**SINGLES—AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE MISSIONARY FAMILY**

Presented at the Midwest Conference on Missionary Care on February 20, 2015

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**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.*

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

**Key Quotes:**

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

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

*3. 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

*4. 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

*5. 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:**

* *Surveyed 21 current/former single missionaries of which 16 were female and 5 were male*
* Four questions on survey:

1. When you served as a single missionary or when you serve, in what ways were you or have you been included as an important part of the missionary family/team?

2. In what ways did you not feel or do you not feel included as an equal and important part of the missionary family/team?

3. What helps/helped you feel part of the team?

4. What would have helped or could help you feel more connected as an integral part of the missionary "family"?

**Interview:**

**1. Introduction of interviewees –** name, where and when served as single missionary, ministry role

* Hannah Zelmer – WMPL Bangladesh
* Jennifer Blevins –
* Kristin McWeeny – WMPL Ecuador
* Michelle Peterson – Philippines

**2. Interview with the four questions**

**Sharing Other Results from the Survey:**

1. **When you served as a single missionary or as you serve, in what ways were you or have you been included as an important part of the missionary family/team?**

* Participating in all team meetings—invited to be an active participant vs. take on an honorary babysitter or other behind-the-scenes role
* Team meetings give me an opportunity for input, fellowship and communication
* Felt like an equal member of a three-person team
* Being included in decision making roles and given the opportunity to serve in a leadership role on the team
* Serving as a leader in a major center of the mission, I fell that my input is valued on an international level and I’m a member of the international leadership team
* Being involved in our yearly field conference meetings where there were times of reflection and accountability
* Participating in weekly Sunday evening worship/Bible Study, staff meetings and retreats
* Being part of prayer meetings and praying for personal needs as well as ministry needs
* Participating in a weekly home group
* Having the mission office nearby and finding a community there and the door open
* Meetings with others with a similar vision
* Always welcome at all gatherings—none were specifically for “families only”
* Being treated as a peer and trusting me as of equal value on the team
* My opinion is sought out
* Being allowed to remain as the on-site leader of my team despite having two older, more experienced married couples join the mission (because they recognized that I had the most time/experience in the country)
* Having visits from the country director from the home office and also other team members living in other parts of the country
* Being invited into homes for meals, family game nights and other family events such as birthdays and holidays and days off
* Being invited to go on vacation with a family
* “Weekly” movie nights with a family or “pizza night” where I helped the wife make the pizza, biking on weekends
* Being assigned to a family to assist me with set-up and setting in the beginning of my first term
* Being invited by a family for many informal, spur of the moment excursions to explore or grabbing a bite to eat—I felt included like an uncle to their young children—these frequent events gave me time to relax in a family that accepted me and we could share our discoveries and challenges openly and learn from one another
* The team made my birthday special
* Team Christmas gift exchange
* Team holiday/gatherings/dinners
* Having a couple nearby lend me things and fix things as needed
* Folks with vehicles and handyman skills were willing to share them and help when needed
* My field leader and team have made sure that I have a comfortable place to live with enough space & privacy for me
* Being involved with the youth group and attending their events

such as ice skating, camping weekly Bible studies

* Getting rides to far away events and all important events or being given good directions as to how to take bus and train
* Getting help with doctor appointments and getting prescriptions and other needed supplies as I don’t yet speak the language of the host culture

1. **In what ways did you not feel or do you not feel included as an equal and important part of the missionary family/team?**

* Feeling lonely seeing others together as families at Christmas I sometimes feel like I get overlooked. As a team, we have to not only do ministry together, but we also have to be there for each other in everyday life. I am a very independent person, and I think my team has gotten accustomed to that. When I’m unable to be independent, (especially when I’m sick), some members don¹t think to ask how they can help me in practical ways. I have to initiate asking for help rather than being asked: How can we help you? I don¹t think they realize what it¹s like to have to do everything by yourself and have no one to help you.
* Married team members process things with each other, but as a single, I don’t have that.
* When I was compared with missionaries who had been there longer and were committed long-term.
* Being asked to not attend staff meetings because I was a “short-termer” only there for a year.
* Being rejected by the couple in leadership and seemingly distrusted more as a single and then not having a spouse to turn to for support and not wanting to talk with other married team members behind the back of the leading couple (this couple was later removed from the field due to their own emotional issues that affected their ability to lead the team)
* Having rules made for all single people because of a lot of young short term missionaries
* Some men have trouble relating to single women
* Feeling marginalized due to problems within the team and not being able to contribute or feeling ignored
* When people ask me how I cope being single on the mission field
* Not being invited to a meal with others from the team upon the arrival of the country leader
* When certain provisions or privileges are given to families as opposed to singles
* Being asked to “house-sit” for vacationing families simply so they didn’t have to pay a national to do it and then having to move my stuff, transport food, and care for all the pets
* A difference in language and culture can separate us from others
* Ending up rooming with the senior ladies at mission events just because we are all single
* Feeling like a 5th wheel at our division conference—not having my husband or family to always sit with at meals/do things with during free times and no plan in place for connecting singles
* Unless I speak up and ask to participate, I may not be asked if I want to attend certain events.

1. **What helps/helped you feel part of the team?**

* Having other single missionaries to support each other and to do traveling and vacations together
* When we single women spoke with one voice, we got things changed
* It helps to network with missionaries from other sending agencies and get together for support, fun, prayer and fellowship
* I knew I was wanted. The whole mission conference, especially the women, became my friends.
* I was able to live with other single missionaries and could share my culture and language frustrations with them.
* Being included in team responsibilities and accomplishing team goals.
* It’s a gif to have team members who know my strengths and then advocate for me and help me to find strategic roles and responsibilities that use my strengths.
* Being invited to be part of families and playing the sister role and aunt role.
* Weekly meetings and phone contact
* When people express verbally that they are glad I was there.
* Taking care of me when I was sick especially when I was in the hospital, visiting me a couple times a day, communicating with my family at home, printing messages from home, bringing game nights to me, even staying overnight with me
* Openness and communication
* I felt part of the team when I had good relationships with other team members, when I was contributing to the team in some way, when I was listened to and my opinion taken into account, when people would help me and I was called on to help them.
* When families invite me to enjoy family events, weekly meals, and holidays
* Being encouraged by my team to be involved with prayer partners, national families, language tutor, the national mentors and expat mentors.
* Being selected to be the representative for al the engineering-related expatriates to the executive committee
* Being an integral part of the team meetings
* Developing close relationships with married people of the same gender: women to women, men to men

1. **What would have helped or could help you feel more connected as an integral part of the missionary "family"?**

* I would appreciate if our mission had some sort of a singles network and also maybe included this topic: Singles as an Important Part of the Missionary Family (and how to make them feel as such) in their training for missionaries about to go out into the field
* I tell people that I want to know that you have my back. If I could see that each team member is looking out for me and advocating for me in some way, I’d feel even more connected as an integral part of the team
* Communication is always the key even if it is Skype sessions with Mission leadership
* Networking and intentional extra curricular activities
* Being invited to go out to the countryside or other places to which one cannot go as a single alone
* Taking time to get to know me.  I hit the round running and almost no one asked questions to get to know me and what I had left behind.
* People genuinely asking, "How are you?" and taking time to listen.  Regular check-ins.  People who are missionaries with a spouse or a family have people to share honestly and openly with all the time.  Singles don't have that.
* More encouragement, support, and verbal acknowledgment that my presence and sacrifice to be there was appreciated.
* Specific care as a first-time short-term missionary.
* Checking in on how I was doing spiritually.
* Hugs!!
* Pray with me.
* Listening to me share about things I missed at home, realizing that was an important part of my life and all I'd ever known.
* Give me background on some of the inside jokes, quick tips working there, more proactive help about living there.  Not getting frustrated with my questioning and trying to learn.
* Acknowledging my feelings, and that it was okay to miss home and family.
* Acknowledgment of the difficulties of a short-term and first-time missionary.  Not making me feel like a failure or like I'm abnormal, but instead, coming around and supporting, loving, encouraging, and lifting me up.
* To be respected, listened to, able to contribute according to my gifts (not my gender) and to have good relationships within the team are vital
* To be able to relate to everyone on the team—men, women, children
* To be considered a responsible adult
* Being invited into people’s homes sooner and invited to do things sooner.
* Dividing financial bills more fairly according to the number of people going or attending (families should naturally pay their share vs. singles paying half of what a family of 6 might pay)
* Dividing of responsibilities more fairly not giving the singles twice the responsibility of the family units (i.e. the family unit is in charge of the worship and teaching one week but can actually split it between husband and wife while the single in charge has to do it all)
* Much greater trust from field leadership in terms of competence in leadership

**Recommendations for Single Missionaries:**

1. Pray with two other people in a group regularly as prayer partners, instead of just one partner. Then when one leaves on home assignment or returns to their home country, you still have someone to pray with.
2. Nationals are going to ask you why you are single. Think up a good way to explain it, and don’t take it too hard when they ask you questions that seem rude or surprising.
3. Learn to appreciate your single life as you are and not try to fit into a context that is not meant for you.
4. Learn to love your single state and leave space for couples to grow as well. Give them breathing room or space.
5. Make sure this is a call and not only a personal desire, because once you say yes to this commitment, you need to stay faithful until the end.
6. Make sure you have a home church backing you up and also a group of selected friends who will pray for you continually
7. If you are struggling with any aspect of the single life, being on the field will not improve it, but actually it will get worse.
8. Do not expect the field to be all you have dreamed of, but to be the place of obedience and service you have been called to.
9. Be ready for lots of surprises, but also for MANY, MANY HUGE blessings along the way.
10. The One who calls you is faithful and will never ever desert you.
11. Work through being single before coming to the field—if God has called you, be obedient and trust that He will provide for all your needs—even a partner for life. The God who called you to the field is able to supply all your needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus.
12. Learn to do some mechanical and domestic chores.
13. Invite a missionary family over for meals or an evening of games and popcorn and share hospitality with them.
14. The **key to victory** is the same as for every other problem. **IT IS IN YOUR PERSONAL RELATIONSHP TO CHRIST, AND YOUR CALLING TO MISSIONS AS A VOCATION.**

**Recommendations for Mission Organizations:**

1. Provide training for missionaries on team building and how to effectively include singles in the missionary team/family in orientation.
2. Select team leaders who are able to be effective team builders and can relate to married and single alike.
3. Encourage regular team evaluation including relationships between all members, communication, team activities, and team building.

**Recommendations for Senders:**

Help your single missionaries feel part of the Missionary Family by:

1. Praying, for them regularly, emailing regularly, visiting when possible
2. Connecting them with a few safe and caring people in the congregation who can guard confidentiality
3. LISTENING!!! WITHOUT GIVING ADVICE.
4. Encouraging the single missionary to share their needs for feeling a part of the missionary family/team with their mission organization and with the team on the field.
5. When your missionary comes back on home assignment, invite him or her to participate in your family activities, meals, events for families and singles
6. Contacting the single missionary’s mission organization to inquire about their policies and training for their missionary teams and leaders on this topic.

**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: http://www.mmct.org/#/resources/communiqu

Powell, John R. & Bowers, Joyce M. (2002). *Enhancing Missionary Vitality*. Palmer Lake, CO: Mission Training International

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