

“Marriage isn’t for everyone. Some, from birth seemingly, never give marriage a thought. Others never get asked – or accepted. And some decide not to get married for kingdom reasons.” (Matthew 19:12, MSG)

Tens of thousands of single people are serving short-term or long-term as Christian mission workers outside their home country. It has been estimated that about 60 per cent of Western mission personnel in the past 200 years have been single women.¹

Some people enjoy their single lifestyle, or don’t think much about it. Some feel they have been called to singleness, and they don’t consider marriage; they might even make a vow of celibacy. For others, singleness is a ‘cross to carry’ or a ‘thorn in the flesh’, with a constant hope of marriage one day, and a feeling that until that day comes, something important is missing. Some feel they have never been loved or chosen. Others have had opportunities to marry, but not with a person they felt was right for them. Some have experienced the pain of broken relationships. Some are separated, divorced or widowed.

Evangelical Christians who are single, unlike their secular friends, are expected to refrain from sexual activity and pornography. Evangelical teaching encourages Christian single people to be celibate.² This makes them unusual in today’s society. They may feel that being a Christian reduces the potential partners available to them as they would only marry someone who shares their faith. Among Christians, there are many more single women than single men, so many single Christian women are unable to find a suitable marriage partner within the Church.

Marriage prospects reduce further for single people committed to ministry outside their home country, as there may be fewer potential partners they can relate to who are willing to share their lifestyle. This is especially true for women, as among mission personnel, single women outnumber single men by about ten to one.³ Mission workers may have less time or opportunity to meet people of the opposite sex than they would in their home country. Single mission personnel can face particular challenges, related to the culture they are in and being far from home, family and friends.

Some Christians, ignoring the advice of many a pastor, date someone in the hope of converting them to Christianity, so that they can marry them. This is known as ‘missionary dating’, but is not the sort of missionary activity which this book is about!

Some people assume that there must be something wrong with single people or else they would be married. This book challenges that assumption. Jesus was a single man, and Paul wrote that it is good to be single (1 Corinthians 7:7-8). This book contains testimonies from normal people who are single and thriving in ministry. We give God the glory for what he has done in their lives, around the world. We pray that these inspiring stories will encourage you in your own faith and ministry. Singleness is not a disease or a problem. Single people can be fruitful and happy, and there are advantages of singleness.

People will read this book for different reasons. You might read it because you find it challenging to be a single person in ministry. If so, we want you to know that you are not alone. Many people experience similar difficulties. We hope you will be encouraged and that these pages will help you find ways to thrive, and not merely to survive.

You may have chosen this book in order to improve your understanding of what it is like to be a single person serving far from home. You may be supporting or working alongside people in this position. We hope this will help you care for and pray for them effectively. Deep friendships and support mean a lot to single people.

You might have picked up *Single Mission* because you are interested in cross-cultural mission. We trust that these stories will inspire you. Perhaps you are preparing for ministry yourself. We hope you will appreciate the insights from different cultures.

In a book of this size it is impossible to include authors from every nation, but we have tried to reflect some of the diversity of the topic. We apologise to those from countries not represented here.

The chapters have been written by more than 30 people from many different cultures, backgrounds and ages. Most of the authors are women to reflect the proportion of single women on the mission field, but some men are included. There are more authors from some continents than from others, and some chapters are longer than others, but we regard each individual and every culture as equally important. The mission personnel who have contributed chapters include Bible translators, health workers, preachers, teachers, (friendship) evangelists, administrators, church planters, counsellors, 'tent-makers', and those in leadership serving with different mission agencies and churches. The editors have both served as single mission workers in a number of countries.

In this book, you can discover the challenges and joys of being single in different cultures. You can read about friendships, involvement with children, and returning home. We include a section on dating and marriage, for those who are considering that option. We refer to those who are single for a second time. We also discuss sex, masturbation, pornography and same-sex attraction.

We are very grateful to everyone who has shared their comments and experiences with us, and helped in the writing of this book. Some authors have chosen not to give their full name or location, and some details have been disguised in order to protect people working in insecure locations.

Our prayer is that this book will help encourage, equip and support many in ministry, so that they can be even more effective in the important work done in bringing hope to people around the world.

We would love to hear your feedback about this book, to assist us in our ministry and in any future editions. You are welcome to contact us with any comments, through the website www.resilientexpat.co.uk.

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- 1 In Hoke, S. & Taylor, B. (2009) *Global Mission Handbook*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, p.174.
 - 2 The Bible teaches against 'fornication' or 'sexual immorality' (Greek word *porneia*) – e.g. Galatians 5:19. Most evangelical Christians assume that this refers to all sex except that between a husband and wife.
 - 3 See chapter 37. See also Danielson, E.E., Cummings, B. & Fry, M. (1991) *Lord, send me: a handbook for single missionaries*. El Cajon, CA: E.D. Publishing. Marti Smith puts the figure at six women to each man in her chapter 'Choosing how to live in a Muslim context: case studies from missionary women' in Eitel, K. E. (2008) *Missions in Contexts of Violence*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library.