 Although this question and the following question are two sides of the same coin, stick with what marrieds can do to enfold and encourage singles. Generate a list of possible actions.
- 7 Now, move onto the other side of the coin. Singles also have the ability to build deep connections—and not just with other singles. For example, offering to babysit so an exhausted couple can have a much-needed date night not only is an example of Jesus' teaching that "it is **more** blessed to give **than** to receive" (Acts 20:35), but it likely will lead to a deeper friendship with that family which will produce many additional blessings for years to come.
- 8 Choose at least one concrete action you all as a Community Group will take to enfold singles. Make concrete plans to actually do it.

Sermon Summary

The Bible has a lot to say about being single.
Here are six observations we can make:

[1] Marriage, as we know it, is a temporal institution that will not endure in eternity (Mark 12:24-27). If there is no marriage in Heaven, then you don't have to worry about singleness being some kind of a relational disadvantage in eternity. The loneliness that being single sometimes brings here on earth will not be perpetuated in heaven.

[2] Jesus Christ, the most complete human person who ever lived, never married. The single, celibate adult is not less whole than the sexually active married person. He was the most complete human who has ever lived, and he never once had sexual intercourse. This can be a liberating truth for those who are tempted to think, "Unless I experience sexual intimacy with another person, I will somehow be less than what I was meant to be." One of the purposes of salvation is that we become like Jesus Christ, and so we can rest assured that the need to experience marriage or sexual intimacy is not a barrier to achieving Christlikeness. Jesus was—and is—infinately whole!

[3] Singleness provides an extraordinary opportunity for undivided devotion to Jesus Christ. As a single person, you have much greater flexibility than your married friends. Compared to your married friends, you are able to focus more singly on your Christian walk and ministry (1 Corinthians 7:32-35). You should take advantage of this opportunity! This is the time to develop the disciplines of regular Bible study and prayer. This is the time to fully devote yourself to worship, fellowship, and ministry. Pastor Doug's daughter, a nurse, took advantage of her single status to serve on an extended medical mission trip, bringing God's love to the disadvantaged people of Madagascar.

[4] Singleness is a gift from God (1 Corinthians 7:7)—and we need to view it that way. If you are single, you should thank God for this time in your life when you are able to more fully devote yourself to knowing and serving Him. This is a time of growth and preparation.

[5] Jesus promised that those who forsake family for the sake of the kingdom will be repaid with a new family: the church! (Mark 10:29-30) With respect to being unmarried, Jesus is saying that those who choose the kingdom road of obedient singleness, rather than marrying outside of the will of God, will find that forsaken marital relationship replaced a hundredfold with a new spiritual family: the church. Singles, you need not be lonely. In Christ's church, you have a family where you can find the love, acceptance, and encouragement you need to become the mature man or woman God desires.

[6] God is sovereign over who gets married and who does not. That being true, we need to trust him to sovereignly work out his will for our lives in the area of singleness and marriage. Allow God to be God in this area of your life. Focus on the person God wants you to become, and allow him to sovereignly direct you either into singleness or into marriage. You can trust him. He loves you. He wants what is best for you, and he knows what is best for you. Enjoy the gift of being single!

Talking To God About This Week's Message

"Heavenly Father, today I want to be a 'doer' of the Word, and not just a 'hearer'. Amen."

Talking To Others About This Week's Message

If a neighbor or friend at work asks you, "*What kind of stuff do they talk about at your church?*", how would you summarize the most important elements of this week's sermon and the key lessons you intend to apply to your life? Can you explain it in **plain language** anyone could understand?

Digging Deeper in your Daily Quiet Time

We're no different than people in biblical times—believers in Corinth wrote Paul to get his opinion on a number of issues (notice Paul's repeated phrase, "Now concerning the things about which you wrote...", see 1 Corinthians 7:1; 7:25; 8:1; 12:1; and 16:1)—and questions about marriage and singleness topped their list! Let's learn from several notable singles in the Bible...

Monday—First, the Apostle Paul: Read 1 Corinthians 7:1-7.

- The latter half of v. 1 ("It is good for a man not to touch a woman.") apparently is **a quote of the Corinthians**. How does v. 2 begin? Does Paul enthusiastically embrace their view? Why or why not?
- Apparently, overcoming temptation is both a good reason to get married and to maintain satisfying sexual life within it (v. 2, 5). Yet Paul was not married! Is he being hypocritical? How do you explain the fact that Paul didn't take his own advice?
- Have you ever heard of a "charismatic"? The Greek word, *charisma*, means a "gift". What was Paul's gift (v. 7)?
- Open your Bible (or search online) for the maps of Paul's missionary journeys and travels to Rome. In "airline miles" (which they weren't!), Paul's travels equaled over 13,400 miles—more than halfway around the globe! The cost in today's dollars for his travels (by foot and ship) would have been almost \$425,000 per person! (It also took over twelve years of travel!)
- Read 1 Corinthians 9:5. In light of the above "costs" of Paul's travels, comment on what might have happened to the spread of Christianity had Paul been married.
- How have you personally been enriched by Paul's choices?

Tuesday—Now, let's consider the Prophet Jeremiah. Read Jeremiah 15:1-9.

- Jeremiah often is called "the weeping prophet" (9:1). From what you've read, what were the days of Jeremiah like?
- Read 16:1-4. What special calling did God have for Jeremiah?
- If Jeremiah would have married and had children, what additional difficulties would he have experienced?
- Although God's instruction in 16:2 must have been hard at the time, how was singleness actually a **blessing** to Jeremiah?
- What "blessings in disguise" have you personally experienced (or, are you experiencing) through singleness?

Wednesday—Read Exodus 1:8-10 and 1:22—2:8.

- You've just read about the birth of Moses, and the role his sister Miriam played in saving his life. Read Exodus 15:1-19. What did Moses grow up to become and to do? So, what can be said about Miriam's contribution to Israel's greatest escape?
- While Moses led the children of Israel out of slavery, Miriam led the women of Israel—perhaps hundreds of thousands of them—in her own song. Read Exodus 15:20-21. Miriam played the timbrel (tambourine)—and so did all the rest of the women! Envision and describe the situation.
- Miriam never married, but instead accompanied and assisted her little brother Moses in the salvation of the Jewish nation. Who do you know who has used their singlehood to assist in the accomplishment of a large task?
- Read Luke 9:29-31. On the Mount of Transfiguration, with whom did Jesus speak (v.30)? About what did they speak (v. 31)?
- The word translated "departure" is the Greek word, *exodos*. So, God chose to use the Jews' exodus from slavery (made possible, humanly speaking, by the sacrificial service of a single woman!) to pre-figure our exodus from enslavement to sin! How might God use your (or someone else's) singlehood to significantly accomplish the goals of his church?

Thursday—Anna, married for seven years, widowed for sixty! Read Luke 2:21-40.

- Mary and Joseph clearly understood Who and What their son Jesus was. Yet Simeon's and Anna's words had a powerful impact on them (v. 33, 38). What do you think their visit to the Temple would have been like had they not met them?
- With whom did Anna speak about the Redeemer?
- Anna was eighty-four at the time. Young women typically married around age fifteen, so she would have certainly been a widow from age twenty-five onward. What thoughts do you imagine ran through her mind during her 30s? 40s? 50s? 60s? 70s? Now in her 80s, what "clicked" and made sense about her life-path?
- What would eighty-four year old Anna say to her younger self? What would she say to you?

Friday—John the Baptist never married. Read his story in Matthew 3.

- From what you've read, describe John's person, lifestyle, and calling.
- What kind of wife would relish the lifestyle described in v. 1-4?
- Read Matthew 11:2-19. Describe John's person, lifestyle, and calling.
- Read Matthew 14:3-12. Describe John's person, lifestyle, and calling.
- Do you think John **wished** he had been married? At what point do you imagine he made peace with God's call on his life?

Saturday—Jesus, of course, is the Ultimate Single...

- Read John 11:1-8, 20-27. What three words would you use to describe Jesus' relationship with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus?
- Read John 13:1-5. How is Jesus' love for his disciples described? (Note, Judas was still among them!)
- John (the author of The Gospel of John) never named himself in the book he wrote. Read John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2, 7; 21:20. **What did he** call himself? **Why** do you think he identified himself that way?
- What is more notable about you—your first name or the fact that Jesus loves you? Why do you think that? (By the way, it appears that John never married either. What impact do you think Jesus' love had on him?)