

I DO: A Sermon Series on Marriage, Singleness, and Parenting

At the very beginning of the book of Acts, just before He is about to ascend back into heaven, Jesus tells His followers that they will change the world. Jesus' followers, a group of jacked up, uneducated, freaked out, Galilean peasants, had no clue what to do next. They gathered together in a stuff room on the roof of a house to pray.

After several weeks of praying, God showed up in power. And, these freaked out Galilean peasants stepped out in the market place with supernatural boldness. They proclaimed the Gospel and 3000 people became Christians in one day. Once again, Jesus' followers had no clue what to do. What are we supposed to do with all these people? How are we going to make sure that these new Christians grow? How can we continue to bring Gospel to more people in our city, country, and world?

The early church's answer to that question was Life Groups. The early church met in groups of 10 to 20 in various houses throughout Jerusalem. And, in these groups, men and women lived life together, they studied God's Word together, they challenged each other to grow together, and they lived on mission together.

What was true then, continues to be true today. Real growth, life changing growth, happens in the context of Life Group Communities. I became a Christian the summer after my freshman year of college. And, at the first Christian event that I attended, I met a group of guys who would take me under their wing. We didn't have formal times when we met together. But, we lived life together, we challenged each other, we encouraged each other, and we grew spiritually together. Later that same year, I got plugged into a college ministry. They invited me to be a part of a Life Group on campus. This Life Group was significantly more formal. We met for an hour and a half every week. We walked through a lesson, sometimes with a video. Both of these Life Groups, one more informal and one more formal, were integral in me growing in my faith as a young believer. From then until now, I have been in some sort of Life Group Community and the Lord has consistently used that community to draw me closer to Him.

Our dream at Fellowship is that every neighborhood and people group in Southwest Missouri would have some sort of Life Group Community. This is our dream because we long to see lives changed in Southwest Missouri and life change happens in Life Groups.

This curriculum is designed to make our Life Groups as effective and life changing as possible both for the participants and for you, the leaders.

CONTEXT OF A LIFE GROUP

Life Groups that flourish have three characteristics in common:

1. They are vulnerable. In our world of social media and staged instagram pictures, almost nobody has a place to be real. Our Life Groups must be a place where people can be real. They must be places where people can share the hard, messy, ugly parts of their lives, in addition to the fun, exciting, and easy parts. Leaders, this starts with you. Your Life Group will only be as vulnerable as you are.
2. They are compassionate. In our world of marketing, people feel used almost constantly. Almost nobody has a place where they are genuinely cared for. Our Life Groups must be one of those places. They must be places where people don't need to be fake, but where they can know that they are cared for. Leaders, this starts with you. You must genuinely care for people in your Life Group.
3. They are exciting. In our world of cynicism, almost nobody has a place where they can be genuinely excited about what God is doing in and through them. Our Life Groups must be one of those places. They must be places where our eyes are lifted out of the ho hum of our daily lives to the bigger picture of how God is changing us and changing our world through us. Leaders, this starts with you. No one will be more excited about your Life Group than you.

CONTENT OF A LIFE GROUP

We have all been to Life Groups that are nothing more than sterile Bible Studies. A fill-in-the-blank question here and a Sunday School answer there. And, we have all been to Life Groups that are essentially just hanging out. Frozen espresso drinks are great but coffee shops and various levels of caffeine don't change lives. Real Life Groups, Life-changing Life Groups have deep relationship and challenging engagement with God and His Word. You must have both.

The following curriculum is designed to foster both engagement with God's Word and deep community with those involved in the Life Group. Every Life Group will have four parts:

1. Connect (10 min). This usually happens at the very beginning. Much of this will be informal as people are eating cookies or just hanging out for the first several minutes. But, some should be formal. You should try to begin every Life Group with a fun or funny introductory question.
2. Discuss (35 min). Every Life Group will spend some time in God's Word. This should happen through reading a passage of Scripture and asking open-ended questions to discern what that passage means and how it applies to our life. For each passage, this curriculum will give you around 7 questions to choose from. You do not need to use all these questions. They are meant to give you tracks to run on as you plan your Life Group.
3. Relate (25 min). Every Life Group will have time when those who come can be real and vulnerable about their lives. This should be done in all male or all female groups. The two questions that should guide this time are: What has been the highlight of your walk with the Lord this week? and What has been the biggest struggle this week? Remember, leaders, you must lead out in this. This is intended to be an opportunity to confess sin/temptation and celebrate growth. And, leader,

you will need to model vulnerability and engaging in heart issues not simply surface issues.

4. Impact (5 min). Every week, your Life Group should pray about people that they are going to invite next week. Life Group is not an island. It is a launching pad for impacting people. That starts with this part of Life Group.

IMPACT OF A LIFE GROUP

There are some people in your Life Group who will become Christians because of your leadership. There are others who will be challenged to live on mission for a lifetime and they will. There are others who will become missionaries in their workplaces or overseas because of what they experience in your Life Group.

Leading a Life Group is a weighty responsibility. We prepare well for Life Group because the potential for impact is so great! But, the ripple effects of leading a Life Group this year could be felt to the ends of the earth and into eternity. Welcome to a great adventure!

A VISION FOR MARRIAGE (Ephesians 5:22-33)

CONNECT

As a connection activity during this series, each week, have one married couple in your Life Group share the story of how they met and eventually got married, or, have a single share their testimony and how they came to be in Southwest Missouri

DISCUSS

What stands out to you from these verses?

What was your biggest takeaway from the sermon?

In the sermon, Justin said the marriage is “both the hardest and the most beautiful relationship that he has experienced.” How have you experience this as true in your marriage or marriages that you have encountered?

“Christian marriage is a lifelong covenant between one man and one woman instituted by God.” What most strikes you about this definition of marriage? What are some ways that this definition is attacked in our culture?

Paul argues that marriage is a living, breathing picture of the way that Jesus relates to His people. What are some ways that this is true?

What is the upward spiral of love and respect that Justin talked about? Wives, share some ways that you have felt loved by your husband. Husbands, share some ways that you have felt respected by your wives. If you are not married, share some ways that you have seen husbands love wives and wives respect husbands.

There is a downward spiral of lack of love and lost respect. Describe a time in marriage when you have experienced this.

RELATE

What has been your biggest spiritual highlight this week? What has been your biggest spiritual struggle this week?

IMPACT (Invite, Engage, Share)

Pray for one person that you can trust the Lord to impact this week.

BIBLICAL SINGLENESS (1 CORINTHIANS 7:25-38)

CONNECT

As a connection activity during this series, each week, have one married couple in your Life Group share the story of how they met and eventually got married, or, have a single share their testimony and how they came to be in Southwest Missouri

DISCUSS

What stands out to you from these verses?

What was your biggest takeaway from the sermon today?

What would you consider to be the greatest challenge for unmarried people in our culture?
What would you consider to be the greatest challenge for unmarried people in our church? If you are married what were some of your greatest challenges before marriage?

Justin described people who despise singleness and people who idolize singleness. How have you seen either in your interactions with unmarried people?

Paul challenges unmarried people to be “anxious about the things of the Lord.” Justin paraphrased this by saying that Paul challenges unmarried people to be “filled with Jesus.” What are some ways that you seek to be filled by Jesus? Whether you are married or unmarried, what are some of your greatest challenges to being filled like that?

What are some of the advantages that Paul gives for singleness? What are some of the cautions that Paul gives unmarried people?

Justin told single people that our church needs them. How have you seen this to be true? If you are married what are some ways that you can better care for unmarried people? If you are not married, what are some ways that you can get more involved in the life of our church?

RELATE

What has been your biggest spiritual highlight this week? What has been your biggest spiritual struggle this week?

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