Resilient Cross-Cultural Living: Unique Perspectives from Single Missionaries

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He (Christ) 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.”
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.
Mobile Member Care Team – West and East Africa teams together in Ghana

Together for the journey
The Survey – Resilience: Perspectives from Single and Married Missionaries

Focus: Resilience and Marital Status

Criteria for Respondents: Serving in passport country not their own
Content of the Survey

Demographics

Rating Scale

Narrative Questions

Self-Care and Lifestyle Balance Inventory
Description of the Respondents

Total Respondents: 817

Ministry setting: Most working in urban areas of developing countries in a team or workgroup
Types of Ministry

Teaching
Support
Discipleship
Administrative
Member Care
Evangelism
Marital Status

- Married: 60%
- Single: 40%
Single Types

- Single, Never Married: 93%
- Divorced: 5%
- Widowed: 2%
Gender of All Survey Respondents

- Male: 30%
- Female: 70%
Gender of Singles

- Male: 9%
- Female: 91%
Housing for Singles

- Live Alone: 68%
- Live with others: 32%
Respondent Nationalities

Missionary represented 26 different passport countries
Passport Regions

North America – US/Canada
Europe – 9 countries
Africa – 6 countries
Oceania – 3 countries
Central/S. America – 3 countries
Asia – 3 countries
Countries of Service

Missionaries serving in 73 different countries of service
Countries of Service

Africa – 32
Asia – 21
Central/South America – 7
Oceania – 4
Europe - 9
The self-rating statements were:

1. I am content in being (married or single).
2. I have the emotional support of family.
3. I am part of a close, loving community.
4. My self-worth is directly impacted by my marital status.
5. I feel I am discriminated against because I am (married or single).
6. I have a close personal friend who speaks the truth in my life.
7. I am resilient
Respondents rated on each statement from 1 to 5 with 1 being Strongly Disagree and 5 being Strongly Agree.

Take a moment and think about how these self-statements might be different for marrieds and singles. You will find them on pg. 2 of your handout.

Put an S for Singles or an M for Marrieds next to the statement you think would be rated higher for that particular group.
Survey Results for Statement Ratings
SURVEY RESULTS: SELF-RATING STATEMENT #1

Higher for marrieds

I am content in being (single or married)

MARRIEDS
Strongly Agree
4.79

SINGLES
AGREE
3.67
SURVEY RESULTS: SELF–RATING STATEMENT #2

*Somewhat higher for marrieds*

I have the emotional support of family

- **SINGLES**
  - Agree 3.70

- **MARRIEDS**
  - Agree 4.46
SURVEY RESULTS: SELF–RATING STATEMENT #3

Somewhat more likely for marrieds

I am part of a close, loving community

SINGLES
AGREE
3.70

MARRIEDS
AGREE
4.12
SURVEY RESULTS: SELF–RATING STATEMENT #4

Marrieds are more likely to feel this way

My self-worth is directly impacted by my marital status

Marrieds: 2.61
Singles: 2.0
SURVEY RESULTS: SELF–RATING STATEMENT #5
Singles are more likely to feel this way

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

MARRIEDS

DISAGREE

1.52

SINGLES
NEITHER

2.80
I feel I am discriminated against

43% of single missionaries disagreed

BUT

90% of married missionaries disagreed
Theology of Singleness

Old Covenant

vs.

New Covenant
New Covenant Blessing

In the new covenant, one is fully blessed in union with Christ independent of marriage, family, or possessions (land). Barry Danylak
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 choose not to marry for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Let anyone accept this who can.
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.
New Covenant and Status

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

...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
SURVEY RESULTS: SELF–RATING STATEMENT #6

Singles are slightly more likely to feel this way

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

MARRIEDS
AGREE
3.78

SINGLES
AGREE
3.93
SURVEY RESULTS: SELF–RATING STATEMENT #7

Marrieds rate themselves slightly higher

I am resilient

Marrieds agree: 4.11
Singles agree: 4.0
The Majority of Single Missionaries:

...are content in being single (67%)

...have the emotional support of family (67%)

...are part of a loving community (67%)

...have a close friend who speaks the truth (76%)

...feel they are resilient (84%)
What Contributes Most to Resilience?

- Close relationship to God
- Strong, loving relationships
- Sense of God’s Call – Singles
Other Themes Related to Resilience

Personality and character traits

Personal disciplines

Enjoyment of ministry

Specialized supports (e.g., counseling)
What is the Best Part of Being Single?

FREEDOM
Other Best Parts of Being Single

Time to myself, for myself
Independence
Flexibility
Knowing this is God’s best plan for me
Intimacy with Christ
Ability to serve God w/o distraction
Opportunities to bond with culture
Opportunities to rely on God
But some said...

I can’t see a best...
I don’t want to be single.
What is the most difficult about being married?

Less freedom

Less independence

Less flexibility
What is the most difficult about being single?

LONELINESS
Themes Related to Loneliness

Being alone
Not belonging
Lack of companionship
Lack of sexual intimacy
Not having children
Challenges to self-image
Negative assumptions
But some singles said...

being single is not difficult...
I enjoy it.
What is the best part about being married?

Companionship
The antidote to loneliness

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 be loved. So, we need each other. Yet marriage and family are not the only antidotes to loneliness. John Stott
How would you go about building intimacy in your setting?

This is not referring to sexual intimacy, but rather close, deep personal friends.
Intimacy with God

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. John 17:22-23
Intimacy with Others

We loved you so much that we shared with you not only God’s Good News but our own lives too. (I Thess 2:8)

God knows how much I love you and long for you with the tender compassion of Christ Jesus. (Phil 1:8)
Intimacy with Others

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
How are Singles Building Intimacy with Others?

Sharing deeply with others
Time together – shared experiences
Praying together
Intentionality, effort
It is a gift from God
My favorite “building intimacy” response...

I listen more than I speak.
I laugh more than I cry.
I remain authentic and honest before God and others.
Lack of Intimacy

But, some don’t feel they have intimacy....for a variety of reasons...
Best and Hardest Parts of Being Single

Freedom/Independence

AND

Loneliness
What Kind of Freedom?

For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don’t use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love. For the whole law can be summed up in this one command, Love your neighbor as yourself. Galatians 5:13
West and East Africa teams

Building Community
Building Meaningful Community

Some ideas from the Mobile Member Care Team:

Attitudes

Practices

Written Helps
Attitude of Grace

I used to know all about speaking truth. Now that I am living in this community, I am learning about speaking the truth with grace.
Some community building practices...
Gathering around each other during a recent Member Care Providers Retreat and Consultation

Praying together
West and East Africa teams attempting to do a Maasai jump!

Having Fun
Group hug for the West Africa team
Singing together

May the Peace of
the Lord song

MAY THE PEACE OF
CHIST EVER GO WITH
YOU

MAY HE BLESS YOU WITH
THE FAVORS OF HIS
PROTECTING LOVE.

MAY THE BLESSINGS OF
THEY POUR OUT ON
YOU, THE BLESSINGS
OF THE SAINTS.

AT THE BRIDGE YOU
THE ROAD.

PROTECT YOU THROUGH
THE STORMS.

MAY HE SHOW YOU THE
PATH.

MAY HE GUIDE YOU ON THE
Road.

MAY HE ENDURE YOU
WITH THE FAITH.

MAY HE BRING YOU HOME
TO OUR DOOR.

MAY ANGELS WATCH OVER
YOU.
Taking walks – on the coast of Ghana

Exercise together
Let’s pray

Turn to the person next to you and pray for a single missionary you know or for single missionaries in general.
Response at the Organizational Level

What policies or practice hinder or facilitate the work of single missionaries?

Is there a bias?
Response at the Individual Level

Give single missionaries the opportunity to talk about:

- Sense of call
- Relationship with the Lord
- Identity in Christ
- Friendships/Community of believers
- Emotional support of family
- Perceptions of discrimination or negative judgment
- Need for any practical helps
- Vacation plans
- Level of contentment
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.
For a written version of this presentation...

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In the Resources Section
The End...