



Text: 1 Corinthians 7:6; 32-35
Bible Teacher Ben Stuart

1. Have you ever had a time similar to Ben's story about the gifts, that you either received something or were in a season of your life that you received with joy in the moment but later turned out to be a source of pain and frustration and/or you disdained a gift in the moment but later it turned out to be the source of great joy and meaning? What or when was it? What did you learn?
2. What about the current season you are in? Each season has its own benefits (which we tend to play down) and its challenges (which we tend to play up). What are the benefits of your current season? How do you leverage the benefit of the season you are in to pursue God?
3. Read Psalm 84.
 - a. What does this Psalm teach about where the highest joy is found?
 - b. If you were honest, would you agree with the Psalmist? Where would you say that you are looking for greatest joy? Your spouse? Your child(ren)? Your success at work? Your material possessions?
 - c. What are you longing for that you believe will fulfill your deepest longings? The spouse you don't have? The child you don't/can't have? Your dream job? A better/nicer house/car? How might the second half of verse 11 influence how you view the absence of those things you long for?
 - d. Compare this with Luke 11:11-13. How is God described? How should this effect how we understand the "gifts" that the Lord has either given or withheld from us? What does Jesus say is the greatest gift God could give?
4. Read James 4:14.
 - a. How does this verse describe one's lifetime?
 - b. Read Psalm 90:12. What does the Psalmist say will be the result if we truly understood this?
 - c. Read Psalm 16:11, Luke 10:27, Matthew 28:18-20, 2 Corinthians 5:6-10. What do these verses teach about what we should devote ourselves to with the time we have been given?
 - d. How are you or could you begin to live this sort of life?
 - e. Would you say that in your typical day to day life that you live with a focus on this life or on eternity? How can we best "play with the clock in mind"?
 - f. Ben gave two examples of how this should influence how we live our lives. We should be devoted to God's Word and to His work. How have you been doing with your Resolve for More commitments? What do you need to (re)commit yourself to? Do you have a certain cause tugging on your heart, like the girl with the heart for orphans in Africa, that the Lord might be calling you to get involved with? What can you do about it?

Challenge: Read Matthew 19:11-12. What “sacrifices” would you have to make to be obedient to what the Lord has called you to?

Prayer: There is power when God’s people pray together. Spend some time in your group praying those in your group and in our church who are single.

- View singleness as a gift whereby God has secured a season of undistracted devotion to Himself (1 Corinthians 7:7).
- Use their season of singleness as an opportunity to single-mindedly serve & please God (1 Corinthians 7:32-35)
- Devote themselves to doing radical, time-consuming things for God
- Seek to spend time with married couples & families who are functioning biblically, to observe & prepare for marriage if God wills at a future time.
- Place their hope in Jesus and pursue Him with their whole heart.

STUDY DEEPER

3 Reasons Married and Single People Should Be Together in Groups

I didn't mean to join a group of married couples, but I've learned a lot along the way. When I was in my twenties, almost every small group I was part of consisted of single people also in their twenties or early thirties. While this was a fun stage of life to walk through with other singles, it was also a season with a lot of transition. Every month or so, a big life changes seemed to affect members of our group: job changes, break ups, engagements, job losses, graduations, new dating relationships, relocations for work, and weddings. Someone was always going through a major transition, and this translated into a high turnover rate in group members. As I entered my thirties, more and more of my friends were married and I found myself trying to balance relationships with both married and single friends.

Then it was my turn to change jobs. Because I was leaving to work at another church, it also meant connecting with a new small group. Rather than landing in a small group of other singles, I found myself as a 33-year-old single woman in a small group with two married couples with kids. As it turns out, I love being in a small group with married people. Here's why:

1. Single people have a lot to learn from married people.

I love the fun and freedom I experience as a single person. It's a season where nothing holds me back from chasing my dreams, and my schedule and finances truly are my own to do whatever I want. As much as popular culture wants to tell me that I'm living the dream, though, wisdom tells me there's more to life. Narcissism and hedonism are two very real temptations for this stage of life. Being grounded in healthy relationships with the married people in my small group brings much needed stability, balance, and perspective I might otherwise miss in this stage of life.

Whether it's a gaining a window into a healthy marriage, or watching how others parent their kids, more is caught than taught in small groups. The gift of catching these life lessons from my small group is priceless, and it sets me up to have healthier family relationships of my own one day.

It's easy for single people to sit around with other single people and give dating advice, but there's a reason Jesus warns against the blind leading the blind. I've come to treasure the dating advice from the married members of my small group. Not only have they successfully found, dated, and married their spouse, but they also share both the male and female perspective—something I miss when I'm only around other single women.

Being invited into a family is also an incredible gift to singles, particularly if they live far from their own family. My parents, siblings, nieces, and nephews live far away, and when my small group invites me to kid birthday parties, it's an invitation to experience a beautiful slice of life that I often miss. The New Testament uses family as the primary image when talking about church for good reason. Humans are made to live in family systems, but sometimes career, education, or other opportunities cause us to move away from family. This provides a unique opportunity for small groups to step in and integrate singles into a new kind of family.

2. Married people have a lot to learn from single people.

Have you ever considered that a significant portion of the teaching that you've built your life upon has come from people who would check "single" for their marital status? Jesus and Paul were both single, and between the life and teachings of Jesus (all four Gospels), and the life and teachings of Paul (half of Acts and the majority of the epistles), most of the New Testament comes from people who were never married. That includes some of the powerhouse passages about marriage like Matthew 19, 1 Corinthians 7 and 13, Ephesians 5, and Colossians 3. Just because someone isn't married doesn't mean they can't offer wisdom and speak into the life of a married person.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 7:32–35 that it is better to be single because a person's attention is undivided in serving God. This, too, is the perspective that having single people in a small group can bring. Just as the temptation for singles is building their own personal kingdom and caring only about themselves, the temptation for married couples is building their own little family kingdom and missing out on contributing to the kingdom of God. Having a few singles in your small group might actually help the group stay focused on spiritual growth and outreach rather than getting caught up in marriage and parenting concerns.

The U.S. Census Bureau reports that around half of Americans are single: divorced, widowed, or never been married. While it's hard to pin down an exact statistic of how many adults in church are single, it's a safe bet that anywhere from a third to a half of any given congregation are single. Consider, too, married people who attend church without a spouse. We need to intentionally integrate singles into ministries—especially small groups.

3. Marital status is not the most important part of our identity.

Small groups are about learning to follow Jesus together, applying what we're learning in practical ways, and encouraging and supporting one another as we work to advance the kingdom of God. Jesus calls his disciples to "seek first the kingdom of God." The most important part of my identity is that I am a child of God. I happen to be in a single stage of life, but in no way is "singleness" a core part of my identity. The same is true for married people. I know too many women who have lost sight of their identity as a follower of Christ because the identity of "wife" and "mom" became all-consuming in their lives. We do a disservice to single people when we make "singleness" the most important part of their identity and send them out to be only with other singles, as if they were a leper being sent to a leper colony.

Rather than "seek first those who are in the same stage of life," let's gather together, blending married and single people and focus on seeking Jesus above all else. When we grow in discipleship, we'll be impacted in countless ways—one of which is our relationships. When we grow, we might experience stronger marriages, close relationships with our children, or healthier dating relationships. But our focus is on Jesus rather than our earthly relationships. The most important part of our identity is not a box we check about marital status. We must never lose sight of the fact that the defining feature of our identity is who we are in Christ.

While there are times and seasons for married people to gather and for single people to gather, I'd like to advocate for offering some small groups that welcome both married and single people. Let singles decide for themselves if they want to be around married people or not; that's not a decision that should be made for them.

There are practical challenges that go with this model, of course. The schedule of a single 30-something most likely looks very different than the schedule of a married couple with two young kids. But we shouldn't let these challenges hold us back.

As a single person, I joined a small group because I believed the people in that group would challenge me to grow in my faith—and because I liked spending time with them. They just happened to be married with kids. I've learned that we're simply better together.

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<http://www.smallgroups.com/articles/2016/3-reasons-married-and-single-people-should-be-together-in-g.html?paging=off>