

# "The Single-Parent Family"

Acts 16:2; 2 Timothy 1

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# connect groups

## PATH

Some of the most struggling and lonely people in our congregation may be those who are single parents. They may be moms, dads, divorced, or never married. They may be young teenagers, they may be older grandparents—but they all have this in common: they are raising children by themselves. Does the Bible speak to this? Are there any clues for Christians to understand so we can help bear the load of single parents among us? Yes, there are.

### I. The Cultural Reality (Acts 16)

- A. Yesterday's Ancient Culture
- B. Today's Modern Culture

### II. The Caretaker's Role (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15)

- A. The Role of the Parent
- B. The Role of the Grandparent

### III. The Community's Responsibility (2 Timothy 1:2)

## POINTS

### The Cultural Reality

- *Timothy* means *one who honors God*. He was the son of a mixed marriage: his mother was Jewish; his father was an unbeliever.
  - Biblical scholars aren't sure, but Timothy's father may have died. If so, Timothy grew up in a single-parent household.
- A. Yesterday's Ancient Culture:
- In ancient Roman history, there is scant record of divorce. The first mentioned is Spurius Carvilius Ruga, who filed for divorce in 234 BC because his wife was barren.
  - Rome had conquered Greece, and Greek culture had a different moral worldview, so the Roman perspective on marriage and divorce changed. Also, various civil wars in the empire had adverse effects on marriage.
- B. Today's Modern Culture
- According to the New York State Courts, the number of single-parent families has tripled since 1960.<sup>1</sup>
  - Two main factors are the increase in the divorce rate and out-of-wedlock births.
  - Single-parent families raise nearly one quarter of our nation's children—three out of every ten families—making it one of the largest population segments.<sup>2</sup>
  - Of all the single-parent families, 88 percent are headed by a woman. Fatherlessness

is one of the most harmful demographic trends today.

### The Caretaker's Role

#### A. The Role of the Parent

- Paul didn't mention Timothy's father in the text. Timothy's mother and grandmother raised him both physically and spiritually.
- Other women in the Bible raised children alone: Hagar raised Ishmael (see Genesis 21), and Elijah helped a widow raise her son (see 1 Kings 17).
- Solo parenting is stressful, hectic, and demanding.

#### B. The Role of the Grandparent

- Grandparents play a key role in a single-parent family support system.
- In America, 2.9 million grandparents are raising six million kids.
- Though a parenting team of mom and dad is the biblical ideal, the influence of a godly person (grandma or grandpa) will help raise a child better.

### The Community's Responsibility

- What does the future hold for single-parent children? For Timothy, Paul became his spiritual father. Paul called Timothy a "true son in the faith."
- Eventually, Timothy played a key role in Paul's life.

- Timothy accompanied Paul on his second missionary journey.
- Timothy went to Jerusalem for Paul to collect an offering to help other believers.
- Paul sent Timothy to Ephesus as a pastor. There, Timothy dealt with false teachers and appointed spiritual leaders.
- In all, Paul mentioned Timothy twenty-four times, saying he was *like-minded*, meaning *equal-souled*.
- Paul took the initiative to engage, encourage, and mentor Timothy. In a broader context, mentorship—what we call discipleship—is the responsibility of the church.
- The church can step in and be a family in these ways:
  - Assistance: Help families in need with practical things.
  - Availability: Be available to listen, help, and guide; provide counsel and comfort.
  - Mentor: Single parents tend to make a soul-mate out of their child, enmeshing their lives together. But for an emotionally strong relationship, both mom and child need outside mentoring. Still, don't expect a mentor to be perfect; we're all human. Do your best and entrust the rest to God.

## PRACTICE

**Connect Up:** Look up Genesis 1:26. The text states, "Let Us make man in Our image." This verse is the basis of God's triune interrelationship ("Us," "Our"), as well as humanity's interrelationship with God and others (we are made in His image). Because God is a community of Being (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), the Lord likewise created humanity to reflect community: family, church, etc. How does community give insight into the triune nature of God? Why do you think God values community, be it family, church, or society?

**Connect In:** Think about this: to be is to belong. Being human means we belong to others: God, family, friends, our community and the world. What core characteristics should a church community adhere to in order to support all people (single, married, young, old, etc.) in their journey with Christ? For help, look up Philippians 2:1-4. Notice key characteristics, such as comfort, love, fellowship, affection, mercy, like-mindedness, etc.

**Connect Out:** Pastor Skip mentioned that part of the church community's responsibility to single parents is to provide assistance, availability, and mentoring. Take a moment and discuss the implications of this challenge within the local church. What practical things can you do today? Learn to LOVE: Listen to them, Offer help, Value them, and Entrust them to the Lord through prayer. Take some time to pray for the single parents you know, asking God how you can assist them.

<sup>1</sup> Susan Pollet, Esq., "Single Parent Households: Are the Children Growing Up in Them Really Alright?," December 17, 2013, <http://ww2.nycourts.gov/sites/default/files/document/files/2018-09/ArticleSingleParents.pdf>, accessed 11/12/18.

<sup>2</sup> Thom S. Rainer, "5 Fascinating Facts about Single Parent Families," May 27, 2014, <https://www.ouramericanvalues.org/5-fascinating-facts-about-single-parent-families>, accessed 11/12/18.