

Study guide — *Just Women*, Summer 2010

Introduction

Welcome to *Just Women*! We hope this leader's guide will help you plan meaningful study sessions using the Summer 2010 issue of the magazine.

The focus of this issue of *Just Women* is single and satisfied—celebrating single women and fearless love.

According to the U.S. census, 43 percent of Americans over the age of 18 are unmarried. “Unmarried” is a catch-all term that describes those who have never married, those who have divorced, and those who've been widowed.

In the past, single women were often derided as “old maids,” people to be pitied. Today, millions of American women are single — some by choice, others because of circumstances beyond their control. Many are single moms, raising children on their own.

In the Summer 2010 issue of *Just Women*, you'll hear from women who are single and satisfied. You'll be challenged to think differently about single women, and maybe to change some long-held ideas. What does it mean to be a single woman in a “culture of couples”? What are the challenges of raising children as a single mom? What unique challenges and opportunities await single women pastors? What are the joys of single status?

At the end of this study guide, you'll find a list of books on being single that might be helpful in your study.

Preparation

In prepare for the study sessions outlined here, make sure you have a sufficient number of subscriptions to the magazine, so that all members of your group have their own copies. If you need more, go to www.justwomenmagazine.com, and click on Subscribe in the right column.

Then read through the Summer issue, focusing especially on the articles on being single on pages 1, 6–11, and 18.

Ask your group members to read the same study materials *before* your first meeting, so you'll all be ready to participate in the study.

Session 1

Supplies

Bibles, the Summer 2010 issue of *Just Women*

Opening prayer

DAUGHTERS OF EVE

LORD, we come to you in prayer in all of our diversity.

We are single and married, divorced and widowed, young and old, black, brown, and white. We are sisters and mothers, daughters and grandmothers, strangers and friends.

We are the daughters of Eve and Mary, Nefertiti and Tamar, Lydia and Sarah.

We love and are loved, hurt and are hurt, forgive and are forgiven.

We come with unique longings, pains, joys, and sorrows. We struggle alone, but we are not alone. Sometimes our pride keeps us from asking for help, but help is always there.

We ask your blessings, LORD, upon those gathered here and upon our sisters around the world. We know that while we may look different, speak different languages, pray and eat and live in a multitude of ways, we are all your daughters.

Bless us, LORD. Open our eyes and our hearts and our minds to your healing word of love. Amen

Icebreaker

Ask group members to think about a time when they felt alone. Who did they turn to for support? Who do they know who might be struggling? How can they reach out?

Scripture focus

Ask someone in the group to read aloud Philippians 4:12–13. Ask another person to read “Frustration and freedom” on page 7 of *Just Women*. Make sure group members have already read Beverly Dale’s story, “Single & satisfied,” on pp. 6–9 of *Just Women*.

Questions

Choose several questions to guide your discussion today:

- ⊙ Lashaundra Smith writes that singleness is “simultaneously a state of frustration and freedom.” What are some of the frustrations for single women? What can you do to support single women in your community?
- ⊙ Did you have a “life plan” when you were a teenager? What did it entail? How does your life compare with that plan?
- ⊙ What are some of the joys of being single? If you are single, what do you most enjoy about that? If you’re married, what do you miss about being single?
- ⊙ What stereotypes can you name about single women? When you hear a woman say she is single, does that change how you perceive her? Are you threatened by single women?
- ⊙ Do you perceive single men differently than single women? How so?
- ⊙ In her article, “Single & satisfied,” Beverly Dale writes, “Christian women have the freedom to pursue, thoughtfully and responsibly, a sexual ethic that embraces the body as the divine gift that it is.” What might that sexual ethic look like? Is it okay for single women to be sexually active?

Closing prayer

Offer your own closing prayer, or invite a group member to do so.

Session 2

Supplies

Bibles, Summer 2010 issue of *Just Women*

Opening prayer

PRAYER FOR SINGLE MOMS

Sleepless nights and runny noses. Whining toddlers and sullen teens. Carpools and homework and curfews and lunchboxes. A mother's work is never done.

How much harder, LORD, to do it on our own. How much harder to be solely responsible for children. How much harder to be the only adult in the house.

We ask your blessings, LORD, on single mothers everywhere. Strengthen them, guide them, nurture them, embrace them.

Help us, LORD, to support mothers in our churches, in our communities, and in our world. Remind us to reach out, to offer help and encouragement, smiles and embraces, babysitting and cups of tea.

Help us to show your love in a world that too often turns away. Let us become beacons of light in the darkness. Let us be your hands and feet.

Guide us, LORD, as we work and play, eat and sleep, raise children and grandchildren.

Remind us that all children are your children, that all women are our sisters. Remind us to withhold our judgment, to curb our tempers, to hold our tongues.

Bless our mothers. Bless us as mothers. Bless all mothers. Amen

Icebreaker

Ask group members to reflect on stereotypes of single mothers. How are those stereotypes formed? How are they hurtful? Have perceptions of single mothers changed over the years? How so?

Scripture focus

Ask someone in the group to read aloud Psalms 68:5 and 121:2. Ask someone else to read

Stephanie McLemore's story, "Becoming a single mom," on page 8 of *Just Women* and Alicia Rodriguez's story, "Who would have thought?" on page 9.

Questions

Choose several questions to guide your discussion today:

- ⊙ Some people believe it's wrong for a single woman to bring children into the world. What do you think about single women having children? Is it okay for some women, but not for others? Why or why not?
- ⊙ What problems do you think children of single mothers face? What can you do to support children of single moms in your community?
- ⊙ How can you support single mothers in your church? What concrete things can you do to help a single mother?
- ⊙ Do children need a father in their lives? How can the church help to provide positive male role models for children of single moms?
- ⊙ Should single women be permitted to adopt children? Should adoption agencies favor married couples over single women in selecting adoptive parents?
- ⊙ What are some stereotypes of divorced women? Have they changed in recent years? How can you help a friend who is going through a divorce?

Closing prayer

Offer your own closing prayer, or invite a group member to do so.

Session 3

Supplies

Bibles, Summer 2010 issue of *Just Women*

Opening prayer

PRAYER FOR A PASTOR

Encouraging words and supporting hands. Hospital visits and funeral services. Marriages and baptisms and sermons and prayers. We expect so much of our pastors.

They have heard and heeded a call to serve you, Oh LORD. Help us support them in their work, in your work.

Help us to remember that our pastors are people, too. Human like us, with the same hopes and expectations, joys and sorrows.

When we are tempted to judge, remind us of our own sins.

When we are tempted to speak harshly, remind us of our own flaws.

When we lose patience, remind us that you are always patient with us.

Help us especially to support our sisters in ministry, for we know they face unique challenges and expectations.

May we be friends as well as congregants. May we help to shoulder the burdens of the church. May we minister to them, as they minister to us. Amen

Icebreaker

According to the *Yearbook & Directory* of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), women comprise almost 23 percent of pastors and senior pastor in Disciples churches in North America, and make up nearly 29 percent of associate and student pastors. What stereotypes can you name about women pastors? How has your perception of them changed in recent years?

Scripture focus

Ask someone in the group to read aloud 2 Timothy 2:15 and Isaiah 50:4–5. Ask another

person to read Sharon Fields' story, "Single in ministry, and liking it just fine," on p. 18 of *Just Women*.

Questions

- ⊙ What do you think about single women in ministry? Do you prefer your pastor to be married? Do you prefer a male pastor over a female?
- ⊙ What challenges do single women in ministry face? What are some advantages they might have over their married colleagues?
- ⊙ Is it ever okay for a single pastor to date a man in her congregation? Why, or why not?
- ⊙ Can a single pastor understand the complexities and challenges of married life? Can she be a good pastoral counselor to married couples? Why or why not?
- ⊙ What do you think about divorced pastors? Would you consider attending a church if the pastor is divorced? Why or why not?

Closing prayer

Offer your own closing prayer, or invite a group member to do so.

Additional ideas

1. Spend a session on the Woman-to-Woman Worldwide Program study material on pages 14–17 of *Just Women*. Use the map/insert to help in your study.

- ⊙ Does the United States bear any responsibility for the drug trade in Colombia?
- ⊙ What is your opinion of Venezuela's president, Hugo Chavez? Is he a reformer or a dictator? How can Christians in the United States support Christians in Venezuela?
- ⊙ In the Wayuu culture, elders are revered. How are the elderly treated in American culture? What can you do to change perceptions of older people in our culture?
- ⊙ Are Christians called to take a stand against social injustice at home? Are they called to take a stand for those in other countries? How can you stand with those in need at home and abroad?

2. Spend a session reading and discussing Patricia Case's article, "By the sweat of your face," on pp. 10–11 of *Just Women*.

- ⊙ Case writes, "everything that God does works for our redemption — even God's curses." How do God's curses work for our redemption?
- ⊙ Case notes that our responses to tragedy in the world can seem like "beading pearls on a string with no knot on the end." Do you ever feel overwhelmed by the endless need in the world around you? How do you keep going?
- ⊙ Do you keep a garden? Do you feel closer to God when you are gardening? What is the most satisfying part of gardening?
- ⊙ Case notes that her "sin" was not eating the tomato, but breaking her grandmother's trust. Have you broken someone's trust lately? How can you repair that relationship?

Suggested readings

Here are some readings you can use to accompany the Summer 2010 issue of *Just Women*.

Single & satisfied

Flying Solo: Single Women in Midlife by Carol M. Anderson, Sona Dimidjian, & Susan Stewart (W.W. Norton).

The New Single Woman by E. Kay Trimberger (Beacon Press).

Promises from God for Single Women by T. D. Jakes (Berkley).

The Last Single Woman in America by Cindy Guidry (Plume).

Single by Chance, Mothers by Choice: How Women are Choosing Parenthood Without Marriage and Creating the New American Family by Rosanna Hertz (Oxford University Press).

Colombia & Venezuela

Between Legitimacy and Violence: A History of Colombia, 1875–2002 by Marco Palacios (Duke University Press).

More Terrible Than Death: Drugs, Violence, and America's War in Colombia by Robin Kirk (PublicAffairs).

Beyond Bogota: Diary of a Drug War Journalist in Colombia by Garry Leech (Beacon Press).

The Silence and the Scorpion: The Coup Against Chavez and the Making of Modern Venezuela by Brian A. Nelson (Nation Books).

The Real Venezuela: Making Socialism in the 21st Century by Iain Bruce (Pluto Press).

The History of Venezuela (Palgrave Essential Histories) by H. Michael Tarver & Julia C. Frederick (Palgrave Macmillan).

Spirituality of Gardening

The Spirituality of Gardening by Donna Sinclair (Northstone).

Growing Myself: A Spiritual Journey Through Gardening by Judith Handelsman.