

Date	October 24, 2010
Series	Extreme Makeover Family Edition
Title	Extreme Makeover Family Edition, The Call to be BE ADOPTED/INCLUDED not overlooked (Lord of the ring-less)
Big Idea	Jesus saw people for who they were, not for what they did NOT have.
Text	John 4:4
Speaker	Roger Valci

5. The Call to be USED to be ADOPTED/INCLUDED, not overlooked (October 24)

Happy Days. Little House on the Prairie. Leave It To Beaver. Family Ties. All of these traditional family TV shows were based on organic families: mom, dad, brother and sister. Although there may have been a time in America where this was the case, today's families have a much different look and feel. The traditional family isn't necessarily "normal" any longer. With over half of marriages ending in divorce, "singleness" at different points throughout life is more common than ever.

And it comes in many forms: Never married. Divorced. Widowed. There are so many people looking for *family* to widen their circle and give them a place at the dinner table.

This week, we give voice to a group of people who face challenges much different than those of the traditional family. These people face life **alone**. Sure, life is filled with relationships, activity, careers and purpose. These are people who love to interact with others during the day, have aspects of life that are rich and fulfilling, **but who come home at night to an apartment or home where there is no one to greet them, no one with whom to review the day, or watch a movie, or pray, or share household tasks.** People who are often overlooked by a group or family that will reach out to them and even embrace them. They scramble when holidays come, wondering what they are going to do and if they will have someone with whom to share these sacred days. Even something as simple as finding a seat in church on Sunday morning can cause anxiety in their soul.

My hope is that after our time together, we will find someone else sitting beside us next time we eat our Sunday afternoon meal.

Introduction:

I am surprised how **personal** this message has become for me. I obviously don't fit officially the category of the group we will talk about today, but **my life as well as yours is surrounded by people who do**. In fact, **four members of my team** at the church are in this "group". By interviewing and reflecting several people in the church, **I have come to see that my life is full of people around me whom I love and admire dearly** that are, for lack of a better word, **SINGLE**.

*Chief amongst them is my mom. I grew up in a divorced home. My mom worked 3 jobs and did the best she could to provide and live a life for us on her own. Being only ten at the time, I didn't have the maturity, nor the insight, to appreciate the gallant efforts she put forth in those early days. I believe she was making around \$6.50 an hour as a nurse while running a house with 3 small children and pay a mortgage. She had: no one to fix the car, no one to care for the house repairs, no man to draw the line for the kids, no adult in the home to share the day's event with. **She was truly alone**. Even her own family stepped out of the picture. To make ends meet, we even rented a room in our house to another divorced woman. Now that I look back, I guess it seems a bit strange to say that two divorced women raised me through my tween and teen years, but that is what happened.*

*Down the street was a Christian family who shared the gospel with my mom, even prayed that she would accept Jesus as her Savior. They invited us to the local AG church that is now called Harbor Light. Being a divorced women in the church in the 70's seem to put my mom on **the outskirts**. **Every sermon, social group and class seemed to be geared around the organic families**. She entered and exited services. Tried to find an affinity group, but none existed. She went for about a year, and then stopped. No one called. No one noticed. No one missed her. She never stepped back into a church until her son became the Senior Pastor at VCC some 30 years later. Some how that moment triggered*

something in her need for Christ. She now goes every week to a Calvary Chapel church in southern California.

This morning is my privilege to speak on behalf of my mom and those like her. Right here, in this room today, **are numerous people who find themselves unmarried.** They may be **divorced.** They may be **widowed.** They may have **never had the opportunity yet to be at an altar and make the vows of matrimony.** They comprise **46% of the U.S. population** and it's about time we address their world.

In all my years of church, I have never heard a message that directly speaks to **the joys, struggles and hopes of a single person.** When we laid out this family series last summer, I heard people around me say, **"Don't forget us singles."** I heard you, so here we are today. We even purposely cast two characters in our family sitcom that are not married **just to reflect that reality and those needs.**

Landmines:

However, though I believe in my heart **the target today is the right one (Jesus certainly cares about the situation, struggles and callings of single people), I have much apprehension on speaking on this particular demographic.** There are several **landmines whenever a person speaks about or on behalf of another group.** I have done my best to interview numerous people in this fellowship who fit the category. I only hope in the end that the singles here **feel heard, affirmed and embraced.**

Though I have labored hard and read these notes over and over again to find the best words, I still have that uneasy feeling that I may have wrongly characterized or used language that may not exactly fit those in this situation. **I ask for your forgiveness for my limitations and shortcomings. My frailties aside, this topic and this group needs a voice and I will do my best to give them one today.**

Theological Teaching:

Last Wednesday, I overwhelmed the family class with dozens of verses, stories from church history, Biblical principals, even a handout as we talked about **the principles and implications of the 5th**

commandment to honor your mother and father. This morning, though I believe our time will be as profound and insightful, though I will not cover massive amounts of Scriptures together.

In preparing for this message, I came to the reality that it is not easy crafting a sermon on singles. **Think about my dilemma with this subject. What book of the Bible do I turn for this topic? What story do I turn to? You can't get much from a concordance search on the word, "Single".** I had a difficult time this week bridging my research to the text.

That being said, this is perhaps **the most loving message I may have ever written.** I hope it touches your heart as well. I cried a few times during the interviews and conversations. **In fact, the best takeaway I can give you today is the handout Kelly Kindall wrote in the bulletin.** I asked several people to write down their thoughts on being single. When I read Kelly's I asked her permission to share it with you.

So to get us started Biblically, I simply want to use one thought of Jesus to launch us into their world. This morning, I want us to talk a trip to **Samaria.** Samaritans were the **half-breeds.** Some of their blood was from the revered lineage of Abraham, Moses and David. Some of it was tainted with the blood of foreigners that some perceived as compromising, unclean and impure. This mixture didn't settle well with many people in Jesus' day so they decided to avoid, even shun, the Samaritans. **Simply by the status of their life, perceptions were created, mindsets established, attitudes forged and in many cases actions done.** I think a similar pattern has happened to single people.

Single people, in my mind, **feel as if people view them like Samaritans. That there is something not quite right with them and so I need to avoid or distance myself from their lives.** Many single people believe, and often convinced through experience, **that people in the church view them as a half-person.** That something is wrong with them because they don't have a mate.

Jesus, though, saw people for who they were, not for what they did NOT have. He liked to portray Samaritans as heroines of life. The woman at the well (John 4), the good Samaritan (Luke 10:33) and the ten lepers (Luke 17:16) because of this He was accused of being a Samaritan (John 8:48). He felt led to enter their world. ***John 4:4* Now he had to go through Samaria. We often forget that Jesus Himself was single and it appears that many of his disciples and even Paul were single.** Single people carry a proud lineage in the people of God.

So let's begin a journey that tries to explore their world. Let's go to Samaria.

How do we define this group?

Let's be honest, none of us like labels, though we tolerate some more than others. Vocabulary is important to people and my first struggle is finding "the right descriptor" for this group. My impression is that most people in this group don't like the label "single". There was a time in my life where it had a positive, or at least, a neutral, connotation to it. Today, the term "single" tends to have a **negative connotation in the mind of many I spoke too.** No one I spoke likes the term "widow." "Divorce" carries some element of shame to it. Right away I felt a bit apprehensive because labels don't seem to work for this group. What I did find is that **they want to be defined on their own terms, not whether or not they have a spouse. Who then are those people out there whom we thought we knew?**

Who is this group?

So with no good descriptor except "single" in hand, let me try to characterize this **vast** and **diverse** group who I am certain occupies some chair(s) in your family as well as my own.

Some in the group have never been married.
Some have been married several times.
Some want to get married perhaps for the first time
Some for the third time.
Some are content with their singleness.
Some were married for 20, 30 or 40 years.

Some have children.
Some do not.
Some wanted children and could not.
Some never wanted children and are ok with that.

Some are this way because of the choices they made.
Some are this way because of the choices someone else made.

Some live alone and enjoy the fact that no one is there to complain if they don't make the bed.
Some live with families.
Some live with friends.
Some in shelters (yes, that is happening with some in our church)

Some are celibate and feel a calling to be so.
Some are, lets just say, they are "frustrated."

Some love the holidays.
Some hate the holidays.
Some will decorate their house for these days.
Some say, "Why bother?"

Some have a chipper, upbeat message on their answering machine.
Some still have the voice of their deceased spouse on the answering machine.

Some have friends and family remember and celebrate their birthday.
Some **have to tell others** when its their birthday.
Some let the day slide by and very few, if anyone, notices.
Some don't even get a birthday comment on Facebook.

Some love coming to church and seeing people.
Some struggle on deciding simply who to sit by during the service.
Some join other groups after service for lunch and football.

Some hate the time after church because the Sunday routine with their spouse is now gone.
Some have never been asked to join anyone for Sunday lunch.

Some enjoy the freedoms of being single.
Some hate it and wish they had someone to come home to.

Some are thriving.
Some are struggling, really, really struggling, right now.

Some were more than eager to have someone ask them about their situation.
Some said talking about it was too painful right now.

Some are ok with the label "single".
Some hate it and will correct you if you use it.

Some are young and some are in their later years.

Some are financially ok.
Some are drowning in bills.

Some are very social and fun during the day.
Some cry themselves to sleep at night because it is lonely.

Some are fearful of the noises of the night because they have no one to protect them.
Some dread bringing the garbage cans to the curb in the rain.

Some found friends and support in the church.
Some found rejection and isolation in the church.

Some like working in their yards, making repairs and fixing cars.
Some hate it and don't know where to turn when things go south.

Some have amazing stories of how they have picked up the pieces of their life and moved on.
Some are stuck in life and don't know where to take the next step.

Some are at peace with their status in life.
Some cry when checking a box on an application that says: single, divorce or widow

Some want to get out of this club.
Some are content to be in it.

They are **single**, **divorced** and **widowed** though none of them seem to in my mind like any of those labels.

They all, in my opinion, want **inclusion**, **understanding** and **help**.

Stereotypes:**What Are You Doing About Singles In Your Church?**

David McCasland

Let's paint some pictures of the **stereotypes** that may unconsciously exist in our minds about single adults:

1. **Never Marrieds.** Nice people, but obviously there is something wrong with them under the surface or someone would have latched onto them long before now. They are basically unhappy, only marginally dependable, and the thing they most need in life is an introduction to the "right" person.
2. **Divorced Woman.** Attractive . . . very attractive. The married men wonder why any man wouldn't be happy with her. The women think they know. She has no children, works for a TV station or an advertising agency. She is financially independent, intellectually stimulating, and sexually available.
3. **Divorced Man.** The whole thing was probably his fault. He has no sense of responsibility to his wife or children and is probably keeping more money for himself than he sends to his family. He is not to be trusted and spends most of his spare time with divorced women.
4. **Widow.** She needs our sympathy and support for about six weeks; then it's time for her to get her act together and get on with life. If she's young, someone nice will turn up for her. In the meantime, she needs to really ride herd on those unruly kids of hers. Never invite her to dinner unless you invite a top-of-the-line, never-married man too.
5. **Widower.** His dear wife's death was untimely; but his kids are grown, he has his job, his house is paid for, and there are a million things he can do. About six weeks of support should get him on his feet too. But he'd better not even look at another woman until his wife has been dead for at least a year.

Did you see anyone you know? Or perhaps someone you merely thought you knew? Obviously, singles cannot be categorized and labeled any more than married folks can; but we somehow find it easy to lapse into that kind of thinking about each other.

Statistics:

There are 104 million unmarried Americans over age 18, representing over 45% of the adult population. - U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey: 2008

In 2005, unmarried households became the majority of all U.S. households. - U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey: 2005.

The average American spends the majority of his or her life unmarried. - Kreider, Rose and Jason Fields. 2002. "Number, Timing, and Duration of Marriages and Divorces: 1996." Current Population Reports.

68% of divorced or widowed Americans plan to remain unmarried. - Gallup. 2006.

In 2008, 29.4% of men and 22.7% of women ages 18 and over had never married. - U.S. Census Bureau. "America's Families and Living Arrangements: 2008."

Observations:

Let me pass on some observations that I believe are helpful for marrieds to realize in the process of relating to singles in the church.

1. **(Not married) Many people have chosen not to marry as the best course for their lives. Many others who have greatly desired marriage have accepted God's direction thus far, which has left them without a life partner.** They are moving ahead with becoming whole persons who enjoy life and make their mark on it as Christians. They need our **admiration** and **encouragement, not our pity.** Many of them feel less awkward at a dinner with other couples than they do sitting home alone. In a society conditioned to think in multiples of two, we need to realize that "odd" numbers are simply mathematical terms, not social categories of strangeness.
2. **(Divorced) There are a great many divorced persons who tried desperately to avoid it.** Divorce is not always the decision of two people. **In many cases, there is one partner who wants to save the relationship and is willing to seek counseling and any other help necessary to accomplish that goal. Often, the other partner simply wants out.** Even though there is always shared responsibility in any marital break-up, **the will to continue often exists only in the heart of one.**

In addition, the ex-spouse seldom goes away forever. **Divorced people must continue to cope with painful relationships.** One person remarked to me that it would be nice if, when two people divorce, they could just say good-bye and never see each other again. It seldom works that way, especially when children are involved. **Marrieds need to understand that many singles are dealing on a continuing basis with very painful relationships.**

3. **(Widow) We also need to realize that it takes a long time to get over the death of a spouse.** A widow remarked to me that it was six months after the death of her husband before she got over being "numb." For half a year, she went through the motions of living, accomplishing the work she needed to do, feeling nothing.

We are talking about a process of **integration**, and that has never been easy. The dictionary defines integrate this way: **"To make into a whole; unify. To join together; unite."** Unfortunately, our integration of marrieds and singles in the church is **sometimes hindered by a lack of awareness.**

Here are some principles that we found helped achieve the integration of singles into the total church program:

1. Hear their story.

None of us like caricatures or labels that misrepresent us. So ask yourself, have I truly taken the time to hear their story? Not everyone is ready to share. Many are. Let their answers discern how whether you can farther. I find most people prefer for us to understand them through facts rather than perceptions. The focus is quite honoring.

2. Invite them into your world.

The one word I heard from many of them is **"alone"**. That is not every moment of every day, but it certainly has a place in their life **particularly at night**. Many struggle with **holidays, taking communion in church, sitting by someone in a class or sharing a room at a retreat**. They would rather have the options to say, "No" rather than never be asked to a marriage or even child setting just because they are single. Just ask.

3. They are God's favorites. See them as He does.

God does NOT view everyone on equal ground in the Bible. The Bible says God **defends** the cause of the **widow (Deut. 10:18)**. He tells us that **IF** our faith somehow does not reach into their needs, we have no true faith at all (James 1:27). Malachi says that "God hates divorce" (Malachi 2:16), not that "He hates divorced people." Why? God hates what divorce does to a family which includes the kids. He is close to the **brokenhearted (Psalm 34:18)**. Widows, orphans, the broken hearted, the outcast, the forgotten (Isaiah 61:1). **God does have favorites meaning that He has adopted their plight as His own and asks that we do the same.**

4. Help...

Yard work...cars...big decisions...taking time with their kids. I will tell you that I would not be in the church, let alone as a senior pastor, if godly men, pastors, teachers, and youth workers in the church, never stepped into my world and invited me to events, got me work and even challenged my decisions. Many of our widower seniors can't take care of their homes. One day a group of men noticed Curtis hold needed paint. They showed up and painted. That's faith!!!

5. **Know that they are in the audience.**

Some want to be apart of single's settings. Many want to integrate. They wonder why singles never get invited to hang out with married couples. Some told me that events at the church **exclude** them. One told me that a recent women's gathering was so focused on husbands and kids, they felt a bit left out. Or that women's Bible studies can parenting sessions. Discern who is there and try to assess how to include them.

Conclusion:

How do we wrap this up? I believe the most spiritual events in church are not necessary sermons, altar calls, spiritual gifts or even evangelism. Some of the most spiritual things that happen can be the simple invitation to lunch. **INCLUSION. Whenever Jesus was in a crowd, He took time to notice those on the outskirts.**

A man in a tree.

A women with a hemorrhage.

A blind man wanting healing.

A man with a withered hand.

A widow in her offering.

A women at a well with a past.

Some of the greatest stories we have in the gospels come because **dignifying focus** was given to someone who society tended to push aside. My hope is this talk today may refocus your ability to see in a crowd. Perhaps then, God will whisper to you, "Invite them to lunch and hear their story."



The Blessing

- A charmed life seems idyllic, but it didn't allow me to grow deep roots; my burdens have in many ways given way to my blessings.
- Striving, and in many cases succeeding, to have "Grace through the Journey" – being able to extend grace to myself, as well as others, because of what I've gone through, not in spite of it.
- When it comes to relationships, having a grounded sense of reality over naïveté (I much prefer to be informed, not surprised or blind-sided!); high expectations for myself, but low expectations of others. Keeps it real.
- Freedom in how to spend my time/resources and in setting priorities.
- Spontaneity.
- Marriage is not a goal to attain or "go after." A gift to — maybe — hope for, but not the ultimate completion of my life. I don't (now) get lost in the identity of another, but can strive to completely get lost in my identity in Christ. I get to be the me He created, not who someone might expect or pressure me to be.
- I don't have to settle for mediocrity in a relationship in order to live a fulfilled and fruitful life.
- I don't have to adopt a sense of "waiting" for someone in order to get on with life...I'm living it now!
- Empathy and compassion when others face what I've gone through.
- I don't have to make my bed every morning and no one would know :)
- I don't have to compromise with anyone in order to have a peaceful home.
- Independence.
- A good sense of pride in what I've been able to accomplish on my own (I say that fully acknowledging that my life is one big blessing from God, and other than my choices, is not entirely of my doing!)
- I can be (and have the responsibility of being) a good steward of my life, without having to make accommodations for anyone else.
- I have gone through and emerged from "The Dark Night of the Soul" knowing with certainty that God walked every single step of it with me...an incredible faith-building experience for which I will always be grateful.
- The certainty that God will use all things for good; if I hadn't gone through what I've experienced, I often wonder how meaningful my contribution to this life would be; it was so wrapped up in who/what John was that I am quite certain I was fulfilling less than an optimum level that God intended for me.
- A greater sense of what I'm capable of...when you experience great loss, it's eye-opening as to what you can handle.
- I get to know that the grass is indeed green on both sides!
- Understanding the beauty of seasons; each one has something to offer that is unique and valuable.

The Burden

- Coming to grips with the death of dreams of being a wife, being a mother, being in ministry (all in the course of six months) and (sometimes) willing myself to believe that what's ahead is just as good or better, even in the absence of someone to share life with.
- Greater difficulty building in accountability; finding someone who is really willing to invest that level of interest in my life is a challenge. Easy to do so on a basic, just-below-the-surface level, but not with someone who's really willing to dig deep...and stay with me over time.
- Not being known at a deep level; not having that sense of "rootedness" or connection with someone.
- Not being valued/looked to as a viable contributor to conversations with those who are married and/or have children ("What do you know about it?")
- Financial management and decision-making; knowing I'm solely responsible; no one with shared responsibility to bounce ideas off of or discuss pros and cons.
- Financial management and decision-making of home ownership; I can't just call the landlord. It's sometimes frustrating to know that other women can just call on their husbands; I have to spend time tracking down someone, hoping I can trust them, and then paying for it!
- Having to be responsible for ALL household chores and yard work...it's very time-consuming when it can't be shared.
- Fighting the perception that I'm somehow less of a person or somehow flawed for not having a spouse.
- Having to endure the "God has someone for you, just be patient" syndrome that many married people have.
- Being excluded in "couples activities" simply because I'm "solo."
- Knowing I will never be a (birth) mother and facing the possibility of never being a grandmother.
- The fear of growing old alone, not just in companionship, but in the areas of health, finances, just managing life.
- Having to take the trash out...EVERY time, even late at night, when it's raining.
- Sometimes giving in at night to the fear of living alone (strange noises...) and that sense of vulnerability in the absence of someone to protect me.
- No spiritual leadership in the home other than my own.
- The inevitable baggage that comes with betrayal and the fear of trusting someone to the degree I would marry again.
- Being labeled a divorcee, especially in the Church.
- (Sometimes) just too much quietness.
- Knowing I cause discomfort in some people because of my experiences/status.

I'm afraid I could go on and on...but this will give you some idea of how my experiences have shaped my thinking of living life alone...why I sometimes mourn it and why I just as often embrace it.

Soli Deo Gloria!
K.