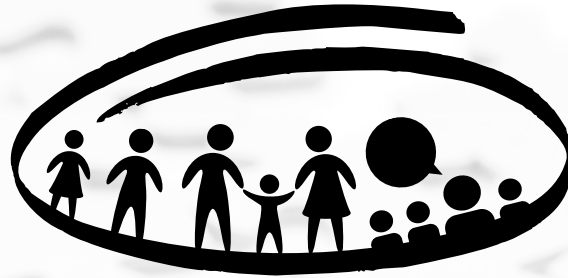


Singles, Families & Teams



Introduction - by Mike

"Here at DestiNations International (DNI) we desire to train and equip our individual Workers and Teams. Our goal is to equip and empower each worker to fulfill God's call on their lives in sharing the gospel and planting churches among unreached people globally.

As an Administrative Team, we enjoy interacting with our Workers to listen and observe how we can promote healthy teams. One area we noticed we could improve on was interaction between singles and family units. In 2021 it was decided to do a Marital Status & Team Relationships Survey.

This was an interesting and insightful project. We received 43 responses from men and women of all ages, single, married, and families. All with varying levels of experience on the field. It is interesting to note that there was not a huge variation in response between the different groups. The most prevalent themes for a healthy team was;

- A. Relationships
- B. Communication.
- C. Include single women in all Team meetings

As you read the reflections and details of this survey, our prayer is that you would find this information helpful in your ongoing journey in building God's Kingdom.

Marrieds Reflection - by Debra

The discussion and questionnaire regarding team dynamics has been and continues to be of interest to me. Here is my response as a married woman who keeps in touch with a variety of teams worldwide. I am thankful for each one that responded to the survey.

As I see it, the main focus on team dynamics is communication. Open communication is very important on any team who is trying to work together in a new setting with others they don't know well. In situations like this and general day-to-day life, it is crucial that we don't assume anything but rather keep all lines of communication open to discuss everything from the mundane to the critical items in life.

How well do singles and married people relate to each other? Do we treat each one the same regardless of marital status? Do we try to know and understand the single as much as we do someone that is in a similar marital status as I am?

Obviously we know from Scripture that God does not value one marital status over another. So therefore we should be careful that we care and value each person the same.

It would seem understandable that a single would have more free time while a married person with a family has the extra responsibility of caring for his family unit and less alone time.

Sometimes it is hard to find child care so we can spend time together with just our spouse. Does the single enjoy babysitting for us? Does he/she feel like we are assuming this role fits their interests and schedules? Is it fair to assume that since we left grandparents and favorite aunts and uncles behind, a single person will be more than willing to fill this task? And if she wasn't willing to babysit the past few times, should I ever ask her again?

And for those who are willing to help with babysitting and other responsibilities, how can I meet their needs in order to reciprocate my thankfulness? Can I invite them to join our family for a meal, a game night, or help with other issues that the single may feel overwhelmed with?

Some of the struggles that came out of the survey was the idea of singles being reserved toward the married person of the other gender and not knowing where healthy boundaries are. This can be a cause of conflict. Is there a way of handling these concerns without tiptoeing around each other during the entire term? How would open communication with the adults on the team change the outcome? Does each person on the team, regardless of marital status, have a voice on the team during team meetings and discussions? Or are they there to take care of the children and provide the snack?

Holidays and birthdays are special days but can be very difficult in an overseas assignment. Can a single join a family for a meal or vice versa in a way to get to know each other in a relaxed non-team setting? Singles bring energy and enthusiasm to a team both one-on-one and in team situations. Take the time to learn about each person as an individual

Keeping lines of communication open demands time, energy, openness, honesty, and humility. This includes all aspects of life—child, young, single, married, widowed. I desire to be like Jesus who met each person at their level and knows them personally. Am I doing my part to truly know and understand those I rub shoulders with on a regular basis regardless of whether they are married or single?

Singles Reflection - by Tricia

"Why aren't you married? Don't you want children? Are you gay/lesbian?" In many cultures, singles are called to account for their singleness. Sometimes, it's an open door to share Christ, but more often than not, it gets really old. And it's not just the locals that call singles to account; sometimes, it's teammates.

Let's face it, when groups separate into "singles" and "marrieds," the singles often feel like they drew the short straw. Maybe they're in their 30s and sitting at a table of team children, or consistently referred to as "the singles" or "the girls," or parented by their peers. It could be that they feel expected to volunteer for those extra team tasks. Or maybe team events are planned around married couples' schedules at the expense of the singles. Or maybe they're simply excluded from conversations. These sort of responses to singleness broadcast a message of inferiority.

Unfortunately, most singles already find feelings of inferiority lurking nearby, whether projected from the outside or originating from within. The solution, of course, is to get married! So singles are bombarded with matches made in heaven or paradise or karma (depending on which culture is matching them up).

There is that perfect cousin of a friend or that nice boy or girl from a sister church. Thus the inferiority message is reinforced: singles are incomplete, deficient. The reality is that by choosing to work on the field, singles have limited their options for a marriage partner to a fraction of what it might have been had they stayed in their home communities. And because of this secondary choice, they end up feeling unacceptable, often by their host culture, their team culture, or both. This is painful.

Whether or not our culture acknowledges it, Scripture teaches that singleness is a gift. But even when singles recognize this and enjoy the blessings of singleness, they also see that singleness comes at a cost.

Sometimes, that cost is loneliness or the lack of companionship. Think about it: most singles have left behind every relationship they have ever known and they have to start all over with new people in a new community. This is lonely, especially at first. In many cultures, singles are oddballs; people don't know what to do with them. Sometimes the cost of singleness is needing to be very careful with cross-gender relationships, which still doesn't exempt either gender from myriad proposals or sexual harassment from those who assume they're marketing themselves. Singles can feel vulnerable when they have to travel alone or can be overwhelmed when they face ministry, legal paperwork, PR work, and housework woven into one undelegetable role: singleness.

Over the millennia, the church hasn't had much practice relating to singles, and today it can still be tricky, depending on how touchy singles are about their singleness (and yes, this is an issue). But take heart, oh ye who are married, the surveyed singles have compiled a few basic things to keep in mind, much of which you are already doing well, according to the survey. No, you won't always get it right, just like they won't always get it right when they relate with you. That's where grace comes in. Let me note here that not everything listed below is unique to singleness—married couples can face many of the same issues—but, according to the survey, these are common issues for singles.

1. Choose to believe that singleness is a gift. If you don't believe it, you won't be able to affirm and appreciate singles (and, believe me, your underlying ideology will come out no matter what your words say).
2. According to the survey, one of the biggest things to remember is that singles are adults. They want to be treated as adults, not half adults, or deficient adults, but 100% adult, 100% teammate. Most don't want another set of parents; they want teammates.
3. Along with that, view singles as equals. Give singles an equal voice on the team, valuing their thoughts and input, and keep them in the loop of what is happening. They love when you value their opinions, not more and not less than married peoples' opinions, but equally. Those who aren't used to being heard may need a bit more prompting. Try asking for their opinions and then listen.
4. Value their time. They might be more flexible or have more time than married teammates, but don't assume and treat the assumption as a fact. Communicate. Most singles are glad to serve and fill in gaps, but most are not sitting around waiting for more team assignments or babysitting requests. View singles primarily as people, not a resource.

5. Be aware that the singles on your team might be lonely or just ready for more team interaction than you may need. Sometimes, singles aren't sure when it's acceptable to initiate an activity with families. Is it okay to interrupt your routine with an invitation? This is not an assignment to hew big blocks of extra time for the singles on your team. Several voices from the survey said they appreciated the openness of teammates' homes—becoming part of the family right down to washing the dishes—but they also said they appreciated the space when they needed alone time. What if your team had regular fellowship meals or times to “play” together? Segregated team meetings without the distraction of children could also be helpful for same gender relationship building. Of course, invitations for holidays are special, since singles are far from their families.

6. Singles are not kindling, waiting for the strike of a match. Most can maintain cross-gender relationships without starting on fire. There are times they need input from the opposite gender, a luxury that they have left behind in their home communities. Invite them into appropriate social interactions with you, both same gender and cross-gender. But don't violate boundaries, yours or theirs. For example, it could be helpful to discuss things like getting a ride, private messaging, etc. Note that teasing is a hot topic for some, so tread softly. There is a way to tease good-naturedly without communicating that a single is incomplete, but many singles don't even appreciate that.

7. Serve them. They love it when you step into the areas they are lacking—helping with complicated household maintenance or a meal or sorting out the legal system of the host country or finding a safe place for solo time.

8. Nobody wants to be an obligation, a box that you tick if you tell them hello or glance over their quarterly report. Make a point to get to know singles as people and enjoy them. They want to do the same with you.

9. Be real with your own unique joys and struggles. Be vulnerable to ask for prayer or advice (They want to do the same!). Singles are your brothers and sisters in Christ and they want to rejoice and weep with you. You model the relationship of Christ and the church in your marriage and it is an honor for singles to be a witness of your covenant.

As we met as a survey committee, we realized that most of the surveyed—both single and married—recognized that this is a conversation we should be having. There was a strong sense that we want to honor each other by creating a space of trust to listen and share. However, we want to do more than just talk about it; we want to be the body of Christ to each other and to the unreached world that surrounds us.

I have noted many of the suggestions that the singles shared in the survey, but this is only part of the story. Teams, combine this information with the other survey results to get a well-rounded perspective. Then put your heads together and come up with a plan to grow team relationships. What changes would you like to see? What is feasible for your team right now? If you need help or advice, reach out for input from someone outside of your team.

Singles, this survey wasn't meant to be a platform from which we can finally share our feelings at the expense of our married brothers and sisters. Instead, let's take the time to listen well to their perspectives; we will always have room to grow. Let's not turn our struggles or our blessings into a competition. Instead, let's offer grace big enough to take away the threat of misunderstanding and free us to work as the team God has called us to be.

(Disclaimer: Cross-cultural workers are a motley crew; therefore, it's best to take these compiled thoughts and discuss them with your team to discover each member's unique perspectives.)

Survey Results

We received 43 responses to the survey. 13 from singles and 30 from marrieds, all with varying levels of experience working on teams in a cross-cultural context. Below are lists of some of their responses to the various questions with responses from marrieds on the left and responses from singles on the right. Items in bold were mentioned multiple times.

What are some struggles particular to your marital status in an overseas or cross-cultural context?

Marrieds

- **Balance of ministry and family**
- Hard to find good care for the children
- Singles on the team being too reserved toward the marrieds of the other gender
- Finding time to care for children
- Finding time to spend with spouse
- Extra responsibilities of a family
- Lack of extended family and church family
- No personal space
- Not knowing where healthy boundaries are
- Not having grandparents near

Singles

- **Loneliness**
- The need for more independence
- Team leaders who can be too parental
- Painful comments about things we struggle with deeply
- The need to be more careful about interacting with the opposite gender
- Lack of day to day companionship
- Lack of close, open relationships
- **Feelings of inferiority**
- Very few or no options for a marriage partner
- Being the object of match-making
- Pressure to get married
- The responsibilities of a household without the division of labor
- Being a social anomaly (especially older singles)
- Harassment (especially the single ladies)
- Team information is sometimes communicated to the men but not to the single ladies
- Difficulties in travel, especially for single ladies
- Misunderstanding about the reason for singleness
- Difficulty finding solo time

What are ways that those with a different marital status relate to you & serve you well or could relate to you & serve you better?

Marrieds

- **Relate to children like uncles and aunts**
- Honor the limitations of having a growing family
- Bless them in spending time as a family
- Help with children when the team is together.
- Have mature adult interactions
- Provide helpful input from outside your own family
- Be willing to have deep conversations
- Be friends not just teammates
- Contribute energy and enthusiasm to the team
- **Offer to babysit**
- Have a realistic view of how much mothers can be involved in the team
- Fill the roles of extended family
- Help with practical things (house work, food)
- **Invest in the lives of the children**
- Be vulnerable about your struggles whether married or single
- Be clear with your boundaries; sometimes it's hard to know how much to ask of singles and we wonder if they want to spend time with the family after declined invitations
- Seek counsel instead of just plowing ahead
- Avoid a judgmental spirit
- Don't leave the marrieds out, especially in the fun times
- Don't belittle personal prayer requests

Singles

- Talk to singles like adults
- Give singles an equal voice on the team
- **Keep (even the single ladies!) in the loop**
- Ask their thoughts
- Include singles in team discussions
- Be a part of conversations with the other gender
- Spend time getting to know each other
- **Include singles in activities and meals with the whole family**
- Extend a welcome for social interaction
- Affirm and appreciate the gift of singleness
- Be understanding of singles' unique difficulties
- Value their time
- Give their opinions the same value as married people's
- Make sure the singles on the team are not alone on special days, holidays, birthdays, etc
- **Invite to just be part of the family**
- Invite singles to help with hosting events
- Clarify if it is okay to initiate doing things together outside of team activities
- Invite singles to join in ministry activities
- Be open to healthy cross-gender relationships with singles
- Allow singles to enjoy the children
- Be available for prayer and advice
- Help them travel safely
- Value their point of view
- Help with maintenance and legal work and even household things
- Don't group singles with the youth
- Don't tease about singleness
- Don't take advantage of them
- Don't lump all singles together
- Don't look at each other—marrieds and singles—as threats to each other
- Don't try to matchmake
- Don't disregard their time/schedules
- Don't make assumptions about cross-gender friendships
- Don't resent each other for unique blessings
- Don't view singles as built-in babysitters at team meetings

How could we break down some of the potential barriers between single workers and married workers?

Marrieds

- Have an attitude of humility
- Occasionally include the singles in things done as a family (meals, games, vacations)
- Clarify expectations and communication.
- Don't assume
- Ask questions
- Don't treat a single's time as less valuable than a married's
- Beware of and communicate about potentially compromising situations
- Be honest about the challenges
- Have guys/girls nights so the singles don't always feel like a third wheel
- We tend to only share our struggles with those who can relate: singles with singles, marrieds with marrieds, parents with parents. This only widens the relational gap.
- Hospitality from both sides
- Marrieds should not feel threatened when singles have more time and energy for ministry things
- Pray together
- Be givers rather than grabbers

Singles

- Understand that the marrieds have more responsibility
- Don't just talk about struggles but do something about it
- Address this topic as a team
- Trust each other
- Don't just check boxes but care for one another
- **Communicate**
- Provide space for segregated time
- Honor each other
- Listen to each other
- Have regular fellowship meals
- Get input from people outside of the team

This report and survey was put together by a small committee made up of workers of DestiNations International with a passion for the Gospel to be spread to the nations by healthy and diverse teams.

Thanks to everyone who contributed!
For questions or comments regarding this publication
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