

Resilient Cross Cultural Living: Unique Perspectives from Single Missionaries

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Key Verses

Ephesians 4:16 *He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.*

Romans 12:4-5 *Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other.*

Matthew 19:10-12 *Jesus' disciples then said to him, "If this is the case, it is better not to marry!" "Not everyone can accept this statement," Jesus said. "Only those whom God helps. Some are born as eunuchs, some have been made eunuchs by others, and some chose not to marry for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. Let anyone accept this who can."*

I Corinthians 7:7, 35b *But I wish everyone were single, just as I am. Yet each person has a special gift from God, of one kind or another... I want you to do whatever will help you serve the Lord best, with as few distractions as possible.*

John 17:22-23 *I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me.*

I Thessalonians 2:8 *We loved you so much that we shared with you not only God's Good News but our own lives too.*

Philippians 1:8 *God knows how much I love you and long for you with the tender compassion of Christ Jesus.*

Mark 3:35 *Anyone who does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.*

Ephesians 3:19 *May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of the life and power that comes from God.*

Key Quotes

In the new covenant, one is fully blessed in union with Christ independent of marriage, family or possessions (land). Barry Danylak

In the family of God, one's status is not improved through marriage. Barry Danylak

If marriage is good, singleness is also good. It's an example of the balance of Scripture that, although Genesis 2:18 indicates that it is good to marry, I Corinthians 7:1 says that "it is good for a man not to marry. So both the married and the single states are "good"; neither is in itself better or worse than the other. So whether we are single or married, we need to receive our situation from God as his own special grace-gift to us. John Stott

God created us as social beings. Love is the greatest thing in the world. For God is love, and when he made us in his own image, he gave us the capacity to love and to be loved. So we need each other. Yet marriage and family are not the only antidotes to loneliness. John Stott

*Though Paul did not have his own wife and family, he experienced **profound familial intimacy** within the spiritual family of God in which he had **utterly invested himself**.* Barry Danylak

Survey Results – 817 Missionary Respondents

Seven Self-Statement Ratings:

All are statistically significantly different when comparing singles and marrieds.

1. I am content in being (married or single).

The level of contentment is higher for _____.

2. I have the emotional support of family.

The emotional support of family members is somewhat higher for _____.

3. I am part of a close, loving community.

Having a close loving community is somewhat more likely for _____.

4. My self-worth is directly impacted by my marital status.

_____ are more likely to feel that their self-worth is impacted by their marital status.

5. I feel I am discriminated against because I am (married or single).

_____ are more likely to feel discriminated against because of their marital status.

6. I have a close personal friend who speaks the truth in my life.

_____ are slightly more likely to have a close friend who can speak the truth in their lives.

7. I am resilient.

_____ rate themselves slightly higher in resilience.

Narrative Question Results:

1. What contributes most to resilience?

Two predominant themes with both marrieds and singles were:

- Close relationship to God and spiritual resources
- Strong, loving relationships

A theme that came up more often for singles than marrieds was:

Sense of God's call – or knowing I'm exactly where God wants me

2. What is the best part of being single?

By far the most common answer to this question was **FREEDOM**.

For marrieds, a repeated theme for what was most difficult about being married was having less freedom or independence or flexibility.

3. What is most difficult about being single?

The most common word that came up was **LONELINESS**.

For marrieds the most common response of what was best about being married was having someone to share their lives with and companionship.

4. How would you say you go about building intimacy in your setting? This is referring to close, deep personal friends.

Some positive survey responses: Intimacy is a gift from God. It is enhanced by intentionality to share time, experiences, prayer and deep conversation. Favorite response: “Listen more than I speak. Laugh more than I cry. Remain authentic and honest before God and each other.”

Other responses from a number of singles: I don’t have intimacy due to lack of trust, hurts, cultural misunderstandings, people leave, too busy, too hard, or don’t know how.

Sadly, too, a number of **marrieds** also said that relational intimacy is hard and they do not have it or know where to get it.

To build resilience in our communities and to address the hardest part of being a single missionary -- loneliness, we need to major on building meaningful community!

Building Community: some ideas from the Mobile Member Care Team

A few of these might only apply to a team; many could be applied friend to friend or in marriage.

Attitudes:

- Giving preference - yielding my way or my preference for the sake of the other
- Sharing concern for each other’s families – call them by name, pray for them, meet them
- Generosity
- Inclusiveness
- Speaking the truth with grace

Practices:

- Prayer
 - Spontaneous prayer
 - Prayer and Refocus Time: Sunday evenings when we each answer 4 questions: What went well, What didn’t go well (about the previous week). What do I want, What do I need (for the coming week). Then we pray for each other’s concerns.
 - Prayer Retreats – Quarterly
 - Friday prayer for Africa, missionaries we serve, and ministry concerns
- Having fun – laughing and playing together
- Caring for each other when we are sick
- Touch – frequent hugs
- Service – helping each other with practical things even when it means giving up something I want to do
- Reading Scripture together before midday meals
- Acts of Kindness – taking coffee to someone in the morning, making meals, offering to do something that will free up another’s time

- Singing “May the Peace of the Lord Christ Go with You” when one leaves or returns
- Sometimes vacationing with each other
- Exercise together – take walks
- Practice forgiveness
- Inviting families and individuals over for evening meals – hosting together
- Debriefing each other when we return from trips

Written Helps:

- Team Covenant: We read it together regularly. Includes elements re: decision making, communication, loyalty and commitment, conflict management, building trust.
- Words to songs: A song we sing in our workshops includes these lines:
*“Brother (Sister), Let Me Be Your Servant, Let me be as Christ to you,
 Pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too”*
- Article: Henri Nouwen’s *From Solitude to Community to Ministry*. Many move from solitude to ministry but Jesus went from solitude to community to ministry (ministering with and through his disciples).

Response:

Organizational Policies and Practice – what hinders and helps resilience?

At the Individual Level – give opportunity to talk about sense of call, relationship with the Lord, identity in Christ, friendships, community, family, negative judgments of others, practical needs, vacation plans, and level of content.

Conclusion: Life as a single missionary that is characterized by a deepening relationship with the Lord, ongoing investment in relationships and community, and knowing you are where the Lord called you to be is a delightful way to spend one’s life. It is a good and honorable choice.

May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of the life and power that comes from God. Eph 3:19

Resources:

Danylak, Barry. (2010). *Redeeming Singleness*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway.

Holy Bible, New Living Translation. (2007). Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers.

MMCT Communiqué on Singleness found at: <http://www.mmct.org/#/resources/communiqu>

Soper, Sharon. (2003). Negotiating Reality Single. In M. Kraft (Ed.), *Frontline Women: Negotiating Cross Cultural Issues in Ministry* Pasadena, California: William Carey Library.

Stott, John & Hsu, Al. *John Stott on Singleness*, Christianity Today.