

Serving God Alone

Singles serving cross-culturally for
the glory of God

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Preface

Single describes everyone at some point in life. Whether it's as a late teen/twenty-something, a newly widowed senior, or somewhere in between, we all deal with singleness. Unfortunately, just the fact we were single before we married doesn't help us understand the blessings and challenges of being a single adult, particularly on the mission field. It is for that reason this course was suggested, requested, and created.

Let me state up front that this book is by no means exhaustive. It is not intended to cover every topic related to being or working with a single missionary. There are gaps regarding dealing with aging parents and with being a mature single (or single-again) and many issues that arise from extended family relationships. There are resources for some of these situations listed at the end of the book. We will monitor your comments and consider the need for *SGA, Part 2* that would deal with topics beyond the scope of this course.

Throughout the lessons you will find quotations from missionaries at various stages of life—and acceptance—dealing with being single. Kara Gallagher served as the resource person and interviewer, herself a single missionary with first-hand knowledge of the issues. There was also an accountability group of IMB singles who put together the list of topics to address and made sure we approached the subject from the right perspective. We are grateful to Kara and our colleagues who contributed so much time and effort.

The following quotation from *Singles at the Crossroads: A Fresh Perspective on Christian Singleness*, by Albert Hsu, sums up the attitude we have tried to take throughout the preparation of this material:

*If you are single then you have the gift of singleness. If you are married, you don't. If you marry, you exchange the gift of singleness for the gift of marriedness. Both are good. Simple as that.*¹

So what about the title—*Serving God Alone*? Maybe we should unpack that a bit. Yes, it's intended as a play on words, a double-entendre. We surely must be serving as we go about our IMB work. Certainly we must all be serving God alone and no other god. But what about that word *alone*? I can hear some of you saying, "Do you have to rub it in?" You will have the chance to determine for yourself exactly which meaning to attribute to the title. I hope you will know my heart by the time you finish studying this material.

Whether you are a single or someone who cares about or works with singles, we pray that God will bless you as you study *Serving God Alone*.

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1 Albert Hsu. *Singles at the Crossroads: A Fresh Perspective on Christian Singleness*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 58.



Introduction

Perceptions

God's Word encourages us to look beyond what we see—beyond even what we think we know. If we are tied to preconceived notions, we may well miss the truth. Joshua 2 tells of an encounter in Jericho when two Israelite spies come to trust Rahab, a prostitute. The cultural view of prostitutes did not keep these two men from trusting Rahab and even offering a way of escape for her and her family. What if they had allowed the stereotype to guide their actions? History would be vastly different!

When Goliath sees David, he is not impressed. Having no fear of this small youth, Goliath proceeds with arrogance. "Am I a dog that you come against me with sticks?" Then he cursed David by his gods. "Come here," the Philistine called to David, "and I'll give your flesh to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts!" (1 Samuel 17:43-44) Of course, we all know how the story ends—Goliath could not even imagine the peril that awaited him because he held fast to the misconception that size meant victory.

Perhaps the greatest example we have in Scripture of this—and the one with the gravest consequences—is that of Jesus teaching in the synagogue in Nazareth. The people were shocked that this fellow they had known since He was a boy would come and teach with such authority. "'Where did this man get these things?' they said. 'What is this wisdom given to Him, and how are these miracles performed by His hands? Isn't this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And aren't His sisters here with us?' So they were offended by Him." (Mark 6:2-3)

Consider this near-miss in John 1:45-46. "Philip found Nathanael and told him, 'We have found the One Moses wrote about in the law (and so did the prophets): Jesus the son of Joseph, from Nazareth!' 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Nathanael asked him." To his credit, Nathanael was not so tied to his misconception that he refused to believe the truth, for just three verses later he says, "You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

A fool does not delight in understanding, but only wants to show off his opinions. Proverbs 18:2

But where can wisdom be found, and where is understanding located? No man can know its value, since it cannot be found in the land of the living...But God understands the way to wisdom, and He knows its location...He said to mankind, "Look! The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to turn from evil is understanding." Job 28:12-13, 23, 28

God makes it clear that our perceptions and understandings are sometimes faulty. We do not have perfect wisdom. Apart from God, we exhibit only foolishness. Whenever we find ourselves making blanket statements or judgments about any group of people, we are engaging in behavior that can harm both us and the people we are judging. These attitudes are hardest to identify when they are part of our worldview—our cultural mindset. When we open our hearts and minds to understanding, we open ourselves to wisdom.

With that in mind, how open are you to learning about the particular needs and struggles of single adults? “People who were not single for long generally don’t have an experience base from which to understand the single adult’s perspective. So some of the things singles grapple with arise from that lack of understanding.”¹ How much information have you encountered that deals with issues facing single adults—beyond those that focus on sexual purity? “An unfortunate consequence of the lack of teaching about singles to the whole church is the perpetuation of stereotypes about singles.”²

Let’s look at some of those areas of misunderstanding.



One of the biggest areas of struggle for single people is in the area of sexual temptation and maintaining sexual purity.

It drove me crazy when people thought I was a lesser human being because I wasn’t married. There is a sense that because we are single, we are unable to control ourselves sexually or otherwise. What the families do impacts me—I wanted them to work as hard to honor my purity and singleness as I did to honor their marriages. I never said things like, “You guys need to make sure you’re having sex regularly,” or “You need to be more sensitive to your spouse or children”—but it was okay for them to warn me about my sexuality—is that all I am? I’m a person, too. I’m not just some walking hormone factory. (ISC)

“In a national survey given to both singles and couples, singles ranked feeling left out as their number one problem, while sexual frustration was fifth. Couples perceived the number one problem of singles was sexual frustration.”³



All single people have a desire to marry.

Many married folks don’t see singleness as a valid option. If you’re single, you’re waiting to be married. They cannot accept that some people were created to be single until the day they die. I learned on the mission field to accept singleness from seeing people who were comfortable with who they were as single people at whatever age. (Career missionary)

I was sometimes asked, “Oh, do you want to marry a Chinese person...” People’s mindset is often, “Oh, I’m so sorry that you’re single.” An elderly man asked, “So, when are you going to get married?” (ISC)

Single people don't have any interest in attending or being involved in "family" gatherings. They'd rather spend time with other singles.



On my team, one-third of us were single. One of the older missionary ladies would cook Christmas dinner and invite all of the GCC folks over. Her efforts were so thoughtful, because many of us would have been alone otherwise. The families had stuff that they did, but they invited singles, too. My team leader invited us over one night and we had Mexican food! That was great! I would encourage married and single missionaries alike to plan functions where everyone is included—that's always nice. (Journeyman)

One of the most curious things I heard, over and over again on the field was, "Oh, you're going to be so-o-o excited. I just found out that John (insert any name there) is coming to our city to work." When I asked, "Why should I be excited?" the answer was, "Because he's a single man, too." I still don't understand that logic. I mean, I wouldn't say to married colleagues, "Oh boy, you guys are going to be thrilled—there's a new couple coming to town." If they asked me why and I told them it was simply because these other two people were married too, they'd look at me like I was crazy. What is the difference in telling a single person that? (Career)

"Until certain aspects of our culture—especially our church culture—change, we will continue to gain and maintain only partial success in overcoming the aches arising from unmet relational needs."⁴

It is easier for a single person to go to the mission field. They only have to worry about and take care of themselves.




As a single woman in an Arab culture, you weren't valued as much as if you were married. That was carried over with my teammates, too. You don't get invited places if you don't have a child or if you're not someone's wife. It was painful. (ISC)

My roommate was assigned as a single woman to the barrios but they told her she couldn't go in alone. She'd have to sit many days—though she was sent as a single woman, she got there and found that she couldn't do her work as a single woman. She had to depend upon married people and they weren't always willing or able to accompany her. It was frustrating. (Journeyman)

"Singles have to leave behind their closest support system, unlike families who take theirs with them! Even with the satisfaction and joy that comes from obeying God, being overseas does not somehow alleviate those feelings. And on the field, singles may have less people to whom they can comfortably express their feelings. Additionally, many cultures are more family-centric than our American culture, so a single feels more like an anomaly in those cultures. Not only is this hard emotionally, but it may be harder for singles in

those cultures to gain credibility with the people to whom they are reaching out.”⁵

 ***Married units and supervisors have a responsibility to protect the sexual purity of their single colleagues because singles in this day and age, left to themselves, are more likely to fall to temptation since they aren't as interested in protecting their own purity.***

I'm in sports ministries and it was hard because it was mostly men who were in the ministry. A career missionary accused me of being involved with a man and he didn't come to me and ask me about it. He went to the national and talked to him rather than ever talking to me about his suspicions. I was hurt because God had sent that man to help me and he was really needed. The national came and told me that the career missionary had asked him if we had a relationship. We were usually always in a group—I want to live above reproach, for my own sake. It hurt my feelings when my supervisor went to the national instead of coming to me, because I didn't feel like I was trusted. How was I supposed to handle my job that required me to be around men—I thought I handled it well. If they were going to put me in that position, they could have trusted me to handle it. It would have been nice if they'd talked to me first. (Career)

How do I work with men? How do they want me to work with other missionaries or nationals of the opposite sex? They just worry that we're going to mess up rather than preparing us to work with them. There is no training given in how to work effectively with members of the opposite sex—they just tell us don't be alone, don't fall in love, don't touch. We need to have some practical training on how to make these situations work. If everyone would stop solely focusing on protecting my purity and give me something to work with, I could get a lot more done...Don't they realize that my purity is of utmost importance to me? ...Accountability and open communication about this issue are absolutely essential—it's not a matter of rules and stuff—it's a matter of my faith and honoring God. (Journeyman)

I realize that there have been problems with single missionaries getting involved....some people have messed up, but that doesn't mean we all will...I'm committed to my purity or I wouldn't be here. (Career)

Those are some of the biggies. You can probably add some more. The bottom line is we're all individuals, called by God to do an important job. Let's covenant to put the stereotypes aside and explore some of the areas that are important to serving God alone. You decide where the emphasis goes.....*Serving.....God.....Alone...*

I.1 Take a minute to write your thoughts here. Where does the emphasis fall right now for you?

END NOTES

- 1 Virginia McInerney. *Single Not Separate: How to Make the Church a Family* (Lake Mary, Fla.: Charisma House, 2003), xiv.
- 2 Ibid, 46.
- 3 Ibid, 52.
- 4 Ibid, 99.
- 5 Ibid, 57.

Course Objectives

This course will assist you to:

- ☞ consider the need for developing and continuing spiritual disciplines.
- ☞ look at spiritual disciplines and ways to incorporate them into your sphere of influence.
- ☞ explore some tools for maintaining your physical health as a single.
- ☞ explore some tools for maintaining your emotional health as a single.
- ☞ find contentment in singleness.
- ☞ identify boundaries related to living and working as a single and design strategies for maintaining balance in your life and work.
- ☞ be proactive in getting your social needs met, including developing cross-cultural relationships.
- ☞ cultivate and nurture family-type relationships with colleagues.
- ☞ accept and deal with your family.
- ☞ examine your motivations for ministry in your cross-cultural context.
- ☞ persevere in and commit to your cross-cultural ministry.

The course material is divided into the following lessons:

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Lesson 1

Nurturing Your Spirit

In this learning task you will consider the need for developing and continuing spiritual disciplines as a single.

The single adult is often called upon to undertake more tasks and responsibilities than others due to the mistaken belief that singles have more time than others. How you manage your time will determine the degree to which you are able to nurture your spiritual walk.

In this section, we will focus on the benefits of spending more time with the Lord and the many activities and perceptions that can sidetrack the single adult from enjoying the full scope of this blessing.

Paul says that singleness can be a state of blessedness, not only in the sense that singles can be vehicles of God's blessing to other people, but also because they themselves receive blessing from God by finding personal identity in Christ and relying upon him. The result can be a stronger Christian identity, a healthier personality and a more secure perspective on life.¹

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- 1.1 How do you spend your time? Make a list of the things you do. In the second column number them in order of importance. In the third column note the approximate percentage of time each activity receives in a week.**

activity	importance	% of time

Now compare the second and third columns. Record your thoughts here.

Author Angela Payne, a single woman, gives some insight into the balancing act single women and men undertake every day:

As a single woman, making decisions that couples usually make together can be challenging, possibly even overwhelming. Taking care of the home and doing things that men traditionally do has been tough, as I am mechanically impaired. There is no 'honey-do' list in my home. If I don't take the initiative, no one else will.²

Time

Though the single adult does not need to make time for a spouse or children, he or she must maintain a household, career, and ministry. There is no one else to do the laundry, pay the bills, pick up the dry cleaning, service the car, buy birthday gifts, cook the meals, cover for you when you are sick, arrange for travel, or tend to the yard. As one single missionary stated, "It is hard to get things done at home, like taking care of maintenance problems, when I have other responsibilities, because there is no one else to wait for the electrician, plumber or other worker."

One myth about singleness is that singles have huge amounts of free time... On the contrary, singles tend to be just as busy as married people, if not more so. In fact, singles may juggle too many responsibilities precisely because they don't have a spouse and family. Singles don't have a spouse to help handle the details of daily life.³

Is this scenario evident within our work culture? Based on 2002 figures for the IMB, the attrition rate for single missionaries is 6.4% compared with 5% for married missionaries. This statistic is perhaps more significant when you realize that single long-term missionaries make up only 8% of the missionary force. The following quotes are from interviews with single IMB personnel. The stories they relate are not uncommon.

I was on 24-hour call. There was not good communication with my supervisor. He would call me to come clear across the city to move a washing machine or something at the height of rush hour traffic after I'd just left from there and arrived home...Finally I had to start saying no. Learning to say no was so hard. I asked for a transfer after several months. The next place I went to was a little better. There was still an expectation that I shouldn't have free time, though. (Masters, single man)

I was teaching two families' children. I took the bus over to one house in the morning, took the bus back to my house for lunch, and took two more buses to get to the other location. I was traveling 3 hours a day—if they had offered to drive me, it would have taken 15 minutes...I didn't have time for anything. With teaching five children eight hours every day and traveling 3 hours, I really began to fall apart. (Journeyman, single woman)

1.2 What could these missionaries have done differently to remedy their situations?

Disappointment is a result of unmet expectations. These disappointed folks likely had quite different expectations for their jobs than the people with whom they worked. Communicating and setting realistic expectations, including a need for rest and renewal, is key to avoiding disappointment no matter who is involved.

A story told by Abba Anthony, a monk known as one of the Desert Fathers, relates a conversation between himself and a hunter. The hunter is disturbed to find Anthony enjoying some moments of leisure. In response, Anthony tells the hunter to string his bow and shoot. He repeats the command several times in succession until the hunter says, “But if I bend my bow too much, I will break it.” Then Abba Anthony said to him, “It is just the same with the work of God. If we stretch ourselves beyond measure, we will break. Sometimes it is necessary to meet other needs.”⁴

“Come to Me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. All of you, take up My yoke and learn from Me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for yourselves. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” Matthew 11:28-30

Nothing on earth should keep us from developing a deep relationship with our Heavenly Father, our First Love. No task, no human expectation—nothing compares to the importance of knowing God.

You were made for relationship with God. Notice that this “you” is *you singular*. Apart from any other person God desires to relate to you as the individual He made. You are not one of many or one part of a whole. You are a unique *one* whom He made to fulfill a purpose within His Body. No one, apart from Christ, can be substituted for you. No one, apart from Christ, completes you.

Jesus tells us in Luke 12:20-21, “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is demanded of you. And the things you have prepared—whose will they be?’ “That’s how it is with the one who stores up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

.....

1.3 What are some examples of earthly “treasure” that may draw an individual’s attention away from being “rich toward God”?

Circle the ones that draw *your* attention.

Trusting in God’s goodness to meet all of our needs is the bedrock of our relationship to Him. One married missionary shared the following comments:

Sometimes I think you single folks understand more about what it is to truly depend upon the Father. If I don’t get something done, I can depend upon my wife to do it. If I have a need I usually go to her first to see if she can take care of it and, I have to admit, I can get an attitude if she doesn’t. I find myself taking God for granted sometimes because of what my wife can do for me, and then I end up taking her for granted, too. It is not a pretty cycle. Single missionaries are expected to accomplish all of the same things, but many of them are much more beholden to God to meet their needs—I think that’s probably a good thing.

*Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice.
Blessed are all who wait for him!*

Isaiah 30:18 (NIV)

- 1.4 Jesus gives us a model to follow as we nurture our walk with the Father. Read the following verses and consider what Jesus does, when He does it, and why He does it at the time mentioned.

verses	what	when	why
Matthew 26:42			
Mark 1:35			
Mark 6:30-32			
Luke 5:15b-16			
Luke 6:12			
John 6:15-17			
John 12:36			

What's the common thread?

When Jesus had important decisions to make, had been working particularly hard, had just completed a project, or felt anguished or tired, He took time to be alone with the Father. In fact, one of the verses mentions that Jesus *often* withdrew to pray. Chances are, the Gospel writers did not include every such instance. Jesus' example should encourage each of us to get away and spend time with the Father *on a regular basis*. If Jesus could afford to withdraw for a while for a time of communion with the Father, we must do likewise. It could very well be that what we view as stepping away from the task for a while is actually one of the most important elements of the task itself.

Pain

*What do I do when I'm feeling so far from God—so far from anyone who loves me just because I'm me? What do I do when I yearn to look into the eyes of someone who shares my blood, shares my history—to be around people who were such a vital part of my daily life before coming to the field? What do I do when I begin to feel angry with God for bringing me to this place *alone*? Does He understand how much I hurt? (Journeyman)*

Jesus understands that love involves sacrifice. He also knows that it is sometimes extremely painful and even lonely to seek the Father's will above all else. If you ever doubt this or ever feel discouraged as you serve

the Lord, or you feel the need to encourage or pray for a single colleague, remember these verses:

*“Father, if You are willing, take this cup away from Me—
nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done.”*

*[Then an angel from heaven appeared to Him,
strengthening Him. Being in anguish, He prayed more
fervently, and His sweat became like drops of blood
falling to the ground.] Luke 22:42-44*

God does not intend for you to go through life in isolation. An angel from heaven came and strengthened Jesus. If He needed strengthening, He certainly understands that you do as well. Jesus was in dialogue with the Father, and the Father met His need. Jesus had his best friends with Him, though they fell asleep in His hour of anguish. Still, He models a healthy pattern for us: surround yourself with brothers and sisters in Christ upon whom you can depend, but never forget that it is God who is your source of strength and hope.

When you are feeling painfully lonely or going through a low time in general, this feeling is only temporary and it is a *feeling*, not a fact. Let yourself experience these feelings, but do not focus on them. Share them with the Father.

.....

1.5 Look up the following verses, noting your thoughts. What model does God provide to us for dealing with our pain? How comfortable are you in approaching Him this way? Why?

Psalm 5:1-2

Psalm 6:6

Psalm 16:7-8

Psalm 27:7-10

Psalm 31:7

Psalm 37:23-24

Psalm 56:8

Psalm 107:43

Psalm 126:5-6

Lesson 1: Nurturing Your Spirit

David was a man after God's own heart. One of the fruits of David's relationship with God is the Psalms. We know that David was not perfect. When he sinned, he sinned **big**. What sets David apart, though, is his openness and constancy before the Lord. David was not timid about approaching the Father in his lowest moments because he communicated with God in his highest moments and in the most ordinary moments as well.

If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, and even his own life—he cannot be My disciple. ...In the same way, therefore, every one of you who does not say good-bye to all his possessions cannot be My disciple.

Luke 14:26, 33

A single adult who chooses to heed God's call to overseas missions knows what it is like to give up all of these relationships for Jesus' sake. Though he or she may not have a spouse and children to actually give up, he or she gives up the possibility of having either, at least for a season, to serve the Lord. But we can know that it is worth the sacrifice:

So He said to them, "I assure you: There is no one who has left a house, wife or brothers, parents or children because of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times more at this time, and eternal life in the age to come." Luke 18:29-30

Let us take a moment to reflect on what we have learned thus far. As a single adult, you may be more likely to feel overwhelmed as you attempt to juggle the responsibilities of home, job and ministry requirements. These obligations may pile up due to the assumption that you have more discretionary time than your married counterparts. As a result of the demands made on your time, you may have less time for refreshment in the Lord. This time is critical if you are to maintain physical, emotional, and spiritual health. Compounding these realities, you could lack a functioning nearby support system. While missionary families can go to their homes and be together, you likely either go home alone or you might seek out time with national friends—but even that requires you to speak a foreign language and adhere to cultural standards that are usually not your own. *This is stressful.*

Even in your lowest moments, in those moments when you might begin to feel resentment creeping into your heart, your relationship to God must come first.

Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.

James 4:8a

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- 1.6 Go back to the table of priorities you created on page 14. Spend some time talking to God about where He ranks in your list. Reflect on your time here.

God wants you to be alone with Him—filling up on His love and sharing your life with Him. He wants you to use the love and gifts He’s given you to share with His Body—a Body to which you belong and to whom you are responsible. This Body is to be unified and characterized by sacrificial love. Though sacrifice is not easy, Jesus showed us that the Father is ready to help us when we call Him.

And everyone who has left houses, brothers or sisters, father or mother, children, or fields because of My name will receive 100 times more and will inherit eternal life.

Matthew 19:29

He will reward us for the losses we endure here for the sake of His Kingdom. You can be assured of His presence and care. What you do with your pain will either feed or diminish your level of vulnerability.

For our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens. Ephesians 6:12

Vulnerability

When are you most vulnerable to temptation and attacks? Most likely when you have completely emptied yourself and neglected to fill up with God. In “Christian speak” emptying yourself sounds really good. In fact, we have a tendency to think of people who are “busy for the Lord” as being more spiritual or mature in the faith. If we don’t slow down long enough to spend time with the Lord, the scary consequence is that we’re working and doing in our own meager power. Eventually that wears thin and we become easy prey.

What is so amazing is that God, the very One who runs the entire show, isn’t in a rush. On the sixth day of our universe, God pronounced it “good” and on the seventh He rested. God didn’t say “work hard and try to figure out that I am God,” but He said, “Be still and know...” He didn’t say, “you’ll have to earn your salvation based on the number of hours you put in,” but “my salvation is a free gift, afforded you before you ever took your first breath.”

Margin in life refers to that time which we devote to interests outside of work and responsibility—and time for the unexpected demands and opportunities that arise. If you don't have it, you need to get it—intentionally. It will not be provided for you by others. Jesus modeled it for us:

Yet He often withdrew to deserted places and prayed.

Luke 5:16

The marginless lifestyle is a relatively new invention and one of progress's most unreasonable ideas. Yet in a very short time it has become a nearly universal malady. Few are immune. It is not limited to a certain socioeconomic group, or to a certain educational level. Even those with a deep spiritual faith are not spared. Its pain is impartial and nonsectarian—everybody gets to have some.⁵

The world expects us to be busy. The buzz and hum of modern life and the multitasking mindset has depleted our margins. Whether these expectations come from within or without, they are unhealthy at best and destructive at worst.

What is time for? If it is only for work, then what will be left of me when the work is gone?⁶

For the world, we see the effects of empty people seeking to be fulfilled. Enter drug addictions, food addictions, sexual addictions, adrenaline addictions, ... and the list could go on without end. Missionaries are as vulnerable to these pitfalls as anyone else. In fact, they might be even more vulnerable.

Most of us have experienced being the “pride of the church”—people think we are “super” human beings for going and serving God as a missionary, especially as a single. The trouble is some think we are *superhuman* beings—and we might even start believing that a bit ourselves.

Just remember, God is *not* going to share His glory. The best way to keep things in perspective, to keep yourself off the pedestal upon which others may want to put you (or maybe you've put yourself) is to humble yourself before the One that belongs on the pedestal—each and every day.

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, because He cares about you.

Be sober! Be on the alert! Your adversary the Devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour. Resist him, firm in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are being experienced by your brothers in the world. 1Peter 5:6-9

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1.7 List the steps toward finding protection that are outlined in these verses. How well are you following them?

We know that Jesus withdrew often to pray—to be alone with the Father in quiet, free from activity, responsibility, and external expectation. In *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster says,

*The Disciplines are for the purpose of realizing a greater good. In and of themselves they are of no value whatever. They have value only as a means of setting us before God so that he can give us the liberation we seek. The liberation is the end; the Disciplines are merely the means. They are not the answer. They only lead us to the Answer....Let us forever center on Christ and view the Spiritual Disciplines as a way of drawing us closer to his heart.*⁷

The next lesson continues our look at spiritual discipline and ways to incorporate it into the life of the single missionary.



END NOTES

- 1 Albert Y. Hsu. *Singles at the Crossroads: A Fresh Perspective on Christian Singleness*. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 95.
- 2 Payne, Angela. *Living Every Single Moment*. (Birmingham, Ala.: New Hope Publishers, 2000), 4.
- 3 Hsu, 163-164.
- 4 Ingrid Trobisch. *The Confident Woman: Finding Quiet Strength in a Turbulent World*. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 149.
- 5 Richard A. Swenson, M.D. *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives*. (Colorado Springs: NavPress Publishing Group, 1992), 16.
- 6 Trobisch, 149.
- 7 Richard J. Foster. *Celebration of Discipline*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1998), 110-111.

Lesson 2

Finding Balance

In this learning task you will continue looking at spiritual disciplines and ways to incorporate them into your sphere of influence.

How are your margins?

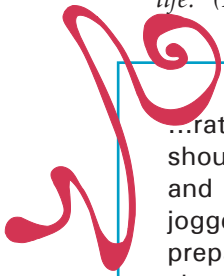
Work time is important. But so is discretionary time, that is, margin. Some discretionary time would be used as leisure time, playtime, free time, or time off. Some would be personal time, solitude time, fallow time, and time to think. We hope a good portion of it would be time together. Ideally, you see, our time should all be God's time, directed by Him and used for His purposes. It is not right that progress has tyrannized us so.¹

One single adult we interviewed enjoyed healthy margins. She expressed the following sentiment after being asked what the benefits were to being a single missionary:

I had such an amazing time with the Lord. When I had a day off, I could shut my door and spend the whole day with Him. If I ever have kids or a spouse I'll have to give that up.

As colleagues, and more importantly as the Body of Christ, is it our responsibility to look after one another's needs? Yes! As a disciple of Christ, is it our responsibility to look after our own needs? Yes! Jesus tells us to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. If we allow ourselves to become stressed to the point of sickness and burnout, chances are that those we are trying to reach for Christ will scratch their heads as we share the Good News and wonder what is so good about it! We have to become comfortable taking care of ourselves as well as we strive to take care of others. A single woman with a successful ministry put it this way:

But when your cup is empty—and for singles, this can happen pretty quickly due to a lack of companionship—you have to act responsibly and do things that fill your tank. That is not being selfish and self-centered; that is using good sense and taking proper care of your emotional and spiritual well-being. "Watch over your heart with all diligence, from it flow the springs of life." (Prov.4:23)²



...rather than flagellating ourselves for our obvious lack, we should remember that God always meets us where we are and slowly moves us along into deeper things. Occasional joggers do not suddenly enter an Olympic marathon. They prepare and train themselves over a period of time, and so should we.³

.....

2.1 Look again at your priority list on page 14. Given your current daily schedule and lifestyle, what would an observer say about the value you place on being still and knowing that God is God?

Life is a journey, but it is not a race. Do yourself a favor and slow down. It is not easy to reassert our right to margin time, but it helps when we are convinced that legitimacy exists for such a right. This legitimacy comes from the same God who exalts faithfulness over productivity, rest over speed, and availability over schedulability. It comes from the same God who invented time in the first place and reserves the right to set the rules for its use. With time margin we can better enjoy what we are doing, we have a more whole-some anticipation of our next activity, we are more contemplative, we are more in touch with God and with each other, we have more time for service, and we actually delight in looking for the divine interruptions He sends us.⁴

Christian singles sometimes impose upon themselves a sense that they must “do more” because they do not have the daily responsibilities of caring for a family. While it is true that singleness provides many opportunities for service, a perpetual outward focus can end up robbing singles of what God is trying to give them in the gift of singleness.

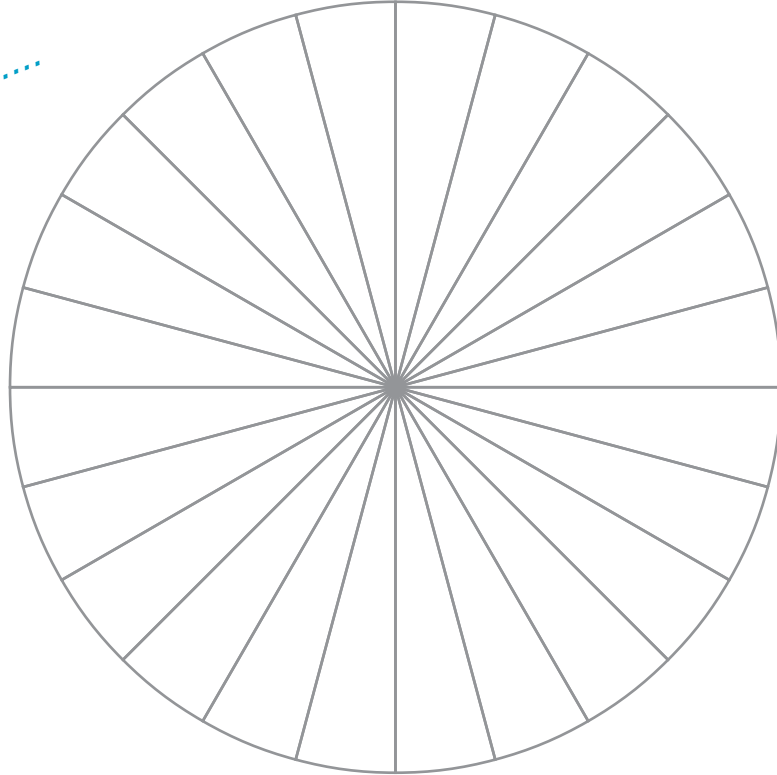
Singleness provides time to invest in spiritual development as well as personal development. Many Christian singles have adopted a kind of “Good Samaritan” attitude toward others, consuming their time and energy in doing good deeds. THIS IS NOT A WISE USE OF SINGLENESS.⁵

Finding a balance among work and ministry objectives, serving others in Christian love, developing meaningful personal relationships, talents or interests, taking care of daily personal needs, and nurturing a growing walk with the Father is essential. When one area suffers due to neglect, all areas will eventually feel the effects. In fact, when one or more members of the Body, either as a result of external expectations or due to personal choices, focus on only one or two of the elements above, the rest of the Body is bound to suffer.

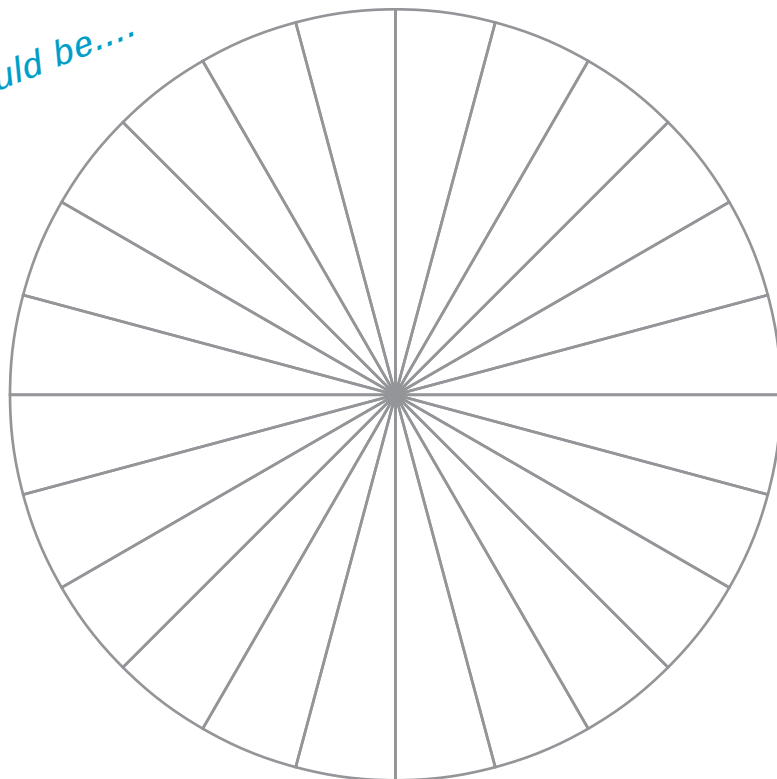
Lesson 2: Finding Balance

- 2.2 In the circles below, create two pie graphs. There are 24 divisions to represent 24 hours. In the first circle, show a typical day in your life. Be sure to include the time for sleep, meals, travel, work, etc.—whatever you normally do. In the second one, show what it would look like if you applied margins to your life. What kinds of changes would you have to make in your life to get the two to match?

How it is....



How it could be....



So why all this talk about time in a section supposed to be enabling the spiritual life of the single adult? Because there is no factor more *disabling* to the spiritual life of a single adult than how his or her time is spent. Though this runs counter to popular opinion, the single adult is more likely to be over-invested in outward-directed activity than the married adult for the reasons we have already mentioned. As responsibilities and expectations mount, discretionary time diminishes. As discretionary time diminishes, personal and spiritual reserves are depleted. When these reserves are depleted, stress intensifies and productivity falls. Burnout is soon to follow.

If you find yourself feeling pressured to work more, or if you find yourself coveting the time colleagues or friends seem to have, remember Jesus' words to Martha in Luke 10:38-42:

While they were traveling, He entered a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who also sat at the Lord's feet and was listening to what He said. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks, and she came up and asked, "Lord, don't You care that my sister has left me to serve alone? So tell her to give me a hand."

The Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has made the right choice, and it will not be taken away from her."

.....
2.3 What is the "one thing worth being concerned about" in your life? Do you identify more with Mary or Martha? Why? How do you feel about that?

Lesson 2: Finding Balance

Jesus validated Mary's choice. He even said that He would not take the freedom she had to make that choice away from her. When we begin comparing our lot with that of our brothers and sisters (as Martha did), we are likely to miss the blessings inherent to the situation where the Lord has placed us. Mary was free to deepen her understanding and relationship with Jesus; Martha was free to serve people she loved and with whom she was intimately connected. Our attitudes about where the Lord has us will often color our impressions of how He is dealing with others. Consider the wisdom Jesus imparts. No matter what demands others may place on us or in what temporary circumstances we find ourselves, "There is really only one thing worth being concerned about." If we don't find it, if we don't seek it out, then we have lost the most valuable gift offered to us.

*Jesus was not in a hurry. He took time each day to get his instructions from his Father. We cannot hurry either in the discipline of our spiritual life. Only when we take time to listen to the voice of the gentle Shepherd will we be enabled to do the things we cannot do alone. If we try to hurry-hurry our prayer life, we can make it irrelevant. Sometimes I have to admit that I cannot finish some task. I can only do today what I can do today. Discipleship is learning to live my life as He would like me to. He is the only one who knows the end from the beginning. Therefore, I cannot afford **not** to take time to listen to him and then obey what He says.⁶*

Accountability

Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their efforts. For if either falls, his companion can lift him up; but pity the one who falls without another to lift him up. Also, if two lie down together, they can keep warm; but how can one person alone keep warm? And if somebody overpowers one person, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not easily broken.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

By yourself you're unprotected. With a friend you can face the worst. Ecclesiastes 4:12a (The Message)

Recently I asked a group of young women who were preparing to serve on the mission field if God was all they needed. I found it intriguing that about half the group said, "Yes."

The other half of the group answered carefully, so as not to appear unspiritual. "No...He provides all we need, but He made us to live in relationship with others. We need each other."

2.4 What do you think?

I shared the following quote with them:

Adam enjoyed unbroken fellowship with God, a perfect fellowship not yet marred by sin, and a totally satisfying paradise. Yet, it wasn't good for him to be without others. This is the first thing God described as "not good" in all His creation up to that point, which highlights an important truth: No matter the depth and sweetness of your fellowship with God, you need relationship with others as well as with God.⁷

Does that match your thinking?

Paul tells the church in Colosse,

For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you, for those in Laodicea, and for all who have not seen me in person. [I want] their hearts to be encouraged and joined together in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding, and have the knowledge of God's mystery—Christ. Colossians 2:1-2

Paul recognized that unity and love within the Body was what would ultimately protect it from heresy. Fellowship with other believers provides accountability in the Spirit. A pastor gave a vivid illustration of this concept from his son's experience playing on a team. The boy's coach asked him, "Son, where is the wolf's strength?" The boy thought for a moment—was it in his vice-like jaws or his steely shoulders? He couldn't decide. The coach gave him the answer. "It's in the pack, boy. *In the pack!*" As Christians, our strength is in Christ, who makes us one Body. We are all part of the same vine—there are no rogue branches here.

Jesus modeled ministry with built-in accountability. He didn't strike out on His own for three years—He called *twelve* companions to walk with Him. He didn't send them out alone either—even though the workers were few. Just consider these verses in Luke 10:1-2:

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." (NIV)

It seems logical that if the workers are few, Jesus could have maximized His human resources by sending the 72 out separately—but He purposefully paired them, meaning only thirty-six units, in IMB-speak, were available. His understanding obviously exceeds ours in this area.

2.5 Consider the two situations that follow.

A. *We had a very small team. It was just the career couple I was working with and me. We prayed together every Wednesday. It was an incredible time. We weren't just focusing on our people group, but on each other as well. If either of them was struggling with something, we'd pray about it—if I was struggling, we'd pray. We shared our joys and struggles and were transparent. When I found myself in a relationship with a national—a relationship that I thought was just friendship—they already knew all the details and the husband was even able to warn me that the man probably had more in mind than friendship. I really believe that if we hadn't had such regular, loving accountability—such strong fellowship that wasn't reduced to a working relationship, I would have been vulnerable in that situation. I'm no different than any other young, single woman who goes out alone. The difference was that my brother and sister in Christ cared deeply for me, strengthened me, and walked with me. I was blessed to have opportunities to do the same for them. (Journeyman)*

B. *I was supposed to have a partner, but my supervisor said there were too few of us, so he decided to spread us out. I went right after college. I was told one time, "This is the real world..." in response to a need. I was told that someone would meet me in my city when I got there, but nobody did. The closest person was, in fact, an 8 to 10 hour bus ride away. I saw from the very beginning that my supervisor was too busy to orient me. I was teaching at a college—the only American there. I was hungry for spiritual encouragement and fellowship. There were demands made of me—and that was the extent of my supervision. My supervisor was concerned about my reports, but not very concerned about me. (Journeyman)*

In which of these environments would you prefer to work? Why?

Plot your current work situation on the following scale, with the two examples on either end of the continuum.

A _____ B

What could you do to make your situation more like the one you prefer? How can you influence the people with whom you interact?

- 2.6 **How important is it to have an accountability partner? If you have one, why? If you don't, why not? How can you begin and/or develop this kind of relationship? If it's difficult due to location or circumstances, be creative. (For example, as you are studying this material you are accountable to ICEL, most likely via the Internet.)**

One more time—your relationship to God must come first—not your job or social obligations. God wants you to be alone with Him—filling up on His love and sharing your life with Him. He wants you to use the love and gifts He’s given you to share with His Body.

Let’s look at the concept of spiritual gifts. God gives us the ability to excel in certain areas in order to further His Kingdom. That means we probably won’t excel in *all* areas, but because we are part of His Body, there aren’t any gaps. We can depend on others who are gifted in the areas where we are not so that the work is accomplished.

Spiritual Gifts

You’re probably already aware of your spiritual gifts. (If not, there are several good assessments available online. Visit www.lifeway.com and search for the inventory, or Google to find other sites.) Consider the following ways to develop your spiritual gifts:⁸

1. Remember what God has already given you. You’ve been called to ministry. You have a purpose. You have friends, family, and colleagues. You have a relationship with God, who has planned for you to be where you are, and He has given you the ability to do what He has called you to do.
2. Maintain healthy routines and patterns. Establish a schedule and stick to it whenever possible. Be purposeful about your sleep, your nutrition, your exercise, and your fellowship. Create margin in your life so there will be time to do the things that build you up.
3. Make a daily date with your Bible. We’ve talked about this already. Time with God is more important than anything—and you have to let Him talk sometimes. Establish Bible study as part of your daily routine.
4. Consult with trusted friends when changes take place. It’s important to just say it out loud to help clarify your thinking. Trusted listeners will give you honest feedback and balanced perspective to keep you on the right track. Develop this relationship before you need it.
5. Pray without ceasing. Don’t think that means you need to say a lot of words. What you’re seeking is constant communication with the Holy Spirit, listening for God’s voice, seeking His face, enjoying His company. Learn to meditate.

...Detachment is not enough; we must go on to attachment. The detachment from the confusion all around us is in order to have a richer attachment to God. Christian meditation leads us to the inner wholeness necessary to give ourselves to God freely.⁹

6. Realize that growth is ambiguous. Sometimes it’s two steps up and one step back, and sometimes that’s reversed. We all want to know that we’ve finished what we set out to do. Try to set some measurable goals so you can have the feeling of accomplishment, but know that the work is never finished.

Lesson 2: Finding Balance

7. Read, collect, and file—never stop learning. You’ve taken a step in that direction by working on this course. Go back up to #2 and build in some time for reading. What have you always wanted to know about? Spend some time looking into it. If filing is not your thing, ask someone who is good at it to help you set up a system you can live with—and live with it!
8. Be accountable to someone. We’ve already looked at this topic, but do you have a plan? If not, make one now. This is not the area to leave for spontaneous meetings. Set regular times to talk with your accountability partner and have an agenda.

All of these concepts speak to how you use your time. Don’t give your blessing of time away without thought and prayer, and don’t take it away from a brother or sister without equally sincere consideration. Full schedules, long hours, and frenetic activity can become the distractions that Satan uses to take our eyes away from God.

If you find things getting out of balance, remember the following illustration and do all you can to restore proper perspective.

“I view my life as a tree,” explains author Jean Fleming. The trunk is the anchor of her life, her relationship to Christ. The limbs represent those major focus areas that God has given her—relationships, job, ministry, and personal development. And the branches represent the ever-proliferating multitude of activities. “Even without special care, activity branches multiply. Soon the profusion of branches becomes more prominent than the trunk and limbs. When this happens, I feel trapped, frustrated, and empty. Why? Because my life is shaped and drained by activities that have lost their pertinence to Christ.”¹⁰

Ephraim, why should I have anything more to do with idols? It is I who answer and watch over him. I am like a flourishing pine tree; your fruit comes from Me.
Hosea 14:8

END NOTES

- 1 Richard A. Swenson, M.D. *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives*. (Colorado Springs: NavPress Publishing Group, 1992), 146.
- 2 Virginia McInerney. *Single Not Separate: How to Make the Church a Family* (Lake Mary, Fla.: Charisma House, 2003), 35.
- 3 Richard J. Foster. *Celebration of Discipline*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1998), 35.
- 4 Swenson, 161.
- 5 Jim Towns. *Single Space: Victorious Living for the Single Adult*. (Tulsa, Okla.: Honor Books, 1990), 32.
- 6 Ingrid Trobisch. *The Confident Woman: Finding Quiet Strength in a Turbulent World*. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 146.
- 7 McInerney, 97.
- 8 Faulkner, Brooks. “8 Ways to Sharpen Your God-Given Gifts and Abilities.” http://www.lifeway.com/lwc/article_main_page/0%2C1703%2CA%253D150999%2526M%253D200005%2C00.html (accessed 7/28/05).
- 9 Foster, 21.
- 10 Fleming, Jean. *Feeding Your Soul*. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1999).

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- 2.6 Based on the illustration above, use the space below to draw your “tree.” Make your relationship with Jesus the trunk, and put in major limbs similar to Jean Fleming’s. The branches will be unique to your life and responsibilities.

Now prune away branches that are overloading the limbs, and graft in branches to make your tree stronger. Ask God to show you what’s important.

Discipline and balance apply to all areas of life for every christian. Besides spiritual discipline, we need to bring all the rest of our existence into alignment, which is the focus of the next few lessons. We’ll look at physical health first.



Lesson 3

Physical Health

In this learning task you will explore some tools for maintaining your physical health as a single.

Did you know that simply by being single a person is at increased health risk? Studies show that single adults are more frequently ill than their married peers—even if socioeconomic factors are the same.

The evidence from four decades of research is surprisingly clear: a good marriage is both men's and women's best bet for living a long and healthy life. Men and women who are in their first marriages, on average, enjoy significantly higher levels of physical and mental health than those who are either single, divorced, or living together. The research on this is very strong.¹

What steps can singles take to improve their chances of living a healthy life? This section will address this issue in detail by exploring preventive healthcare, good eating habits, and healthy lifestyle choices.

Preventive Healthcare

Single adults are less likely to seek out preventive and routine healthcare than are married adults. “Generally, compared with those who are not married, married individuals eat better, take better care of themselves, and live a more stable, secure and scheduled lifestyle.”² Though men tend to have a poorer track record when it comes to having yearly check-ups whether they are single or married, married men do seek out such care with greater regularity. Single women, particularly those who are not sexually active, schedule yearly check-ups with significantly less regularity than do married women of the same age and educational background.

Why is this so? One reason may be that marriage provides accountability when it comes to health maintenance issues. Another possible reason, which applies more directly to women, is that many people take their reproductive health for granted when they are single and not sexually active—“I’ll do that when I get married.” Though one spouse may forget or simply avoid seeking out regular health exams, the other spouse can probably be counted on to remind him or her to be responsible about this issue. Typically, when people marry, and especially when they have children, they begin to realize that neglecting their own routine physicals could result in missing a treatable condition, and they owe it to their loved ones to take care of themselves. Singles need to realize that they owe it to themselves, their families, and their possible future families, to take their health seriously now.

Generally recommended health exams are provided in the following table, adapted from an article by Bridget Martell, MD³. Much of this information is discussed during field orientation training for missionaries. You might encounter these topics again when you seek medical clearance after finishing a term. In the meantime, see where you are currently.

3.1 Review the following chart, filling in your dates as appropriate.

<i>gender</i>	<i>exam</i>	<i>age to begin testing</i>	<i>frequency</i>	<i>date of your last test</i>	<i>date of your next test</i>
<i>Men</i>	<i>Testicular self-exam (TSE)</i>	<i>adolescence</i>	<i>monthly</i>		
<i>Men</i>	<i>Prostate cancer screening</i>	<i>baseline by age 40; earlier if family history exists</i>	<i>annual digital rectal exam. PSA may be used to screen but this can also indicate benign growths as a man ages.</i>		
<i>Both</i>	<i>Dental</i>	<i>when teeth appear</i>	<i>every 6 months</i>		
<i>Both</i>	<i>Vision</i>	<i>when you begin school</i>	<i>annually</i>		
<i>Both</i>	<i>Glaucoma</i>	<i>Caucasians age 65 & over; African Americans age 40 & over</i>	<i>annually; especially important for diabetics</i>		
<i>Both</i>	<i>Blood pressure</i>	<i>age 18</i>	<i>annually; more frequently if high or low</i>		
<i>Both</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>birth</i>	<i>annually; more frequently if sudden loss or gain</i>		
<i>Both</i>	<i>Basic metabolic panel & blood count</i>	<i>childhood</i>	<i>annually; checks blood sugar and other treatable conditions</i>		
<i>Both</i>	<i>Cholesterol screening</i>	<i>baseline by age 18-20</i>	<i>if baseline is normal, every 5 yrs; high-risk more frequently</i>		
<i>Both</i>	<i>Colon cancer screening</i>	<i>age 50 or earlier with family history</i>	<i>stool guaiac (blood in stool) test annually; sigmoidoscopy every 3 yrs; colonoscopy every 5-10 yrs</i>		
<i>Both</i>	<i>Skin cancer screening</i>	<i>adolescence</i>	<i>annually, but have skin lesions, changing moles, or discolorations checked immediately</i>		
<i>Women</i>	<i>Breast self-exam (BSE)</i>	<i>adolescence</i>	<i>monthly</i>		
<i>Women</i>	<i>Pap smear</i>	<i>when sexually active or age 20 regardless of sexual activity</i>	<i>after 3 negative, consecutive annual tests, celibate women under 35 may decrease testing to every 2-3 yrs; if taking oral contraceptives or over 40, annually</i>		
<i>Women</i>	<i>Mammography</i>	<i>baseline by age 40, earlier with increased risk</i>	<i>every 2 yrs from 40-50 annually over 50</i>		

Lesson 3: Physical Health

This table is not meant to be a substitute for maintaining a working relationship with a doctor. In many countries of the world, preventive medicine is likely to be non-existent. If you live in a remote area, opportunities for seeking medical care may be limited, making it more important to take advantage of annual general meetings when doctors are sometimes available to do such screenings or when you happen to be in a large city that offers more up-to-date medical services.

In most cases, the screenings listed in the chart will be done as part of a routine physical. If you are aware that you have missed certain tests (look back at the dates you filled in on the chart), be sure to let your doctor know. It's also important for you to keep a medical file on yourself. Request copies of all test results so that you can share these with doctors as needed. Because of the nature of our work, we must be proactive about maintaining accurate health histories for ourselves.

If you experience the following symptoms, you need to seek medical attention right away:

- *A lump or persistent lesion appears on your body*
- *You have unexplained weight loss*
- *You have a prolonged fever*
- *A chronic cough develops (or if you begin to cough up blood)*
- *You notice continued body aches/pains*

Have a plan for obtaining professional care before the need arises.³

If you find the medical advice you receive is dismissive or unsatisfactory, consult the IMB Medical Department for further instructions.

Despite the fact that you got “shot” more times than you care to remember when you visited the immunization clinics during field personnel orientation, you still need to get boosters from time to time—particularly, but not limited to, the tetanus vaccine. Be sure to keep your immunizations up to date and **keep a record** to avoid unnecessary pain and possible difficulties as you cross national borders.

If you are allergic to certain drugs or have a condition that would contraindicate certain medical procedures, be certain that a colleague is aware of these issues. Better yet, consider wearing a “medic alert” type bracelet in the event you are alone and experience a medical crisis.

*You ARE what
you EAT*

There are seven basic tenets or “musts” to good health:

1. *proper eating habits*
2. *sufficient vitamin and mineral ingestion*
3. *adequate sleep and rest*
4. *a regular program of exercise*
5. *an ample intake of pure water*
6. *a positive outlook on life*
7. *a healthy lifestyle⁴*

The USDA has recently updated the food pyramid to reflect new findings for a healthy diet. The following is adapted from their website, www.mypyramid.gov.

What is a “Healthy Diet”? The Dietary Guidelines describe a healthy diet as one that

- Emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products;
- Includes lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs, and nuts; and
- Is low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt (sodium), and added sugars.

MyPyramid is not a therapeutic diet for any specific health condition. Individuals with a chronic health condition should consult with a health care provider to determine what dietary pattern is appropriate for them.

Key Recommendations for the General Population

ADEQUATE NUTRIENTS WITHIN CALORIE NEEDS

- Consume a variety of nutrient-dense foods and beverages within and among the basic food groups while choosing foods that limit the intake of saturated and trans fats, cholesterol, added sugars, salt, and alcohol.
- Meet recommended intakes within energy needs by adopting a balanced eating pattern, such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Guide or the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) Eating Plan, both available at www.my-pyramid.gov.

WEIGHT MANAGEMENT

- To maintain body weight in a healthy range, balance calories from foods and beverages with calories expended.
- To prevent gradual weight gain over time, make small decreases in food and beverage calories and increase physical activity.

This is a good place to talk about Body Mass Index (BMI). The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website says BMI is “a reliable indicator of body fatness for people.” They call a BMI of 30 or over “obese.” To calculate your BMI, use one of the following formulas. For more information visit the CDC website: www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/bmi.

BMI

units	Formula and calculation
Kilograms and meters (or centimeters)	<p>Formula: $\text{weight (kg)} / [\text{height (m)}]^2$</p> <p>Calculation: $[\text{weight (kg)} / \text{height (m)}] / \text{height (m)}$</p> <p>With the metric system, the formula for BMI is weight in kilograms divided by height in meters squared. Since height is commonly measured in centimeters, divide height in centimeters by 100 to obtain height in meters.</p> <p>Example: Height = 165 cm (1.65 m), Weight = 68 kg</p> <p>Calculation: $68 \div (1.65)^2 = 24.98$</p>
Pounds and inches	<p>Formula: $\text{weight (lb)} / [\text{height (in)}]^2 \times 703$</p> <p>Calculation: $[\text{weight (lb)} / \text{height (in)}] / \text{height (in)} \times 703$</p> <p>Calculate BMI by dividing weight in pounds (lbs) by height in inches (in) squared and multiplying by a conversion factor of 703.</p> <p>Example: Weight = 150 lbs, Height = 5'5" (65")</p> <p>Calculation: $[150 \div (65)^2] \times 703 = 24.96$</p>

Lesson 3: Physical Health

The IMB's BMI policy is as follows:

- Age 34 and below: BMI 30 or less
- Age 35-44 BMI 31 or less
- Age 45-54 BMI 32 or less
- Age 55+ BMI 33 or less

FOOD GROUPS TO ENCOURAGE

- Consume a sufficient amount of fruits and vegetables while staying within energy needs. Two cups of fruit and 2½ cups of vegetables per day are recommended for a reference 2,000-calorie intake, with higher or lower amounts depending on the calorie level.
- Choose a variety of fruits and vegetables each day. In particular, select from all five vegetable subgroups (dark green, orange, legumes, starchy vegetables, and other vegetables) several times a week.
- Consume 3 or more ounce-equivalents of whole-grain products per day, with the rest of the recommended grains coming from enriched or whole-grain products. In general, at least half the grains should come from whole grains.
- Consume 3 cups per day of fat-free or low-fat milk or equivalent milk products.

FATS

- Consume less than 10 percent of calories from saturated fatty acids and less than 300 mg/day of cholesterol, and keep trans fatty acid consumption as low as possible.
- Keep total fat intake between 20 and 35 percent of calories, with most fats coming from sources of polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fatty acids, such as fish, nuts, and vegetable oils.
- When selecting and preparing meat, poultry, dry beans, and milk or milk products, make choices that are lean, low-fat, or fat-free.
- Limit intake of fats and oils high in saturated and/or trans fatty acids, and choose products low in such fats and oils.

CARBOHYDRATES

- Choose fiber-rich fruits, vegetables, and whole grains often.
- Choose and prepare foods and beverages with little added sugars or caloric sweeteners, such as amounts suggested by the USDA Food Guide and the DASH Eating Plan.
- Reduce the incidence of dental caries by practicing good oral hygiene and consuming sugar- and starch-containing foods and beverages less frequently.

SODIUM AND POTASSIUM

- Consume less than 2,300 mg (approximately 1 teaspoon of salt) of sodium per day.
- Choose and prepare foods with little salt. At the same time, consume potassium-rich foods, such as fruits and vegetables.

Note: The Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005 contains additional recommendations for specific populations. The full document is available at www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines.

Updated Tuesday, January 11, 2005 by ODPHP Web Support

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- 3.2 So how's your diet? Based on the guidelines, evaluate your normal food intake with reference to amount and nutritional value. What can you do to honor God through your diet?

Sometimes singles will not go to the trouble of cooking for themselves, but they will gladly do so when expecting company. If you find yourself in a mealtime rut, use your lunch or dinner hours as a ministry opportunity. Invite a friend or two to eat with you in your home. This will give you the incentive to fix a good meal, an opportunity for meaningful fellowship, and respite from leftovers (since more of what you prepare will be eaten!)

*Mealtime as
Ministry Time*

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- 3.3 Reflect on the following Scriptures. How do they relate to your life and ministry?
- John 21:7-14

- Acts 2:44-47

- Hebrews 13:1-2

- 1 Peter 4:8-9

Lesson 3: Physical Health

In addition to these instances, we know that Jesus shared meals with his disciples, ate in the homes of a wide variety of people, and miraculously fed multitudes. It was the Last *Supper*—not the last meeting, or conversation, or cup of coffee. There is something unique about the bonding that results from sharing a meal. As a single adult, you have the opportunity to invite people into your home on a regular basis without disrupting a family routine. Not only will this benefit your ministry, but it will also likely improve your health as you strive to provide delicious, nutritious meals for your guests.

There will be times, of course, when you will be cooking just for yourself. Take the time to take care of yourself—you are not less worthy of a good healthy meal than your guests! We look into “cooking for one” more in lesson five.

Healthy
Lifestyles

As Southern Baptists, we have a leg up on many when it comes to living a healthy lifestyle. Avoiding alcohol and cigarette use provides us with many health benefits. However, Southern Baptists are also known for fellowshiping around food and, as such, it is important to follow a consistent fitness program. This fact takes on greater urgency when you consider research by Glenn T. Stanton, of Focus on the Family, which shows that “the health benefits of marriage are so strong that a married man with heart disease can be expected to live, on average 1400 days longer (nearly four years!) than an unmarried man with a healthy heart. This longer life expectancy is even greater for a married man who has cancer or is 20 pounds overweight compared to his healthy, but unmarried, counterpart. The advantages for women are similar.”⁵

For a complex array of reasons, single adults may be at a disadvantage when it comes to health issues, but we can help ourselves. Being proactive about our healthcare is one way; choosing and cooking the right foods is another way. Taking fitness seriously is the final piece of the puzzle when it comes to maintaining a healthy body.

The following information is from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Pyramid website: www.mypyramid.gov.

Getting Fit

What is physical activity?

Physical activity simply means movement of the body that uses energy. Walking, gardening, briskly pushing a baby stroller, climbing the stairs, playing soccer, or dancing the night away are all good examples of being active. For health benefits, physical activity should be moderate or vigorous and add up to at least 30 minutes a day.

Moderate physical activities include:

- Walking briskly (about 3 ½ miles per hour)
- Hiking
- Gardening/yard work

- Dancing
- Golf (walking and carrying clubs)
- Bicycling (less than 10 miles per hour)
- Weight training (general light workout)

Vigorous physical activities include:

- Running/jogging (5 miles per hour)
- Bicycling (more than 10 miles per hour)
- Swimming (freestyle laps)
- Aerobics
- Walking very fast (4 ½ miles per hour)
- Heavy yard work, such as chopping wood
- Weight lifting (vigorous effort)
- Basketball (competitive)

Some physical activities are not intense enough to help you meet the recommendations. Although you are moving, these activities do not increase your heart rate, so you should not count these towards the 30 or more minutes a day that you should strive for. These include walking at a casual pace, such as while grocery shopping, and doing light household chores.

Why is physical activity important?

Being physically active is a key element in living a longer, healthier, happier life. It can help relieve stress and can provide an overall feeling of well-being. Physical activity can also help you achieve and maintain a healthy weight and lower risk for chronic disease. It is beneficial as it

- Improves self-esteem and feelings of well-being
- Increases fitness level
- Helps build and maintain bones, muscles, and joints
- Builds endurance and muscle strength
- Enhances flexibility and posture
- Helps manage weight
- Lowers risk of heart disease, colon cancer, and type 2 diabetes
- Helps control blood pressure
- Reduces feelings of depression and anxiety

Physical activity and nutrition work together for better health. Being active increases the amount of calories burned. "As you age, your metabolism tends to decelerate by about 5% for every decade of life past age 40, so that if your resting metabolic rate is, say, 1,200 calories per day at age 40, it will be around 1,140 at age 50."⁶ This fact underscores the need to become and remain physically active.

Some types of physical activity are especially beneficial:

- Aerobic activities—speeds heart rate and breathing and improves heart and lung fitness. Examples are brisk walking, jogging, and swimming.
- Resistance, strength building, and weight-bearing activities—helps build and maintain bones and muscles by working them against gravity. Examples are carrying a child, lifting weights, and walking. They help to build and maintain muscles and bones.
- Balance and stretching activities—enhances physical stability and flexibility, which reduces risk of injuries. Examples are gentle stretching, light gymnastics, and creative movement.

How much physical activity is needed?

At a minimum, do moderate intensity activity for 30 minutes most days, or preferably every day. This is in addition to your usual daily activities. Increasing the intensity or the amount of time of activity can have additional health benefits and may be needed to control body weight.

About 60 minutes a day of moderate physical activity may be needed to prevent weight gain. For those who have lost weight, at least 60 to 90 minutes a day may be needed to maintain the weight loss. At the same time, calorie needs should not be exceeded. Children and teenagers should be physically active for at least 60 minutes every day, or most days.

While 30 minutes a day of moderate intensity physical activities provides health benefits, being active for longer or doing more vigorous activities can provide even greater health benefits. They also use up more calories per hour. No matter what activity you choose, it can be done all at once, or divided into two or three parts during the day. Even 10-minute bouts of activity count toward your total.

Most adults do not need to see their health care provider before starting to exercise at a moderate level. However, ***men over the age of 40 and women over the age of 50 planning to start vigorous physical activity should consult a health care provider.*** Individuals with one of the conditions below should also consult a health care provider for help in designing a safe program of physical activity.

- A chronic health problem such as heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, osteoporosis, asthma, or obesity.
- High risk for heart disease, such as a family history of heart disease or stroke, eating a diet high in saturated fat, trans fat and cholesterol, smoking, or having a sedentary lifestyle.

Tips for increasing physical activity

Make physical activity a regular part of the day

Choose activities that you enjoy and can do regularly. Fitting activity into a daily routine can be easy—such as taking a brisk 10 minute walk to and from the parking lot, bus stop, or subway station. Or, join an exercise class. Keep it interesting by trying something different on alternate days. What's important is to be active most days of the week and make it part of your daily routine. For example, to reach a 30-minute goal for the day, walk the dog for 10 minutes before and after work, and add a 10-minute walk at lunchtime. Or, swim 3 times a week and take an exercise class on the other days. Make sure to do at least 10 minutes of the activity at a time; shorter bursts of activity will not have the same health benefits. To be ready anytime, keep some comfortable clothes and a pair of walking or running shoes in the car and at the office.

More ways to increase physical activity

These suggestions don't apply in every location. Just use them as ideas to stimulate your creativity—and get moving!

At home:

- Join or form a walking group in the neighborhood. Recruit a partner for support and encouragement.
- Walk the dog—don't just watch the dog walk.
- Clean the house or wash the car or windows.
- Walk, skate, or cycle more, and drive less.
- Do stretches, exercises, or pedal a stationary bike while watching television or videos.
- Mow the lawn with a push mower.
- Plant and care for a vegetable or flower garden
- Play with the children in your neighborhood—tumble in the leaves, build a snowman, splash in a puddle, or dance to favorite music.

In the workplace:

- Get off the bus or subway one stop early and walk or skate the rest of the way.
- Replace a coffee break with a brisk 10-minute walk. Ask a friend to go with you.
- Take part in an exercise program at work or a nearby gym.

At play:

- Walk, jog, skate, or cycle.
- Swim or do water aerobics.
- Take an exercise class.
- Golf (pull cart or carry clubs).

Lesson 3: Physical Health

- Canoe, row, or kayak.
- Play racketball, tennis, or squash.
- Ski cross-country or downhill.
- Play basketball, softball, or soccer.
- Take a nature walk.
- Most important – have fun while being active!

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3.4 What's your activity level? How do you measure up with the recommendations? Are there ways you can incorporate more physical activity into your day? Make a plan and write it below. To whom will you be accountable?

In *Singled Out for Him*, Nancy Leigh DeMoss gives the following insights:

I confess that discipline is one of my least favorite subjects. But it is something that must be embraced if we want the fruit that it produces. As the writer to the Hebrews expressed, “No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:11 NIV).

Although it may seem relatively unimportant to some, physical discipline is necessary for effective spiritual service. I have often been sobered by Paul’s words to the Corinthians: “And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things... I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1 Cor. 9:25,27). After years of fruitful service, Paul still lived with the awareness that a failure to discipline his physical body could ultimately cause him to be rendered useless—sidelined, disqualified in the final stretch of the race.

I have never been athletically inclined and have always disliked physical exercise. My idea of exercise is reading a book or talking on the telephone! Further, I love to eat! But I have found that when I am intemperate in my eating and exercise habits, I become vulnerable in virtually every other area of my life. If I am unwilling to be disciplined in the most basic areas of my body, what guarantee is there that I will be disciplined in other areas that have even greater implications and consequences?

When my body is not under control, I can count on a lot of other things getting out of control—my attitudes, my tongue, how I use my time, and how I treat others. On the other hand, when I say no to my body and make it do what it does not want to do—physical exercise and moderate eating habits—I experience a greater measure of freedom to be the servant of Christ in other areas.⁷

Caring for yourself is Christ-honoring. Taking the initiative in procuring proper preventive healthcare, choosing and preparing your meals with forethought, and engaging in a regular exercise routine will help keep you in His service for the long haul, allowing you to enjoy the many benefits of His blessings even more richly. We continue our study of well-being in the next lesson as we consider emotional health.



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- 4 Jim Towns. *Single Space: Victorious Living for the Single Adult* (Tulsa, Okla.: Honor Books, 1990), 148.
- 5 Stanton.
- 6 Neil Osterweil. “Fighting 40s Flab,” 5/5/2004, updated 9/2006. <http://www.webmd.com/content/article/85/98830.htm> (accessed 10/31/2006).
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Lesson 4

Emotional Health

In this learning task you will explore some tools for maintaining your emotional health as a single.

Wholeness in singleness

In the last lesson we looked at being healthy physically. It takes discipline to seek preventive care, to eat right, and to exercise faithfully. This same discipline is necessary for maintaining emotional health—being whole while you are single.

Let's begin by considering what wholeness and singleness mean apart from each other. The American Heritage Dictionary says "whole" is an adjective meaning that nothing is missing or left out; that something is complete, with no parts missing; not wounded, injured, or impaired; sound or unhurt; healed. "Single" is also an adjective. Its meanings include solitary; consisting of one part; uniform; not divided; unbroken; individual and distinct; honest; undisguised; unmarried.

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- 4.1 Look at the two definitions. Circle the meanings that stand out for you. How are these two words related?**

Being a whole person means accepting yourself as a unique work of the Father—not static, but not defined by change or activity. Your identity and worth are completely dependent upon Him—no other person, entity, or title can claim to have this significance in your life. The truth is, as a Christian you have the exclusive privilege of being whole. Without having Christ on the inside, wholeness is something people can only seek but can never experience. As a Christian, your wholeness has absolutely nothing to do with your marital status and everything to do with your spiritual status.

Words are empty if they are not viewed within a cultural context. We can claim over and over again that being whole and being single can and should be synonymous—that such a union of states is at least *possible*—but it comes

down to what we believe at a heart level and what we receive from our culture's imbedded messaging systems.

It is important to ask yourself, again and again, 'What do I believe about singlehood?' ... Let's say you believe, as most people do, that singlehood is equivalent to a disease, and therefore you remain ill at ease with your singlehood. What will you do? Probably, you will muster up all your available forces to fight it and annihilate or cure it.¹

You will not experience wholeness as a single adult until you choose to agree with God that at least for now it is His plan for you to be single. This will likely not be easy—your family, church, colleagues, and married friends will either overtly or subconsciously remind you of what you lack as a single adult. You can choose to agree with them, or you can agree with God. If you choose to agree with God, you can experience peace and purpose in your singleness. If you choose to believe that you are being cheated out of happiness, wholeness and fulfillment because you are not married, you likely will have difficulty achieving emotional well-being as a single person, and you may be setting yourself up for disappointment and discontent as a married adult.

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4.2 OK....REALITY CHECK! What do you *really* believe about being single? Did all this stuff make you livid? Defensive? Resigned? Depressed? Write some thoughts about where you are now.

Talk to God about it.....

We need to come to the understanding that

...singleness is a resource to be used, a way of life with certain possibilities that we would not have if we were married. Part of being adult is to accept what we have and to use it as fully as we can. God does have a mirror in which we can see the only accurate reflection of who we are. But we will never see it as long as we carry in our minds what we have determined must be a part of our lives.²

Lesson 4: Emotional Health

Your family or colleagues may inadvertently send messages that singleness is not desirable when they make statements such as “when you get married...,” “when you have children...,” “if you weren’t so particular you might find the right one...,” “you need to get out more/improve your appearance/get involved with a good singles program/...to increase your chances of meeting a spouse.” In fact, you might be having a perfectly contented day in your singleness when someone makes statements or assumptions like these and you suddenly feel somehow inadequate—not quite whole.

These feelings can shipwreck your day, but only if you let them. If you have a strong desire to be married, comments like these hit the heart especially hard and can shake your confidence, leaving you wondering what on earth is wrong with you. To help marrieds understand, you might explain to them that comments like these are no different than saying to married couples or those with children, “when you have children” (imagine the impact this has on a couple who want children but are unable to have them); “if only you had waited for the right mate you wouldn’t be having these marital problems;” “if you would just lose a few pounds, maybe your wife would be more attracted to you;” “if you would just control your kids, your family life would be better...”

These statements are easily recognized as being completely inappropriate, unfeeling, and even rude, but they are received by their hearers much the same way the statements made previously are received by adults who are single. Sensitivity is key, for “each heart knows its own bitterness and no one else can share its joy.” (Proverbs 14:10, NIV)

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- 4.3 As a single, react to the comments made to singles in the preceding paragraphs. Have you heard them before? How did you feel? What did you do?**

Ask a married colleague to react to the comments to marrieds in the preceding paragraphs. Discuss and compare your feelings and theirs. Try to come up with constructive ways to deal with the questions the next time they arise.

Does our culture acknowledge the difficulties of being single? Probably not—when people express feelings of loneliness or insecurity and they happen to be single, the typical response is to encourage them to “get out and meet people” or to assure them that “God will send the right one at the right time.” The root issues of the struggle go unacknowledged and unaddressed. Most people would agree that marriage is a blessing beset with a multitude of challenges. Christian married adults are encouraged to meet these challenges and work through them—resulting in growth for them both individually and as a couple. Christian singles are often encouraged to meet the challenges of singleness by preparing for marriage and seeking out a spouse. Such an approach assumes that *singleness* is the problem.

4.4 Describe what you believe would be a more appropriate response to the single adult’s challenges. How would your approach encourage emotional health and maturity?

Focusing on a person’s singleness, forcing them into a “single” framework, can stunt their growth and usefulness in Kingdom work. Imagine for a moment if Lottie Moon had chosen to put her life on hold, hoping the “right” man would come along instead of following God’s will for her life. Imagine if, in her moments of loneliness, the only comfort she received was to hear someone say, “Well, I’m sure God has a man all picked out for you. When he comes, you won’t be lonely anymore.” We must address the challenges experienced by the adult facing the mission field alone. ***They do not revolve solely around the individual’s marital status!*** While it is true that the child of God is never alone, God expects His children to respond to each others’ needs. Jesus did not offer lofty platitudes to people who were in pain. He never once suggested a man or woman marry to overcome life’s challenges. Jesus did not change His message based on the marital status of His audience. He saw their needs. He recognized their depth and authenticity and spoke to the *person*—not to their position in life.

Living whole as an adult—single or married—can only be accomplished when Christ is alive and active within a person’s heart. He or she must acknowledge God’s goodness, live in loving relationships with others, and

know the truth of his or her identity in Christ. “When we remember that we are not half a person that magically becomes a whole person upon marriage, we learn to love ourselves—even in singlehood.”³ Wholeness will result from godly brokenness that can say to God,

Your words were found, and I ate them. Your words became a delight to me and the joy of my heart, for I am called by Your name, LORD God of Hosts.

Jeremiah 15:16

*Acknowledging
God's Goodness*

Have you surrendered, completely, to the truth of God's absolute goodness? “Oswald Chambers noted that doubting whether God is really good and has our best interests at heart is the deepest vulnerability of our soul.”⁴ Often our struggles with singleness translate into struggles with God. I suspect that the vast majority of single adults would prefer to be married. Many doubt God's provision and goodness at times because He is seemingly deaf to their heart's desire. Or, rather than blame God for their lack of a mate, they may wonder what is wrong with themselves. This is an intensely painful and typically private struggle as singles wrestle with their faith in God, their self-perception, and their marital status.

You, too, may go through times of questioning God's goodness in relation to why you are single. “If you're *not* single, you know what these issues and emotions are, too. You also live with them. ‘How can that be?’ you ask. It's true, because the issues of singleness are not unique to spouseless people. They are really the issues of fallen humanity. Loneliness. Unfulfilled desires. Unanswered questions. Pain. Rejection. Stubbornness. Commitments. Fear. Ill-placed priorities.”⁵

The questioning, hurting single may sound something like this:

Sometimes I wonder if God is withholding His goodness from me. I can't understand why He has chosen to deny me the joys of marriage and having children. (Career missionary)

It baffles me that my friends, who chose to be sexually active in their teen years and early twenties are now happily married to great, godly people. Why does God give them these good gifts but not let me have them? I've kept myself pure. Sometimes, I wish I'd given in to temptation... (ISC)

All my friends were engaged by October of our senior year. I kept waiting. There just wasn't that special person in my life. I was in several weddings before deciding to apply to be a journeyman. I was disappointed to return to the States, still not having found a life mate—I pray so hard that God will send my spouse into my life. I don't know why He is keeping me from that happiness. (Journeyman)

Lord, my every desire is known to You; my sighing is not hidden from You. Psalm 38:9

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4.5 Can you identify with any of these? What's your story?

God has called me to be single for now. Is it forever? I have no idea. I know my desire is for God's plan to be fulfilled in me. Recently, God gave me a picture of how I can be very much like the Israelites: The people desired an earthly king and God said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them." I do not want to reject God. I was very convicted that in thinking I have to have a spouse, or that I am missing out on something by being single, I really miss out on His best for me now. I've decided that God is sufficient for me and I praise Him for His provision! (Career)

What a wonderful testimony of God's goodness and the Spirit's power to change our hearts! Note that this individual had to walk **through** the feelings with the Lord. You cannot deny your feelings—well, you **CAN** deny them, but it doesn't change them!

God has established a feedback system which is designed to grab your attention so you can examine the validity of your goal. That system is your emotions. When an experience or relationship leaves you feeling angry, anxious, or depressed, those emotional signposts are there to alert you that you may be cherishing a faulty goal [marriage] that is based on wrong belief [it is normal/more desirable, etc., to be married].⁶

Are your feelings a healthy reaction to the barrage of messages sent your way that singleness is not the best, or are your feelings of depression, loneliness, or frustration tools which God is using to mature you and draw you closer to Him as He did with the missionary quoted above?

Feelings, by their very nature, live outside the close confines of logic or rational thought. Feelings may overlap logic, but they arise from a different sphere. The men and women who shared their feelings of loneliness, frustration, longing and hurt that grow out of their singleness are not less spiritually mature—they are honest. If you doubt this statement, take a break and read David's Psalms. He did not try to hide his frustrations, fears, and longings from God. God already knew them anyway!

*How long, O LORD ? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
and every day have sorrow in my heart?
Psalm 13:1-2a NIV*

But just a few verses later...

*But I trust in your unfailing love;
my heart rejoices in your salvation.
I will sing to the LORD,
for he has been good to me.
Psalm 13:5-6 NIV*

Look at Psalm 22:1-5. It begins with the words Jesus quoted as He hung on the cross:

My God, my God! Why have you forsaken me?

By verse 3, David remembers to whom he is crying:

But You are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.

Though we may at times feel forgotten or think that God has turned a blind eye to our desires or our difficulties, He is holy! "Feelings come and go. So, we can console ourselves by consciously telling ourselves that we're going to continue to feel this way. All the while praying, telling God how we feel and gaining an assurance that how we feel matters to Him."⁷ We can cry out to Him; but only in testifying to His goodness can we find peace and be consoled.

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4.6 Have you cried out to Him? Is it time to testify to His goodness? Spend some time with the Lord. Make a few notes here, or journal in another place, but talk it over with Him.

God is good and we can acknowledge this truth and still feel pain over missing something we perceive to be a blessing. God will not rebuff us when we come to Him sharing our deepest aches. We have countless examples of this in Scripture. God does not tell us that we have too little faith when we ask more of Him—in fact, He encourages us to continue asking. “Do you ever see Jesus accuse someone of wanting too much? When does Jesus rebuke someone for desiring? If anything, you see just the opposite. Jesus actually fanned the flames of desire.”⁸ He does not find our pain repugnant or our crying out to Him cause for ridicule. Quite to the contrary, Jesus “centered his ministry on people and their needs, and He expects us to do the same.”⁹

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4.7 Consider the following passages:

Matthew 7:7-11

Mark 9: 17-27

Luke 11:5-13

1 Samuel 1:9-11, 19-20

Genesis 18:22-33

How does God respond when His people ask of Him out of a pure heart?

God does not withhold His goodness from us. If we have clothes on our bodies, food on our tables, air in our lungs, and a roof over our heads, we have proof of that truth. God’s gifts are not given because we deserve them. “It is a false assumption to say that not being married means to miss out on the best in life, that being single means being short-changed... In this faulty assumption, Satan has rephrased the lie of Eden: ‘If you are single, you are missing something wonderful. God can’t be good if He withholds something so desirable.’”¹⁰ The Word records that the woman was convinced by Satan’s enticements.

*Then the woman saw that the tree was good for food
and delightful to look at, and that it was desirable for
obtaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate...
Genesis 3:6a*

Now, apply that to the issue of contentment in the “garden of singleness.” Satan discourages you and may whisper to you that all your problems would be solved by marrying. He furthers his assault on your heart by leading you to believe that God is withholding something from you—and he might even use other people to unwittingly drive this feeling deeper.

Lesson 4: Emotional Health

You may succumb to this line of lies and believe that marriage is equivalent to the fresh, delicious-looking fruit—it would make you so happy! So you hold these thoughts in your mind, allowing them to rob some of the joy you should be experiencing while walking with the Lord. In any case, marriage does not mean that God is more pleased with one person than He is with another. He told us that He was pleased with His Son, yet Jesus did not marry. Jesus deeply loved Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, yet they were single. God does not keep happiness from us; rather, He is our “greatest joy.” (Psalm 43:4)

*A joyful heart is good medicine,
but a broken spirit dries up the bones.*

Proverbs 17:22

You can change the way you feel about being single by changing the way you think about being single. Most of us believe, in general, that we can't control our feelings. Actually, it is possible to change the way you feel. Your thoughts and feelings are intricately connected. To be emotionally healthy, your thoughts must be full of truth.

If you think your married friends are better off, that God has overlooked you, that you've missed His plan for your life, you'll be miserable. If, on the other hand, you know you're right where God wants you to be, that being unattached isn't a badge of shame, and that marriage doesn't bring instant fulfillment, your emotions will be transformed.

What do you really believe about being single? Are there lies at the root of your negative emotions? Track them down, root them out, and replace them with God's truth. Your feelings will change and you'll find a world of possibilities in your single life.¹¹

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4.8 So what do you really believe about being single? Take some time to meditate on this thought, asking God to show you the truth.

When you recognize the lies that Satan breathes and counter them with God's truth, you will be on the road to contentment. We'll talk more about how to be content in the next lesson.

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Lesson 5

Contentment

This learning task will help to encourage your contentment in singleness.

“I am the Lord’s slave,” said Mary. “May it be done to me according to your word.” Luke 1:38

What do you want for your life? Have you checked it out with God? “One of the essential ingredients of contentment is recognizing that we don’t get to make many of the key decisions about our life. Will we be healthy? Will we have money? Will we even have a job? Will we ever get married? God decides those things. We need to willingly submit to God’s direction of our lives in grateful response to His overwhelming love for us.”¹

How do we submit? How do we spend the time waiting for what we’re sure He has in store for us? How do we achieve contentment? Joshua Harris writes:

Each of us must develop love, humility, patience, forgiveness, and responsibility in our own lives....[M]arriage is not the finish line. Statistically speaking, most of us will eventually marry. But we need to make sure we “redeem the time” to glorify God, not to earn brownie points from Him so that we can demand marriage. We prepare and develop our characters so we can become as flexible and useful for Him as possible, no matter what He plans for our future...let’s redeem today!²

That means living **now**. Making the most of the opportunities we’re given **every day**. Former missionary Jeannie Lockerbie writes in *By Ones and By Twos*:

Buy or make what is necessary to make your living quarters a home. Use your creative abilities or borrow the skills of a friend. Don’t fall into the mind-set that thinks, “If this were our own house, we’d make it look better,” or “If I were married I’d fix the place up a bit.” That room, or those rooms are where God placed you NOW; make the most of them.

Elisabeth Elliot who has experienced so much in terms of missionary service and living as a single person, a widow and a wife, says:

“Let not our longing slay the appetite of our living. Accept and thank God for what is given not allowing the not-given to spoil it.”

Therein is contentment.³

If you’re waiting for Mom to show up to make your place “home,” you might be waiting for a long time. You know what Paul says about it.

I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know both how to have a little, and I know how to have a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret [of being content]—whether well-fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need. I am able to do all things through Him who strengthens me.
Philippians 4:11-13

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- 5.1. How do you define *contentment*? Is it an issue for you? Be honest with yourself (and with God) and write down some of your feelings and thoughts about contentment. If it's a struggle, write the specifics that you live with and think about how you want to deal with them. If you're there already, how did you get there? Talk over your situation with a trusted friend.

We'll look at some of the decades of life—you might be there, have already been there, or be anticipating (or dreading!) being there—and explore some ways to “accept and thank God for what is given, not allowing the not-given to spoil it.”

20s

Margaret Feinberg, author of *Twentysomething: Surviving and Thriving in the Real World*, says, “You’re just expected to suddenly be all grown up, but no one ever gives you a manual on how to handle all the adult responsibilities you’ve been handed.” Add to that being a single missionary who’s expected to live far from home, saving the world for Jesus. The task can be overwhelming to say the least.

Feinberg advises you to relax. “Take it easy. You don’t have to have it all figured out this week, this month, or even this year....use it as an opportunity to grow your faith along the way. Besides, God’s going to throw you some wonderful curveballs you never expected....If there’s one thing the 20s are about, it’s that life—and all God’s doing in your life—is a journey.”

What’s the biggest issue for twentysomethings? There are several, but they probably come from the same underlying theme of time. “One of the biggest struggles in our twenties is how we use our time, often because we fail to understand that time is a gift. We need to learn to handle our time with stewardship, viewing it as no less valuable or fleeting than our money,” say authors Craig Dunham and Doug Serven in *TwentySomeone: Finding Yourself in a Decade of Transition*.

Ecclesiastes 3 tells us there is “a time for every activity under heaven” and chapter 9, verse 11 says “time...happen[s] to them all”. It seems we must take time into account for every decade of life if we are to serve God in the ways He has called and gifted us.

So what kinds of things should occupy your time as a 20-something? Here are some suggestions, based on an article by Lori Smith⁴. Obviously they aren’t all available to you on the field, so be creative and make some plans for your stateside time.

- ***Revisit your favorite rollercoasters.***
- ***Camp at the beach with friends.***

These both speak to taking some time for vacation. Work is important, but it’s also necessary to take a break and do something fun. Be sure to take advantage of the local attractions where you work.

- ***Learn how to change the oil in your car.*** Girls, too! Or especially! It’s nice to have someone else to do that, but they’re not always available. And it will greatly boost your confidence level—you might decide to take steps into some other unknown place.
- ***Map out a budget.*** Too often singles will spend these years just existing and waiting for marriage or some other big event to change the course of their lives—and that might never happen. Take the time to learn about and plan for your financial future. There are great resources at Crown Financial Ministries’ website (www.crown.org) and at GuideStone Financial Resources’ site (www.guidestone.org).
- ***Play well with roommates.*** One member care person has found that one of the biggest issues for singles on the field is dealing with

roommates, particularly for singles who are beyond their 20s. Now is the time to learn how to deal with all relationships, before the matter becomes a hindrance to ministry. We'll be looking at relationships more in later lessons.

- **Learn to cook something other than pasta.** Man cannot live by spaghetti alone, as we found in the physical health section. Now is the time to figure this out. There are some suggestions on the next page to get you started.
- **Plan a solo spiritual retreat.** AAAGGHHH! Solitude? You want me to be alone on purpose?? Absolutely! Jesus modeled it for us (see Matthew 4:1-11, Luke 6:12, Mark 1:35, Matthew 14:23, and others). In *The Servant Leader*, Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges tell us,

*By "solitude" we mean being out of human contact, being alone, and being so for lengthy periods of time....Solitude and silence give us some space to reform our innermost attitudes toward people and events. They take the world off our shoulders for a time and interrupt our habit of constantly managing things, of being in control or thinking we are.*⁵

Robertson McQuilkin, in the ICEL course *Living The Life*, talks about his yearly spiritual retreats.

*I learned early in ministry that I needed an annual personal retreat of 3-4 days alone with the Lord in fasting and prayer if I were to survive, let alone succeed. Also, across the years, when faced with a major problem or decision, that same pattern prevailed.....I prayed. I read Scripture. I tried to sing God's praises...*⁶

He talks at other times about when he "climbed the mountain behind our home, pitched a tent and camped out" until he heard from God. This is different from a vacation.

*The stillness of solitude brings clarity to more than just our knowledge of God. It also awakens our awareness of our own hearts. And that's perhaps why we avoid it. We run from solitude to the degree that we run from ourselves. For solitude opens the window to your soul and releases all that has been quietly sealed up and hidden away inside. We fear what might be there, lurking in the dark, hidden by our busy lives—sorrow, loneliness, desperation, grief, and weariness. But we do not understand that God's call to solitude is not a call to go off by ourselves to face our struggles alone. It's the call to come away with Him, so that He can minister to our souls and give us the healing gift of Himself.*⁷

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- 5.2 What do you think about these suggestions? Reflect on your life in your 20s—past or present. What can you take from this list and incorporate into your habits? How will you accomplish that? What will be your accountability to do this? Make a few notes here in the margins, and then go to your journal or computer and get real about it. Talk it over with a trusted friend or advisor. Pray about it.**

Cooking for One

Grocery shopping for one is often a challenge. In some areas of the world, food is packaged much like it is in the States—for families. In other areas of the world, food isn't packaged at all, but if you're going to have chicken for dinner, you have to buy the feathers still attached. Whatever the case, singles often find it difficult to find economical ways to shop for and prepare food overseas. Buying products that are packaged for families results in waste and spoilage since refrigerators tend to be small and freezers even smaller. While you might be able to stock up, cook ahead and freeze leftovers in the U.S., you might not have this option overseas.

There are, however, some food advantages to living outside the United States. Many locations still have butcher shops, bakeries, and fruit and vegetable stands. If your area does, take advantage of the ability to buy in the small quantities you need. Butchers can sell you one pork chop, one chicken breast, or a half pound of ground beef because their meat is not pre-packaged. Bakeries will sell a single bagel or roll or a half-loaf of bread, so you can use it while it's fresh. Fruit and vegetable stands are typically inexpensive places to buy healthful and delicious food. You can purchase just what you need to use it at the peak of flavor and nutritional value. Avoid imported foods—go local!

Before we go on, if it is less expensive to eat at restaurants—and the food is as healthy as you would prepare at home—then by all means, budget for it and eat out! But be sure to monitor your portions, calories, fat, sodium, and the effect they have on your waistline and general health.

If you live in an area where eating out with regularity is not an option, no matter the reason, you can prepare interesting, healthy foods for yourself. You may think “Why bother? Why go through the hassle when I can just have a bowl of cereal or some microwave popcorn?” Although such quick meal solutions are acceptable on occasion, your body requires many different nutrients that can only be supplied through a variety of foods.

The Internet makes it easy to find suggestions for recipes and eating plans. A Google search for “cooking for one” turned up more than 300,000 resources. There are websites for microwave cooking for one, specific cuisines for one or two, specific dietary needs, and just about anything else you can think of. Googling “how to cook” nets over 2 million sites for learning how to cook, so if you have a web connection and can read, there's no excuse for eating cereal all the time.

Be sure to plan for leftovers. Here's a Three-in-One Chicken recipe adapted from the Mayo Clinic website (www.mayoclinic.com) to get you started. If you're going to clean that chicken, be sure to get the most from it!

Herb Roasted Chicken: Rub skinless chicken with garlic and sprinkle with rosemary. Bake in oven at 350° F (175° C) for 20-25 minutes per pound. Use leftover chicken in following two recipes.

Mediterranean Salad: Dice leftover chicken and add to torn romaine lettuce. Drizzle with balsamic vinaigrette (balsamic vinegar and olive oil) and garnish with a few ripe black olives and crumbled feta cheese. Vary this by changing the greens, dressing, and other ingredients as you like or as they are available.

Chicken and Pasta: Combine leftover diced chicken with canned or fresh pear slices, water chestnuts, and cooked pasta spirals. Serve warm or cold with low-fat poppy seed dressing. Vary this by adding different combinations of fruits and vegetables (try something new!) and dressings. Use different kinds of pasta or try it with rice.

Another suggestion is to plan for soup. At the beginning of the week, put your leftovers in a large bowl in the refrigerator or freezer. As you have more leftovers, add them to the bowl. At the end of the week (if they are refrigerated) or when you have enough (if they are frozen) heat it all and season to taste. Get some local bread or make some corn muffins and have a feast. Invite some friends to join you and, if you trust them, add their leftovers to yours.

How long should you keep leftovers? A good rule of thumb is one week in the refrigerator or three months in the freezer.

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- 5.2 **Time to reflect and check. How is your eating plan? What can you do to improve it? Make a plan and build in some accountability. How are your shopping habits? Where will you get recipes? Or learn to cook? Is there some food available locally that you really ought to try? Do you need or have a “food mentor” who answers your cooking questions? Who can you ask to help you?**

30s

Lori Smith says, in an article called “Thirtysomething”⁸, “This is the decade when you must stop waiting for life to come to you, and instead, actively pursue the life you desire and God has for you.” As a single missionary, you’ve already begun this pursuit. But there are still bumps in the road that you must navigate. Again from Lori Smith,

Thirtysomething singles generally have simultaneous goals: to be content, to find a mate, and to figure out how to make a contribution to society. But how do you find contentment when life’s not what you thought it would be? ...Continually choosing contentment may be a challenge. You might even know the answers: that contentment is a choice rather than a feeling, that it requires work, that God’s love is fierce, and He has a plan for you and your singleness, that marriage is not necessarily equivalent to a better life...It’s crucial to understand that contentment is a regular choice—a pattern of thinking, not just a one-time accomplishment.

Let’s look at the “must-do” list for your 30s. Just like your 20s, you won’t spend all this decade overseas, so plan some of these for your stateside time, and be creative as you consider these suggestions to adapt for your overseas time.

- **Give yourself a day at the spa.** Indulge yourself a bit and enjoy a manicure, pedicure, massage, facial, whatever you can afford. It does wonders for your mental state and you can meet some interesting people if you want to. If not, they’re usually content to let you soak up the quiet. Most of these services are available to men, too, so don’t just say it’s for women. Everyone can use a pedicure!
- **Host a holiday family gathering.** This might be a bold step of faith when you do it the first time, but it will be well worth the effort. Your family (define that loosely if you need to—see lesson 8) will finally see you as an adult and you will gain skills and respect you never thought possible.
- **Draw up a financial plan for retirement.** But I’m not that old yet!! Remember that discussion of time we had in the last section? According to Ecclesiastes 9:11 it happens to us all—married or not. Don’t expect Social Security or even the IMB to take care of you in your old age. Now is the time and the resources to help you get started are plentiful. Check out GuideStone at www.guidestone.org for some specifics on IMB retirement plans. Crown Financial Ministries (www.crown.org) also has good advice for making your retirement plans.
- **Mentor a child.** Missionaries have a long tradition of “aunts” and “uncles”. These pseudo-parents can be tremendous influences in the life of a child. Single author Miriam Drennan is, in her words, “an 18-year veteran of the aunt business.” She has put together a list of dos and don’ts for keeping the fun in your relationship without disregarding the rules the parents have established. Here are a few:

- Do answer to whatever a toddler calls you. The Scriptures say that God will change our names. So do toddlers—whatever name they land on is now yours. Embrace it.*
- Don't tickle children for more than one or two seconds. It sounds like happy laughter, but it's not.*
- Do understand the rules of play. Little girls usually want interaction and response—even if you're stuck playing the baby. Little boys usually just want you to sit and watch them play while you make periodic truck noises.*
- Do remember that children like plain-looking food but enjoy dipping it in stuff. Green beans are better with a puddle of ketchup.*
- Don't become too much of a pushover; learn to say no, and stand firm with your decisions. Children test boundaries, so establish them.*
- Don't feel obligated to be the fun-loving aunt or uncle to every child within your circle of family and friends or you'll be broke and exhausted. Remember those boundaries? Make sure you've set a few for yourself.⁹*
- ***Find an exercise routine you love.*** We're back to the fitness thing, but if you're going to establish this habit for the rest of your life, you must find an activity (or several) that you really like to do. Otherwise, you won't do it and then you become a fortysomething couch potato that is full of good intentions about exercise.
- ***Experience the opera.*** And a lot of other things that will broaden your interests. Middle schoolers in the U.S. are encouraged to sample a wide variety of school subjects so they will have a good basis for choosing what interests them most. Think of your 30s as your time to explore and sample the arts, foods, cultures, classic literature, things you've wanted to do but haven't gotten around to. Living in another culture may give you the chance for a first-hand look at art or artifacts that your stateside counterparts can only read about. Take advantage of the opportunity.

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5.3 What about this set of suggestions? Reflect again, this time on your 30s—past, present, or future. What small steps can you take to live the rich, full, contented life God has planned for you?

40s and beyond

Linda Hardin is a 50-something single who did research for her D.Min. on the challenges older singles face. She says, “Midlife is a time for taking stock, of reshaping and rethinking one’s place in life...Mourning the loss of ‘what will never be’ will be intense for some and minimal for others. For those to whom it is a loss, this sadness needs to be acknowledged as real.”¹⁰ She offers nine tips on being fortysomething:

- Give....Put your family first and give to children, your church, your co-workers.
- Make traditions with friends, family, and yourself.
- Keep building a circle of friends near you as well as maintaining long-distance relationships (more about this later).
- If it’s still hard for you, learn to do things alone, like eating in a restaurant, taking trips, etc.
- Come to peace with your parents if you haven’t already (more about this later).
- Become involved in the lives of children. “They need to know another adult cares about them,” says Hardin. “Besides that, you can discuss issues they may not discuss with their parents.”
- Grieve your losses. “Identify, name, acknowledge, and grieve the losses you’ve experienced.” If you need help with this, get it. Member care personnel understand and can help.
- Form new hopes and dreams. “Without hopes and dreams, we just kind of flounder along. Begin to envision a life that reflects the events and realities of your life.”

Lori Smith offers another must-do list—this time for your 40s¹¹:

- **Take a dream vacation.** If you developed the vacation habit in your 20s, and you’ve been true to your financial plan, then you can be sure to have a spectacular vacation in your 40s while you can still hike the Grand Canyon or surf in Australia or whatever you can dream.
- **Sign up for a class.** Learn to do something different that you just want to do, not that you need for your job. Go back to campus and live in a dorm if that would make it more fun. Take something online. Find a class to learn a local craft. Just keep learning.
- **Plant a garden.** Flowers? Veggies? Doesn’t matter. Just feel the soil and enjoy the fruits of your labor.
- **Hang out with your nieces and nephews for a week.** Borrow some if needed.
- **Learn a foreign language.** You’ve probably already done this...maybe more than once, so you’re ahead of the game.
- **Run a 10k.** Just can’t get away from the fitness stuff. Think of how good you’ll feel when you cross the finish line.

- **Lead a Bible study.** Again, this is old hat for you. But how can you make it an adventure? Is there some group you can lead or some topic or method that would make it fresh and new?

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5.4 Once more, stop and consider the decade of the 40s—past, present or future. If you're there now, how are you doing? Reflect in your journal or talk with a friend about how you will handle or are handling life at mid-point. Are there thoughts, feelings, expectations or disappointments that you've buried that need to be uncovered and given to God? Are there plans you need to make for the future?

In researching *contentment*, I continue to find the same thing said many different ways. I think Michael D. Warden says it best:

....(S)ingleness isn't merely a waiting period in our lives. It's a holy calling—to abandon ourselves to God and to the service of others. Whether we're called to singleness for a year, a decade, or a lifetime, we must not waste the opportunity to do some extraordinary service for God.....(T)hose who serve out of a heart for God all share one common quality: they're committed to following Jesus as their role model for service....

Like most cultures, ours includes certain benchmarks that tell us where we stand in life. Two prominent rites of passage are marriage and parenthood. Married people—even young married people—are typically awarded adult status in our society. Likewise, parenting a child is typically viewed as a further step toward maturity and leadership.

Consequently, many singles often feel trapped in a perpetual state of adolescence. Lacking the benchmarks that tell us we've arrived at adulthood, we feel stuck in the waiting room of life, never quite growing up into mature Christian adults, hoping God will hurry up and send us a spouse so we can finally set foot in the real world of the living. All the while, we wonder why other adults don't give us the respect we deserve. They treat us like overgrown teenagers, the not-quite-grownups who aren't really ready to serve in positions of genuine leadership.

Developing a lifestyle of true Christian service breaks that cycle. Serving others changes your perspective—broadens it, really. The truth is that there are specific biblical guidelines for gauging your level of maturity in Christ, regardless of your cultural or marital status. And one of the most important benchmarks for Christian adulthood is the willingness to lay down your life in the service of others.....

Christian service isn't escapism; it's transformation. When you commit your heart to serve God and others with abandon, you come to realize your problem isn't that you're single. It's that your world has been too small.¹²

5.5 What do you think of Warden's comments? How do they apply to your life? And what do they have to do with contentment?



My grandpa always said, “Plan your work and work your plan.” I wonder if contentment is something you can plan for? I know it’s a choice—for everyone, not just singles. It’s our responsibility as Christians to trust and obey God. And be content. He knows the plans.

We’ll look at living and working as a single next.

END NOTES

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- 3 Jeannie Lockerie. *By Ones and By Twos: Single and Double Missionaries* (Pasadena, Cal.: William Carey Library, 1983), 33.
- 4 Lori Smith. “Twentysomething.” http://www.lifeway.com/lwc/article_main_page/0%2C1703%2CA%253D160976%2526M%253D50019%2C00.html (accessed 4/28/06).
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Lesson 6

Lifestyles part 1

In this learning task you will identify boundaries related to living and working as a single and design strategies for maintaining balance in your life and work.

I have told you these things so that in Me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world. John 16:33

Jesus knew we were going to struggle. He told us we were going to struggle. Why is it such a surprise to *us* when we struggle? Paul compared our life in Christ to a race—a race that even he had to fight hard to run well. If Paul, who saw a dazzling display of Jesus' glory personally, struggled and strained to run well, why the discouragement and criticism when we experience the same difficulties?

In Baptist church culture it does not take long for you to hear the word *missionary*. The very word can inspire a sense of awe. Missionaries are put upon a pedestal—holy servants of the Lord who do not sin, do not struggle with temptation, do not suffer from bad attitudes, and never feel lonely or afraid because they have perfect faith. “Sending churches think of missionaries as superpeople and that affects their self-image. Add to that their strong sense of call from God, and they may see themselves as God’s answer for a certain country or tribe.”¹ If you believe this after having become a missionary yourself, you are in for a shock.

Missionaries are no more “holy” than any other servant of the Lord. The dedicated mother who takes care of her children, the businessman who refuses to compromise his beliefs to satisfy his company’s greed, the coach who encourages her players to stay pure of speech, the bus driver who values every soul who gets on his bus and shares his faith with anyone the Lord leads him to—these are just as much “holy” servants of the Lord as those who are appointed or sent by the IMB. We all sin and struggle with temptation. Satan would have us believe that we are above such things. Just when we are steeping in our own self-righteousness is the time we are prime targets for his darts of pride and judgmentalism. Missionaries have bad days just like every other human being walking the planet—except, of course, Jesus. He alone was perfect in action, word, and thought.

Look back at John 16:33: *You will have suffering in this world.*

We are going to have trials. We are going to have sorrows. We are going to have difficulties. If we hide that fact because we are missionaries, we are in even more danger.

Lesson 6: Lifestyles part 1

*I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive,
but you are dead. Wake up! Revelation 3:1-2 (NIV)*

Missionaries have a reputation for being alive and thriving in the spiritual sense. So, we might bask in the warmth and adulation of the churches back in the States and in the pride that comes with being “needed” by the nationals or the sense of self-righteousness that may develop with being scorned or “suffering for Jesus.” If we will take a step off the pedestal for a moment, whether others have put us there or we have somehow climbed up by ourselves, we will come back to the truth of our weakness and vulnerability.

*For He knows what we are made of,
remembering that we are dust. Psalm 103:14*

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- 6.1 What are some trials, difficulties, and sorrows missionaries face? Underline the ones that are particularly applicable to singles. Circle the ones that affect you personally.

Loneliness, sexual temptations including but not limited to pornography and the lure of having sexual relations outside of marriage, and resentment or disillusionment are the most commonly cited struggles and challenges that single missionaries face on the field—outside of all of the other areas we have or will consider.

Is it okay for Christians to be lonely? I wondered sometimes after I first became a believer. I was in a singles' Sunday School class at my church and one of the ladies happened to mention how lonely she was sometimes. Our teachers, a married couple, responded to this woman by saying, "Now, dear, you know you are never alone. The Lord is always with you. You need to draw closer to Him and these feelings of loneliness will be taken care of." After hearing that I, as a baby in Christ, formed an idea in my head about loneliness—that it was a marker of spiritual immaturity and neglect of one's time with the Lord. Thankfully, I've come a long way since then. If I had gone to the mission field with that faulty belief still in my heart, I am not sure I would have endured. Rather, I now understand that

I am lonely

"you can know that God is with you and feel His presence in a real way. That is wonderful, such a blessing. But even in the midst of feeling God's presence, you may still feel the longing for the company of people you love. I believe that God understands this and does not condemn you for it. He doesn't look at you as a 'second-class' Christian because you're experiencing this human characteristic that He Himself put within you. When you do feel lonely, don't condemn yourself."²

It cannot be said any better than by those who have lived this experience of going to the mission field alone:

- *My biggest struggle as a single is being lonely. I miss my family back in the States. I miss that support system even though my missionary family does give me love and support, too.*
- *Being alone has been my biggest challenge here and I don't plan on coming back overseas by myself.*
- *To be totally honest, I just long for plain old companionship.*
- *It's been really depressing to have an exciting conversation with someone about the Lord and then come home to an empty apartment and not have anyone to tell about it.*
- *Loneliness is one of the biggest drawbacks for me. During AGM and team retreat, I sometimes am not sure where I fit. Our first team retreat was somewhat stressful for me, especially meals, because I didn't have a built-in meal companion.*
- *I am lonely. I can't communicate what is really going on with me to someone.*
- *I am so lonely at times. I am an external processor and not having someone to process things with is a great struggle for me.*

Lesson 6: Lifestyles part 1

- *There are times that I can feel my loneliness physically as well as emotionally. It presses in on me as I sit alone in my apartment. I will sit and just cry, aching to see or touch another person that is related to me—that cares for me just because I am me. I have an incredible relationship with my colleagues. They love me and look after me in so many ways—but sometimes, I cannot explain why, this intense suffocating wave of loneliness washes over me and my heart just gets crushed under the weight of it. I have been dismayed to find that it does not get better with time—every time I leave the States and return alone to the field, the bouts of loneliness deepen. Time does **not** heal all wounds—but through time I have been drawn closer to the Father—closer to that vision of heaven where goodbyes, separation, and loneliness will be but a distant memory.*

6.2 What's your story of loneliness?

We might be tempted to assume that the “complaint” of loneliness is a symptom of this generation’s supposedly shallow faith. How can we be lonely if we know and love the Lord? But then we learn that even Lottie Moon suffered the effects of loneliness as she served in China.³ We know of this from Lottie herself in the extensive personal writings she left behind. Similarly, Amy Carmichael wrote of her struggles with singleness and the fear of being lonely:

The devil kept on whispering, ‘It is all right now, but what about afterwards [when you get to India]? You are going to be very lonely.’ And he painted pictures of loneliness—I can see them still. And I turned to my God in a kind of desperation and said, ‘Lord, what can I do? How can I go on to the end?’ And He said, ‘None of them that trust in Me shall be desolate.’ That word has been with me ever since.⁴

Lest you begin to believe that loneliness is an affliction of women, read the biographies of great missionary men or evangelists like Charles Spurgeon. John Bunyan, writer of the Christian classic *A Pilgrim's Progress*, also suffered from severe bouts of depression and loneliness. We know from the writings of Jonathan Edwards that David Brainerd dealt with loneliness on a regular basis, compounded by his illnesses and isolation. His diaries are a gift to single missionaries today. Brainerd writes of his desires for a wife, someone to fully share his life with, even though he had made many friends among the Indians he was trying to reach. This man, revered and remembered for his great works, poured his heart out:

My circumstances are such, that I have no comfort of any kind but what I have in God. I live in the most lonesome wilderness; have but one single person to converse with, that can speak English. Most of the talk I hear is either Highland Scotch or Indian. I have no fellow Christian to whom I might unbosom myself or lay open my conversation about heavenly things and join in social prayer. I live poorly with regard to the comforts of life. Most of my diet consists of boiled corn, hasty-pudding, etc. I lodge on a bundle of straw, my labor is hard and extremely difficult, and I have little appearance of success to comfort me.⁵

These are the men and women who lit the way ahead of us. Even David spoke of being lonely in the Psalms. Let us accept this loneliness as part of our being. We have to stop condemning ourselves for it. Adam was lonely for companionship and he had the privilege of walking with the Lord—literally! If we can be characterized by anything in a universal sense, it is loneliness. Loneliness existed before sin. It is at the soul of loneliness that we are driven to find fellowship with the Father most of all. “It is essentially a worldly goal to live without a sense of need. And it’s an illusion that all those needs can be met in this life. Needs are not enemies to conquer, they are part of what keeps us returning to the Lord.”⁶

What should we do with the loneliness? Many, many Christian writers suggest that single adults should seek to cure their loneliness in marriage. But “it’s downright naïve to believe that marriage or sex will be the solution to our loneliness.”⁷ The reason for this is clear: married people are lonely too! As author Jim Towns has pointed out, “A number of strange misconceptions have emerged in our society. One of these is the mistaken idea that Christians who have ‘enough faith’ are never lonely. However, the truth is that a Christian is subject to all human emotions, feelings, and experiences. There is another false notion that the ‘cure’ for loneliness is marriage. But in my years of counseling, I have found that many married people are as lonely as singles.”⁸

- 6.3 Consider your feelings of loneliness away from the field. Compare them to your loneliness on the field as to frequency and intensity. Discuss this comparison with a married missionary. How do they differ? Does anything surprise you? Does anything surprise them?

The single missionary faces loneliness on a different level when on the mission field. "Robert Weiss, a psychiatrist at the Harvard Medical School, has revealed a distinction between two kinds of loneliness. There is 'emotional isolation' which results from the lack or loss of a truly intimate tie (usually with a spouse, parent, or child). There is also a 'social isolation' which is the consequence of a lack or loss of a network or involvements with peers (such as family and friends)."⁹ While the married missionary typically faces the loneliness of 'social isolation', he or she still maintains emotional intimacy with at least one other person in his or her life. While the single adult living in his or her own culture may experience some degree of 'emotional isolation', he or she usually maintains social ties which offer some support. The single international missionary likely experiences both emotional and social isolation.

In many cultures there is no single subculture; singleness is a non-entity and after a certain age, considered abnormal. A single woman expressed her frustrations: "I must think like a man, work like a horse, and act like a married woman." This contributes to the feeling of being a misfit in the new culture...The forces of loneliness can sometimes be so overwhelming that the vision is lost. The single missionary is so engulfed by not having a counterpart to share her deepest needs, thoughts, ideas, and visions with, that a part of her languishes and dies.¹⁰

If you are reading this section and thinking *I wonder when they are going to give me the prescription for my loneliness?* you may be disappointed. There is no prescription for loneliness. It is a deep pain that we must all work through, with prayer and scripture and godly counsel. We can try to talk ourselves out of our loneliness, we can chastise ourselves for a lack of thankfulness for God's provisions in our lives, we can pretend it's not there by filling our time with work and a whirlwind of social engagements—but loneliness is often still there when we lay our heads on the pillow at night. Let the pain work in you, but remember that God is greater than your pain and greater than your loneliness.

Pain—emotional pain—is a curious thing. It takes place on an invisible level, yet it has the potential to actually shape the real stuff of a person's future. It can numb and destroy the passion in life, but it can refine and bless as well. When you're hurting no amount of rational thought will make it go away. It's almost impossible to make pain a mental exercise. And willing the pain to be gone—we've all tried that. "I will not feel this way." It doesn't work too well, does it?¹¹

6.4 What have you learned from your loneliness? What are you still learning from it?

Whatever you have learned, you have learned it by working through the pain of loneliness. In our loneliness we may well be experiencing the suffering that refines and perfects us, so that God "will say: They are My people, and [we] will say: The LORD is our God." (Zechariah 13:9)

Reflect on the following Scriptures:

2 Corinthians 12:9-10

Hebrews 5:8-9

Hebrews 2:10

Romans 5:3-5

What do they say to you?

Resentment

The word *resentment* comes from the “Old French *ressentement*, from *resen-tir*, meaning to feel strongly.” (The American Heritage Dictionary, 2000) Resentment in English means to have antagonistic feelings or feelings of hostility toward another person or group because of felt wrongs or prejudices exacted on one’s self or group by the other person or group. These feelings dog us—they don’t retire once we have felt them and that is precisely why they are classified as *resentment* rather than simply sentiments. Typically resentment grows where there is no means of expressing one’s dissatisfaction with maltreatment or exposure to narrowmindedness or ignorance whether malicious or benign in origin.

6.5 Following are quotes from various authors paired with quotes from IMB single missionaries. As you read, consider what wrong beliefs led to the situations. Note in the margins the “pebbles” of insensitivity that could build “rock walls” of resentment in each case.

One time I made the mistake of opening up about how much I was hurting about still being single. I shared my fear of never marrying and always being alone. My prayer partner, a married woman, chastised me and told me I needed to depend more upon the Lord—He would take care of me. I was left feeling kind of stupid. How could she ever understand? She married before she even left college. I learned to keep my hurt to myself. (Career)

Many people with loving intentions counseled me that if I would deepen my relationship with Jesus, and if I would discipline my mind, I would remain victorious. People who know me know I maintain a strong and vibrant relationship with God and that I discipline my thought life. Despite these strengths, I was not always able to live above the aches caused by singleness.¹²

One thing I had a problem with was when [a staff person] started asking me about my sexual history. He even asked me if I was homosexual. If it had been a woman asking me those types of questions, that would have been one thing, but it really embarrassed me. There was no sensitivity. I left wondering if everyone thought that because I was in my late thirties and still single, I must be gay. It was a humiliating experience. (Career)

I even had one Christian woman ask me if I was a lesbian because, “all straight women are married.” There are times when I feel like I should have a tin cup when I walk into my church. I feel like I should announce my presence like the lepers in the Bible, “Unclean! Single! Unclean!”¹³

When I joined my team (one married couple plus me) on a trip while we were all stateside to a church that had been supporting our work, I was dismayed that the pastor and other church leaders took a great deal of interest in my teammates but virtually ignored me. They wanted the couple to share with the church all that they were doing, but they didn't even want me in the picture—figuratively or literally! A big picture of several church members who had been to our country on a mission trip and my colleagues was taken at the end of the weekend visit—they asked me to be the camera man!

Two of the greatest problems Christian single [men and] women often face are their invisibility and the uncertainty they feel about themselves.¹⁴

There was like this magic formula my colleagues seemed to think would work in my life: you'll go back to the States, go to seminary and find a wife. Then you can come back to the field. It just made me miserable listening to them. I mean, I had held onto this idea when I was in high school that I would go to college and "find" my wife. Then I believed at the end of college that I would go to the field and "find" my wife. What if their formula didn't work either? Can't I just be me? I think I am tired of trying to find ways to "find" my wife. I'm tired of people telling me that's what is going to happen. If it doesn't happen, I'm going to feel like a loser all over again. (Journeyman)

I can't read another book about how to fix my "problem" of singleness. I don't want another person to tell me what I need to do while I am "waiting" for a spouse to tumble into my life. I want to live the abundant life God promised with no marital strings attached. I want to make my one and only life matter for eternity, whether or not I ever [get married].¹⁵

We could continue building rock walls—there is plenty of resentment in the hearts of our single colleagues for an array of reasons that we can only get a snapshot of here. We need to find constructive ways to "deconstruct" these walls and get on with the business that God has called us to. If you have pebbles of resentment rolling around in your heart, give them to the Father before they harden it any further. "Whether our stronghold is an addiction, unforgiveness toward a person who has hurt us, or despair over a loss, it consumes so much of our emotional and mental energy that it strangles our abundant life. Our callings remain unfulfilled, and our believing lives become ineffective. Needless to say, these are the enemy's precise goals."¹⁶

.....
6.6 How does resentment play into the hands of the enemy? How is it at work in your life?

Your resentment may have already plunged your heart into depression. Even Elijah experienced depression. (1 Kings 19) But through that depression God showed us that He “wants to bring his child out of the frustration of depression and back into a satisfying, full ministry. God wants us to see our future with hope...God didn’t accuse or condemn Elijah; He gently and quietly helped Elijah regain a true perspective of his life.”¹⁷ If you need help in gaining a healthy and true perspective, find a safe person to talk to and unload some of those pebbles—otherwise they will weigh you down and create roadblocks in the work God wants to do through you.

Rather than talking to someone about hurts and feelings of resentment, Christians in our culture will often simply bury those emotions and move on, as if admitting that we have fear, anger, desire, pain means we are spiritually weak. “Wouldn’t it be better to bury the disappointment and the yearning and just get on with life? As Larry Crabb has pointed out, pretending seems a much more reliable road to Christian maturity. The only price we pay is a loss of soul, of communion with God, a loss of direction, and a loss of hope.”¹⁸ In other words, don’t stuff your resentment, your loneliness, your needs and desires. With God’s help, and when appropriate and possible with another believer who cares about you, face the realities of your situation and receive His healing and peace.

.....

6.7 What have you tried to bury? What comments, actions, or attitudes have you tried to just “get over” rather than facing? What has been the result of your burying these matters?

Consider the life of Joseph in Genesis 37, 39-47. List the ways that Joseph was misunderstood or abused.

It’s amazing that “Joseph did not end up bitter and disillusioned. Somehow every stressful change—whether for better or worse—only served to build into Joseph spiritual balance, strength, and resolve.”¹⁹ While we should not simply excuse the insensitivity and hurt caused by others, we must not let it consume us or keep us from the task either.

Sexual Purity

You knew we'd get here eventually. Our sexual purity is a battleground and the war is real. Whether single or married, moral failure in the area of sexual purity is the number one reason why missionaries forfeit their calling and service on the field. "Integrity of character occurs when there is consistency between actions and inner convictions over time. Strong Christian character results from both human effort and divine intervention. It is the work of God as you relate to Him in love. Strong Christian character is the result of your heart's desire to obey God."²⁰ Our inner convictions as Christian men and women are clear when it comes to sexual purity. We know the truth of what the Bible says about sex—the trouble is living by it when we are lonely, isolated, and vulnerable.

The following excerpt from Jim McNutt's book, *A Single Journey: Biblical Sketches for Life on Your Own*, is a good review of what the Bible teaches about sexual purity:

D.G. Kehl, author of Control Yourself: Practicing the Art of Self-Discipline, states that self-discipline requires us to do what comes supernaturally. How can we learn to master our bodies in holiness and honor rather than in the gratification of our passions? Paul gives the secret in 1 Thessalonians 4: because it is His will that we be holy (v.3), God has called us into holiness (v. 7), and has given us His Spirit, who is holy (v.8). Mastery of the body must come from the inside out, through the Spirit's control, rather than from the outside in, through a program or regimen. Genuine self-discipline of the body is essentially mind over matter—the mind of Christ over the matter of our bodies.²¹

.....

6.8 This section is based on the assumption that you know God's stand on sexual purity. The point here is not to rehash what we already know, but to acknowledge that the problem exists in our world and to try to communicate some ways for successfully handling these situations when they arise so that ministries are not destroyed. Consider the following verses. What do they speak to you?

- 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4
- 1 Corinthians 10:12-13
- Matthew 5:27-28, 15:19
- Jeremiah 17:9
- Galatians 6:7-8
- Colossians 3:5-10
- Ephesians 4:22-24, 5:1-7

With all we know and all we believe, we are still human. Some Christians blanch at the notion that petty gossip, complaining, and/or overeating are just as much sins as the sins of lust or viewing pornography. Our Lord does seem to make a distinction when it comes to sexual sin in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20. Take a minute to read and process this passage before you go on.

Certainly there are consequences to surrendering one's sexual purity, just as there are consequences for any other sin. "The problem with surrendering to temptation is that there's a price to be paid. The price for us, as it would have been for Christ [when Satan tempted Him to sin], is to allow ourselves to be subject to Satan's domination. To gain immediate possession of those legitimate and pleasurable things that God who seems strangely uncomprehending keeps from us, we become Satan's slaves."²² One moment of sin leads to so many shackles—Satan is a master at multitasking: a perusal of a pornographic site leads to shame and distance from the Father; it may lead to lies when the sites are discovered, which may lead to broken relationships, which leads to more shame, which lessens our effectiveness in ministry. One shackle after another after another...

IMB staff writer Erich Bridges says, "Pornography, especially on the Web, is causing major damage in front-line mission work. Isolation also can open the door to wrong relationships. People sometimes face loneliness on the field and this can set them up for a quick, not from God romance that ends in disaster."²³

If you find yourself in a situation of mounting temptation, talk to someone as fast as possible. Flee from the situation. Do not continue to put yourself in the position of either being victimized or giving in to desire. If you feel safe from the very real temptations that surround you, remember 1 Corinthians 10:12-13:

Therefore, whoever thinks he stands must be careful not to fall! No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to humanity. God is faithful and He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation He will also provide a way of escape, so that you are able to bear it.

It is worth saying that, "even after making good friends with local people, great loneliness will ensue, because the understanding of the foreigner is bound to be limited. Singles face a small pool of potential close friends, so while they try to cope with their problems, they have few friends with whom to discuss them."²⁴ Break out of your loneliness and isolation and make it top priority to discuss your problem or circumstances with someone you can trust. Keep your eyes on one truth:

For since He Himself was tested and has suffered, He is able to help those who are tested. Hebrews 2:18

Lesson 6: Lifestyles part 1

In the event that you have already given in and you are bearing the weight of sexual sin in your heart, DON'T let Satan continue to shackle you. Break free from his grip by seeking godly counsel. Yes, it could mean drastic and painful consequences, but at least you can return to life in the light. DO NOT allow Satan to make you believe you are anything less than you are—a much loved child of God Almighty and All Merciful.

But the enemy of our souls comes to us in a different manner, amazingly similar to the way he came to Jesus in the wilderness. Do you remember how he talked to Christ? “If You are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread.” If you are...that is the key phrase. The enemy challenges us at the bedrock level of our identities. Who we are is not something to rest in and thank God for. It is something to be proved—over and over and over. If you are...this is one way in which we distinguish the negative tapes in our heads from the actual voice of God.²⁵

God wants to forgive you. God wants to restore you to fellowship with Him. God wants you to remember that **nothing** can separate you from His love. You do not have to “prove” anything—you cannot prove anything in any case except that you are a sinner. If we could prove our worthiness, then Jesus would not have had to prove God's love for us by His death on the cross. Remember, “you are who God says you are—nothing more, nothing less. The more you review, recite, and internalize the verbal picture God paints of you in Scripture, the more you will grow like that picture.”²⁶ And, consequently, you will be better equipped to battle Satan's lies.

This is first and foremost a battle of the mind. We may be engaged in actions and habits that we cannot even abide, and we put all our energies into stopping those actions. We totally miss the fact that we must first do some mind work.

*We struggle with a pattern of thoughts, words, or actions. We promise ourselves we'll never do it again. We even genuinely hate the behavior involved. Then we hear those hated words come out of our mouths or realize we've done it again, and we feel like pond scum. In this process we often make a basic mistake. We assume our behavior is the battlefield and the goal is to change our actions. Print the following in your brain and underline it three times: **When the enemy wages war against us, the primary battlefield is the mind.**²⁷*

If you are struggling with sexual sin or the devastating guilt that often follows it, please do the courageous thing—the one thing that will set you free—and get some help. The IMB has a highly compassionate and qualified staff of member care personnel all over the world. If you do not know who your member care person is, ask a colleague. You don't have to tell them *why* you need to talk to someone. If you are not comfortable with your assigned member care person, seek out another one.

With all that said, does sexual purity mean denying the existence of our sexual desires and sexual identities as grown men and women? Absolutely not. Sexual desire and sexuality are God-given. As single adults, we must learn to channel sexual desire in appropriate ways, but our sexuality goes far beyond the sex act. Women are not women only when they are in a sexual relationship with a man, nor are men only men when they are in a sexual relationship with a woman.

“I used to think that being single and not having sex with a man meant that I just neutered that part of my heart,” one woman in her thirties explained. Then she realized how wrong that was and that the place it led her to didn’t resemble life. “I’ve learned not to deny my sexual desires, but to walk through them through life as much as I can—meaning that I let myself enjoy the affirmation of a man, or rest in the strength he brings to the picture. Or talk with other women about sexual struggles. I can’t divorce my sexuality just because I’m not having sex.”²⁸

Though this quote is from a woman, the truth applies to men as well. Single men have all the desires of married men. They should not be required to deny this fact—they *need* opportunities to talk with other men about this issue. Women need the same opportunities to talk with other women. If we deny the desires are there and that it is a constant struggle to keep them under the Lordship of Christ, we open ourselves up to Satan’s attacks because we are failing to shed light on the truth.

I can’t stand it when someone says, “Wow, I just don’t know how those career single men make it. Especially in this culture—they are just surrounded by sex. It must be so hard for them.” Hello! Just because we are women doesn’t mean we don’t have desires, too. There is nothing easy about being a single woman and knowing that you are living in a culture that values your gender for its sexuality—that being in your face every single day and wondering if your national colleagues think you are some kind of freak for not meeting that expectation. I want a husband for physical reasons, too—just as much as any man would desire to have a wife to fulfill physical drives. People put single men on some kind of a pedestal because they are foregoing sex—but they just assume it is so much easier for career single women. That’s not true. (Career)

We cannot deny our desires. They are alive and well in all of us. We can learn to allow God to use those desires for His purposes.

When we deaden ourselves to desire, a lot that’s good and right and true in us dies in the process. The insidious part about deadening desire is that in some circles it brings applause. We call a passionless person by other names. We say she is a stable, responsible soul. Those who have given up all claim to desire are sometimes called godly—so sanctified they do not want a thing. Some feel the only way they can serve God is to keep all their desires at the lowest level possible. But God does not deaden desire—rather, He awakens desire and transforms it.²⁹

Lesson 6: Lifestyles part 1

Consider Joseph's response to sexual temptation in Genesis 39:6-12. If we choose to follow his example, we will

1. confront the temptation with truth (39:7-8)
2. avoid the temptation (39:10)
3. flee the temptation when it becomes too strong (39:12)

Now consider David's response to sexual temptation in 2 Samuel 11. If we follow David's example we will

1. fail to keep our eyes from impurity (11:2)
2. indulge the arousal caused by this failure (11:4)
3. lie to ourselves and to others to cover up our fall (11:6-26)

God *will* use you if you confess and repent of your sins—the life of David and his own words are a beautiful example of this truth:

*Then I acknowledged my sin to You
and did not conceal my iniquity.*

I said,

*"I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,"
and You took away the guilt of my sin. Psalm 32:5*

The bottom line is that sexual purity is a choice. Is holiness important to you or isn't it? Jesus said that the truth would set us free. You can live in freedom from sexual sin by understanding your nature and developing ways to walk in that truth. You may not be free to stare at a woman [or man] or watch any movie you like, but you'll experience peace in your life and a closer relationship with Jesus Christ.³⁰

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- 6.8 OK, this has been pretty heavy. Maybe you're dealing with some stuff now, and maybe you're not. Spend some time meditating on what you've just read. Is there something here that God wants you to finally "get"? What is your plan for maintaining sexual purity? Just like contentment, *ya gotta have a plan!* Pray about it and set some goals for finding accountability and ways to deal with temptation.

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More on lifestyles in the next lesson.



Lesson 7

Lifestyles part 2

This learning task will help you to be proactive in getting your social needs met, including developing cross-cultural relationships.

You cannot be whole in isolation. The civilized world knows the destruction wrought by keeping prisoners in isolation cells for extended periods. Denied human contact, their minds become deranged. “The psychological effects of isolation are extremely detrimental. As early as 1890, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that extended solitary confinement was ‘infamous punishment’ and causes severe mental impairment. The American Journal of Psychiatry reported that hallucinations, anxiety attacks, problems with impulse control, and self-mutilation can result from solitary confinement. Even the U.S. Congress admitted in 1985 and 1990 they were concerned about the amount of time prisoners were spending in their cells. Prisoners at Marion [Prison] have reported that isolation encourages more anger and rage, resulting in less self-control and more violence.”¹ Of course, we do not lock people in cells and deprive them of human contact! However, single missionaries often go to remote locations or large cities alone and suffer the consequences of emotional isolation.

God’s given me contentment about being single, but I was in a city for a time and I was the only single with families. They were pretty set in their ways and did not attempt to include me. My supervisor should have sat down and asked me how I was doing maybe once a week or so. But that didn’t happen. I wasn’t learning the language because I was homeschooling MK’s, doing secretarial work, and trying to learn the language at the same time. It was hard for me to make friends with locals because I was working in English all day. If I could have made friends with people in the national culture, that would have helped my loneliness. (ISC)

This ISCer had made peace with what had happened and was returning to the field as a career missionary, having made a personal commitment to reach out to other new units in an attempt to keep them from feeling the same intense feelings of isolation. Another colleague stated that her “needs as a single woman were not understood and therefore went unnoticed and unmet.” Even when our own colleagues seem to be grievously lacking in sensitivity, we have to keep in perspective that “we live in a world of broken trust. People are going to let us down, break our confidences, misplace or damage our possessions, forget us, leave us out, and not live up to their commitments. We mustn’t be surprised or devastated when this happens, as it surely will. Granting and receiving forgiveness are key to restoring broken relationships and moving on.”² So, if you have

been hurt by the neglect of colleagues or if you find yourself guilty of these attitudes and inactions, remember that there is restoration in forgiving, asking forgiveness, and/or receiving forgiveness. Jesus means for us to be about relationships. Any perceived goal or job that keeps us from valuing and reaching out to our brothers and sisters is errant.

In a recent study of missionaries who had transferred from one region of the world to another, one of the chief complaints was feelings of isolation when supervisors or colleagues assumed they did not need support because they had already been to the field. This led to long-term depression and even caused them to question their calling. Interestingly, all of the units interviewed were married yet they, too, dealt with isolation, and it had significant and detrimental effects on their outlook and degree of general satisfaction. What then can be said about the single missionary entering a new culture for the first time?

I probably couldn't have made it without the IMB family that took me in—they treated me as part of their unit. Though they have two boys and a little girl, they made room for me in their family system. With culture shock, family issues—just everything you have to deal with when entering a new place—they have been essential to my success. There is only one other single in my city and we are not the same gender—I could see that leaning on that person for support and encouragement could have gotten to be “inappropriate” for us both. I can go over to this family's house anytime. I don't even know if they realize how they've ministered to me. Other families could provide such an essential ministry to single colleagues, too. You have got to have an American family to relate to when you get frustrated with the culture and everything going on at the office—or wherever your ministry is. They care about me when I'm sick, they call me if they haven't seen me in a day or two and they even remembered my birthday! I was just so touched when they called to tell me to come over because they had something special for me—they'd made me a cake and everything! Their children accept me as part of the family and they all treat me that way. Everybody needs somebody where they are. I know some people who say otherwise, that they'd rather just relate to nationals—but I think they're fooling themselves. You can see it by how they seem to resent my closeness with this family. You have to be able to be with people who just let you be yourself—without that, I can see why singles leave the field. (ISC)

The testimony of this person shows how vital each of us is to the success of the other. “If the Father is in me and you, and if we are both in the Father, you and I have a very special, close relationship. I might even say that, because of our mutual, intimate relationship with God, I am in you and you are in me. As a Christian, you are not an island; you are a peninsula, and so am I. We are both integrally involved in the body of Christ, and thus we are vitally involved with each other.”³

Mutual Support

What if our physical bodies related the way our Body of Christ sometimes does? For example, my thumb is attached most closely to my hand—the blood vessels, muscles, and bones all work together to accomplish a task. My hand supports my thumb. All the necessary nutrients allowing my thumb to work or heal pass right through my hand. In turn, my thumb enables the rest of my body to carry on its daily tasks with much greater ease.

Okay. That's a simplistic picture of how one part works. Compare this to how the family related to the ISCer in the paragraph above. The family is like the hand, the ISCer like the thumb—together they offer gifts to each other and because they choose to work together, they can bless the rest of the body!

On the other hand, so to speak, let's suppose the hand refused to provide the thumb with nutrients and the thumb refused to work for the body—well, the thumb would eventually just fall off! What long-term impact would this have on the whole body? Yet this is exactly what happened in the case of the first ISCer quoted in this lesson. The supervisor apparently didn't recognize the need to support and encourage this brother or sister. Because the single ISCer did not receive good support, we will likely never know the lives that went untouched because he or she was too emotionally exhausted, living an isolated life with no one nearby to care for him or her as a person. Thankfully, this person is choosing to return to the field as a career missionary, following the desire to be about God's work! Imagine how much more effective his or her ministry could have been in the first three years if the perceived need had been met.

Jesus showed us by example that we are to be about touching the lives of those near to us. Assuming that singles can receive the emotional support and connection they need from family and friends in the States via e-mail and phone calls is faulty. "Long distance friends won't do. Neither calls nor letters can substitute for presence. In one's time of need, one needs a local friend. I have met single wayfarers who spoke of their wonderful friends 'back home'—and they were usually lonesome, vulnerable people who do not feel at home where they live."⁴ No one becomes our colleague by accident—if someone has come to your city or area to work with you, you can assume it is God-ordained and He has a blessing for each of you if you will share your gifts with one another. Jesus had an intimate relationship with His disciples, who would become His co-workers in the Gospel. This closeness did not prevent Him from ministering to others—in fact, it supported His ministry. He broke bread with them, celebrated with them, corrected them, prayed with them, comforted them, and sought out their company in His darkest hour. "There are glimpses in the Gospels of the vulnerability Jesus chose that make you catch your breath when you think about them. How, in the Garden of Gethsemane before his death, Jesus asked his friends to stay awake with him. God of very God, in the moment of his anguish, voiced the longing for companionship."⁵ Is this not

an inspiring model of how we, within the IMB family, should relate to one another, notwithstanding our status—whether single, married, short-term, or long-term?

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7.1 Stop now and take some time to look for specific evidence of relationships in the New Testament. Look particularly at Jesus and his disciples and at the church in Acts. What were the results of their investing time and care in these relationships? Did it help or hinder the growth of the church?

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7.2 The following list of “ten essential human needs that must be met in order for us to experience intimacy in our relationship with God and others” is from David Ferguson’s book *The Great Commandment Principle*⁶. Look up the verses and record your thoughts following each statement.

1. **Attention:** Our need for attention means that we need people to think about us and convey appropriate care, interest, concern, and support for us. When we give each other attention we are experiencing God’s Word as expressed in **1 Corinthians 12:25**. Attention says, “I will enter your world and get to know your world because I care for you.”
2. **Acceptance:** Our need for acceptance means that we need people to receive us willingly, to regard us as good and proper, even if they disagree with us. When we accept each other, we are following the biblical mandate expressed in **Romans 15:7**. Acceptance says, “Even if nothing about you changed, I would love you anyway, just the way you are.”

Lesson 7: Lifestyles part 2

3. **Appreciation:** Our need for appreciation means that we need people not only to recognize who we are and what we have done, but also to communicate to us with words and feelings that they are grateful. When we appreciate each other, we are following the biblical pattern expressed in **1 Corinthians 11:2**. Appreciation says, "Thank you for your thoughtfulness. I am so grateful that you called."
4. **Support:** Our need for support means that we need people to come alongside us and gently help us carry a problem or struggle. When we support each other, we are experiencing **Galatians 6:2**. Support says, "I sense you can use some help. Please allow me to help you carry some of the load."
5. **Encouragement:** Our need for encouragement means that we need people not only to urge us forward but also to inspire us with courage, spirit, or hope. When we encourage each other, we are following the biblical mandate expressed in **1 Thessalonians 5:11**. Encouragement says, "So many people are going to be positively affected by your good work on this project. I know you will finish it successfully."
6. **Affection:** Our need for affection means that we need people to communicate care and closeness through physical touch and affirming words. When we show each other affection, we are experiencing **Romans 16:16**. Affection puts a hand on someone's shoulder and says, "I'm so glad you're here today."
7. **Respect:** Our need for respect means that we need people to value us, to recognize our worth, and to esteem us. When we respect each other, we are living out **1 Peter 2:17**. Respect says, "I need your input on this because your insights are so valuable to me."

8. **Security:** Our need for security means that we need people to protect us from danger, deprivation, and harmful relationships. When we give each other security, we are following the biblical desire expressed in **Psalms 122:6-8**. Security says, “I am committed to you, and as God allows and provides, I will meet your needs both now and in the future.”
9. **Comfort:** Our need for comfort means that we need people not only to ease our grief and pain but also to give us strength and hope to go on. When we comfort each other, we are experiencing **2 Corinthians 1:3-4**. Comfort says, “I am sorry to hear about your daughter’s divorce. How hard that must be for you. Know that I will pray for you and be available to listen to you and go through this with you during the coming months.”
10. **Approval:** Our need for approval means that we need people to express a favorable opinion about us and to affirm us as satisfactory. When we give each other approval, we are following the biblical pattern expressed in **Romans 14:18**. Approval says, “I am pleased with you.”

Obviously these needs cannot be met outside of relationships. In fact, “not only has God created us with these needs, but He also wants to meet these needs in us. He has chosen to meet those needs *not only through Himself, but also through other people.*”⁷ We can show our love for Him best when we reach out to one another in love. Recall Jesus’ admonition to Peter in John 21:15-17.

*My people needed different levels of encouragement. They wanted to be recognized and appreciated for what they were doing. I could sense when I was making too many demands and not appreciating their current efforts. My wife is great at encouraging others, and she really helped me be sensitive to the needs of my people. I made it a point to **see** my folks on a regular basis—most of us were able to gather once a week for our own worship service. The whole team got together monthly. Because I kept myself involved in their lives and work, I could see when they were discouraged. Some were pretty vocal about it, others became increasingly uncommunicative. There were times when complaints would increase. I could not become defensive or judgmental. I had to hear them out. As a servant leader, I needed to be sensitive to what was **really** bothering them and listen. Sometimes it wasn’t*

Lesson 7: Lifestyles part 2

what they thought it was—sometimes they were just lonely and needed a sympathetic ear. My people are more important than my planned strategy. Without them being healthy—emotionally, spiritually, and physically—the strategy won't have heart, hands, or head.” (Career)

Praise God that this man is in a position to influence and encourage our colleagues! Praise God that our heavenly Father looks at our hearts and does not tire of encouraging and supporting us! Our Lord knows, and I believe the missionary quoted above understands that,

When people are encouraged toward an intimate, ongoing relationship with Christ, His Word, and His people, the light of God's truth floods in. And when this happens people's spiritual, emotional, and relational needs are met, and people gain a clearer perspective of their true identity as God's beloved, valued, competent children...But when our vital needs are not met, God's light is blocked and our true identity is hidden in the shadows.⁸

God is good. We have been given brothers and sisters to help us along our journey. He wants us to reach out to one another. He does not want us to live our lives in isolation or by looking only “outside” to find people to care about and nurture. “Jesus calls for the arms of other team members to hug and comfort, their mouths to compliment, encourage and pray, their minds to think creatively to include them in activities that will enrich their lives, and their ears to listen to the problems, fears and desires...The happiest singles are those who are also in a position to take the initiative and include others in their plans. They don't wait to be invited.”⁹ If we want unbelievers to be attracted to Jesus, we will accomplish this best when we live out His love before them by taking special care of one another.

Getting Your Needs Met

If you have made the decision to see yourself in the light of God's truth, you will be able to begin to work on getting your needs met. When you understand how highly valued you are by the Creator, you will most likely respond by understanding that it is okay to be happy, to relax, to have fun, and even to be taken care of sometimes. If you choose to believe that God is withholding something from you (marriage, for example) because you still don't quite measure up to what He wants, you will probably not allow any simple pleasures in your life. You might deny your need for help at times thinking, “If I can just get things right with God, everything will be better.” You might even work yourself to exhaustion trying to prove or sacrifice your way into His good graces—*when you are already there!* If you are working in a situation right now that does not afford you the support and company of a team, either for logistical reasons or because your team isn't quite the model of Christian love it could be, these feelings may be amplified.

Let's revisit some of the ideas from the “to do” lists in Lesson 6—they're important enough for a second look—with ways you can meet some of your needs yourself.

- Take a vacation. You don't need to take anyone else along, freeing you from others' schedules, budgets and desires. That might sound selfish, but that's one of the gifts that comes with being single!

*Probably one of the most important things I do for myself each year is to take my full allotment of vacation time. Some of my colleagues have clucked their proverbial tongues at me—they've made it clear that they think it is a waste and indulgence for me to take that time. They have made comments about how **they** need vacation to spend time with their families. I need a vacation just as much as any married person. It's time to just **be**; to enjoy living. It helps me remember that I am not defined by my job. I'm defined by my Jesus. (Career)*

- Enjoy solo activities. We are so couples-minded that we are reluctant to do some things that we perceive to be activities you shouldn't do alone. Think of all that you might be missing if you're waiting for someone to join you!

There were these really incredible cave formations near where I live. I'd heard about them even before I got to my country, but I was not thrilled about going by myself. I sort of figured people would think, "I wonder why that American is here all alone." So, for the first year, I didn't go. I just kept waiting for someone to go with me. After a while I realized, "Hey, you came all the way over here by yourself, why can't you go to those caves alone?" I arranged to borrow a vehicle and off I went. It was great. I'm glad I didn't miss that opportunity. Once I was down in the caves, it didn't bother me what people thought about me being there by myself. As their kids crawled all over them and wanted to be picked up—I realized I was kind of blessed to be able to enjoy it without those distractions. (ISC)

- Indulge yourself on occasion. Buy yourself flowers on a regular basis. Workout or play video games periodically. Buy yourself a gift when it fits your budget. Spend the day with a good book. Take a Sunday afternoon nap. Spend as long as you want to in the bath.
- Communicate! You can give up a lot of things to stay within your budget, but be sure to budget for phone calls. Call your loved ones or friends on a regular basis. Look for free or cheap ways to call, like Skype (www.skype.com). Write them letters and encourage them to write, too—real letters, not just e-mails. That way you can hold the same paper and see their handwriting.

My sister used to send me my bank statement every month. When she did she would put a little post-it note on it and say, "I love you!" or "I hope you're over your cold by the time you get this!" Now, we talked every week, but those little notes always made me feel even closer. I knew that they had been in her hands, on her countertop, in her mailbox. I know it sounds goofy, but it just made me feel warm and close to her—like we'd actually touched each other. (ISC)

Lesson 7: Lifestyles part 2

- Keep a journal. When you need to process your deepest feelings and frustrating moments and there's no one available to listen, your journal can fill the void. It allows you to write out everything you are feeling and then go back later and reflect on it. "Even if you only pick up paper and pencil when something is needling you, journaling pays some of the richest returns in discovering your heart. How else can we learn about ourselves if not by forcing our hands to tell the truth about our hearts? It is about the best and cheapest therapy there is."¹⁰ There is no secret to journaling—just write whatever is on your mind.

My journal really helps me stay sane—I'm convinced of that. I write like I'm talking directly to God. I don't have to watch what I say or be concerned about how He's going to react. The process of writing just does something—if I think about stuff, it stays in my head. When I journal, it moves from my head and stays on the paper—most of the time! (Career)

- Celebrate special occasions. Don't ignore them just because you're alone. Make them as special as you can!

I'd only been on the field for two weeks when my nephew's birthday came up. He was turning 4 and I had never missed his birthday before. I was even there for his birth! I was dreading the day. I wanted to be with him so badly. It hurt my heart to know that I couldn't be there to celebrate with him. When I got to work that day, one of my colleagues had made this big chocolate cake for my nephew's birthday and we all sang happy birthday to him. One of my colleagues videotaped the whole thing and we sent it off to my nephew. I was so overwhelmed knowing how much they must care about ME to want to celebrate my little nephew that way! It made the day so much easier! (Journeyman)

All my colleagues were taking off for Easter one year to spend with other families on our field. I realized that I was going to be all alone. At first I was pretty bummed. I decided I would just treat it like any other Sunday—I mean I couldn't even attend a church service because I had no transportation or anything. The day before Easter, though, I changed my mind and decided to do my best to celebrate the holiday. I went out and bought some food—I'd never really cooked much before, but it turned out really good. I popped in a tape my church had sent me of a worship service and I had a great time worshipping God. It was a great Easter! (ISC)

- Ask for and accept help when you need it. We feel good when people admire us for our stamina and strength in the Lord. What good does it do us, though, when we are handling everything on our own and it looks really good on the outside but we are falling apart on the inside? Asking for help is not a sign of weakness, it's a sign of wisdom. If you're sick or hurt, let your friends and colleagues minister to you. When situations arise that you can't handle alone, from visa renewal

to flat tires to sewing to travel plans, ask for help. Know your limits and abilities and *accept* help when the time comes. Even Jesus asked for help when He needed it. And don't forget about Member Care. If you can't find your local member care person, contact the home office medical department.

- Allow yourself to say no. You don't always have to answer the door or the phone. You don't have to babysit every time you're asked. You don't have to be perpetually "available." Learn the value of solitude.

I really love the people I lived among. I appreciated the apartment I had. Everyone was so nice and my roommate and I felt well taken care of by the national family's home we lived in. They had a little boy and he was just so adorable. He liked to spend time with us in our apartment—a lot of time. His mother and grandmother loved to visit, too. Then there were all the other children in the neighborhood—our house was the place to be. After a while I was getting really burned out always having people in our apartment. I dreaded to hear someone knock on the door. I knew that wasn't right. I had to do something about my attitude. One Saturday, I decided I wasn't going to get out of my pajamas. I sat down and put a movie in the VCR. When the phone rang, I let it ring. If someone had called to ask me out to coffee, I knew I wouldn't be able to say no. When I heard a knock at the door, I just ignored it. It was great! I felt so refreshed. Several weeks later, when I'd reached my limit again, I knew just what I needed to do. (Journeyman)

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- 7.3 What about the statements in this section made you angry? Why? What did you agree with? What are you doing well regarding meeting your needs? What improvements can you make? Discuss your comments with someone who will help you be accountable to take care of yourself.**

Getting Others Involved in Your Life

As one missionary so wisely stated, we will each need different levels of support and encouragement from outside sources. Our emotional health and wholeness depend upon our spiritual wellness. Acknowledging God's goodness, even in light of unmet desires and dreams, is a crucial step in working toward emotional wellbeing. Even when we are close to the Father, there will be times when we will be lonely, frustrated, burned-out, and in need of the encouragement of our brothers and sisters. This is not symptomatic of a weak walk with the Lord—it is how He designed us. He wants us to live in the context of supportive and loving relationships. God created us with emotional needs that are met by outside sources. Just as our physical needs are met by food, clothing, and shelter—things outside ourselves—our emotional needs are met by God and other people. And just as we are responsible to seek what we need to fulfill our physical and spiritual needs, we are equally responsible to seek out appropriate ways to meet our emotional needs. This quest is no more selfish than wearing warm clothes to protect against the cold and praying to stay connected to the Lord.

It is important for us to acknowledge that meeting these needs, as a single person, is exponentially more difficult on the mission field. One missionary shared, "I was satisfied with being single in the States. Here Satan can and does use the 'you could do so much more if you were married' lie often. It is much harder to be single here." In the States, surrounded by long-time friends, family, and familiarity, being able to meet your needs as a single adult is not terribly difficult if you reach out. On the mission field, others must intentionally reach out to you, too, if your needs are to be met. This doesn't always happen. "The key to thriving in life, whether we are single or not, is a simple phrase, 'Knowing Christ in community.' Jesus holds out a promise to us of an intensely intimate relationship, one that is day to day; one that is hour to hour; a relationship of conversation; a relationship of passion; a relationship of tenderness; and a relationship of ecstasy. He knows our needs and he will meet them."¹¹

True, but consider this point of view:

There are few, if any, places in the world where a person would be forced to remain friendless and alone. Most people are inherently friendly and will respond to warmth as a flower opens to the sun. If being friendly does not come naturally to you, work on it. Start with as simple a gesture as a smile, or a greeting, then move forward from there. Invite people to your home. Schedule times for relaxing, for talking, for recreation. Accept invitations that come your way. Put yourself out in order to be helpful to others. And when you are blessed with friends, cultivate, nurture and cherish them.¹²

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7.4 Time for your two cents' worth.....are these two quotations on the same side or not? Is the first one saying to look only to Jesus to meet your needs? Is the second one saying to do it all yourself? How can they both be right? Or are they both wrong?

What will it take for you to make friends? Plan your first move. Do you need to reach out to the missionary families with whom you work? How can you express to them your needs without whining? Rehearse aloud so you can hear what it sounds like. If there are no other colleagues available, to whom will you reach? How?

Consider these thoughts from *The Friendship Gap* by Tim Stafford¹³:

Communication between two cultures is a delicate and gentle art. Perhaps understanding will always be rare. Yet I think it could be a great deal less rare among Christians, for some of the barriers that keep us apart are really quite weak. Sometimes a single piece of information can make a huge difference.

Our first year in Kenya was a lonely one. We tried hard to make friends with Kenyans and became acquainted with quite a number. We wanted to know them better. How do you signal that to someone? In the United States you invite him or her to dinner. It never occurred to us that another culture might do it differently. But we noticed that our would-be friends became extremely evasive when we tried to fix a date. They seemed so busy we couldn't imagine how they found time for any socializing at all. We had to fix dates weeks in advance. Even then, some would not appear on the appointed day. Others came but seemed strangely nervous. We usually had a good time, but not easily. And it was virtually unrepeatable. When we tried for a second evening together, they evaded us completely, often saying that it was not right for us, as guests in Kenya, to have them to our house before we came to their homes.

But we were never invited! We puzzled over that many times. An African who came to work with a Christian organization in the United States would be invited to dozens of meals. But in Kenya, with one or two stilted exceptions, no one invited us home, neither members of Kenya Youth for Christ (the group we were working with), nor church and fellowship members, nor neighbors. We thought they liked us. Unless we read all the social signals wrong, they appreciated us. But how could we make friends when we only saw people in passing, at church or while on business?

Popie grew up in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and retains the enthusiastic warmth of the South. She often has trouble with friends—too many of them. Friendships are a crucial element in both our lives, not an afterthought. When we thought of life in Africa, we had thought of making friendships with Africans, not just doing work within the borders of an African country.

But we were frustrated. We felt homesick and lonely. Letters from home seemed few and far between. We wanted African friends, and we needed them. But we did not seem to be making them. Meanwhile we met many interesting people from England and Sweden and Holland, as well as from America. They did invite us. We saw how easily and profitably we could fill our whole calendar with them.

But what about Kenyans? Kenyans would never feel comfortable within that set. So we made a rule for ourselves: We would not pursue friendship with any non-African. Pursue is the key word, for we did make good non-African friends. But we almost never took any initiative with them. We waited, sometimes feeling quite lonely, to find our way into friendships with Kenyans.

A retired missionary had given me a helpful piece of advice: “Find Africans who will tell you the truth, however unpleasant, and not the truth you want to hear.” And eventually some Kenyans did tell us what we were doing wrong. It was simple.

In Kenya and in most African countries, you rarely if ever invite people to your home on a particular date. To do so only confuses them. If you want to become friends with someone, you simply go to his or her home, without any invitation (though it is fine to warn them you are coming). Whether you arrive at a mealtime or not doesn't matter, for at any time of day they will feed you. You should expect to stay for a bare minimum of one hour, and half a day is more like it. You will always be welcome.

Easily said, but not so easily done. In the United States we could drop in on good friends (though preferably not at mealtimes), but we would never do it with mere acquaintances. The first few times we stood at the door of Kenyans we didn't know well, and who weren't expecting us, we felt very nervous indeed.

But it worked. They always welcomed us—always, in the warmest way possible. No one ever seemed to be on the verge of going out. (We learned later that, if they were, they canceled their plans.) They fed us, they showed us their family photo albums, they acted pleased we had come. Like magic, such visits opened the door to friendship.

As we visited them, they began to visit us, also without warning and often at mealtimes. We had to adjust, and no doubt we made many offensive mistakes in doing so. But mistakes could be forgiven and corrected. Until we found the way to mix freely, we made few mistakes—and few friends.

An almost impenetrable barrier between cultures had been formed by a simple and small difference of procedure. A single piece of information broke the barrier down. Yet we had found it astonishingly difficult to get that piece of information. Apparently others do too. Just a short time ago I heard of some missionaries in Tanzania who were troubled that Tanzanians had not been friendly to them: “They never invite us to their homes.”

- 7.5 Do you have someone in the local culture “who will tell you the truth, however unpleasant, and not the truth you want to hear”? If not, do you need someone like that? How can you find them?

How are you doing with “crossing” the culture? How can you cultivate meaningful friendships with the nationals where you serve? What are the unspoken rules that apply?



The old saying goes if you want to have a friend you have to be a friend. Many times you’ll need to make the first move, take the first step, reach out to others. Jesus said it best in Luke 6:31, often called the Golden Rule. You know it from other versions, but look at it from *The Message*:

Here is a simple rule of thumb for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you; then grab the initiative and do it for them!

Dealing with families in the next lesson.....

END NOTES

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- 5 Paula Rinehart. *Strong Women—Soft Hearts: A Woman’s Guide to Cultivating a Wise Heart and a Passionate Life*. (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2005) 95.
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- 11 William R. L. Haley. “Thriving Single,” 4/18/99. <http://thefallschurch.org/SERMONS> (accessed 6/2/04).
- 12 Jeannie Lockerbie. *By Ones and By Twos: Single and Double Missionaries*. (Pasadena, Cal.: William Carey Library, 1983), 44.
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Lesson 8

Family...of a sort

In this learning task you will determine ways as a single to cultivate and nurture family-type relationships with colleagues.

We'll begin with a parable:

Let me introduce you to the Christophers. They are a large family with many gifted members, spanning the generations and socioeconomic classes. They get together at least once a week, sometimes twice, sharing meals, talking about their activities, helping each other, and gathering advice. Something odd happens when they come together—the senior members of the family retire to separate rooms to chat, the young married couples congregate in the kitchen, older married couples relax in the living room, single members of the family go off to the study, and the younger generation are kept occupied elsewhere in the house after the initial greetings and family meeting have taken place.

Though they consider themselves to be one family, the different segments rarely mix because they don't think they have much in common. Unfortunately, some of the single members of the family have begun to feel a bit alienated. Though they are all single, they have a wide range of ages and interests, and when they meet in the study they often feel left out of the mainstream of the family. They long to fellowship with others in the family who are nearer their own stage of life.

When family members from out of town come to visit or move into the area, the Christophers greet them heartily and then immediately ask whether they are married or single. Couples are given their choice of which group they believe would best suit their needs, and the singles are directed to the study without further question or comment. You see, the Christophers believe that married family members have a greater variety of needs but the single members are pretty much alike—they're so much easier to deal with, actually—so they don't require much thought and few resources.

As more and more of the family members remain single for longer periods of time after leaving school, it's clear that changes need to take place—clear to the single Christophers, that is. Over time the single Christophers begin to feel increasingly marginalized, and fewer and fewer of them attend the weekly family meetings. Those who are married believe that the singles are choosing not to come because they are too busy doing their own thing, or are too irresponsible to remember, or just don't care to be a part of the family anymore. Sadly, only about one in ten of the adult family members who come each week are single, even though half of the adult Christophers are unmarried.

Lesson 8: Family...of a sort

It may shock you to hear that this loving family has at times even forgotten about some of its members! At holidays and special occasions, some people are overlooked and uninvited because there is a presumption that they wouldn't want to participate. As you can imagine, this has caused some deep hurts and feelings of loneliness and alienation among the single Christophers.

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- 8.1 Make a list of characteristics of the Christopher family. Try to list at least 10 things you notice about them.**

Now go back and underline the strengths. Look at what's left. What changes would you suggest to make this family stronger?

You've probably already guessed that the "Christophers" represent the typical church. "Christopher" means "Christ bearer" and we, as the church, are the Christ-bearers in the world today. Even with a basic understanding of families we can observe that the Christophers are not functioning at peak effectiveness.

Just like this fictitious family, "the church is fractured and weakened. Jesus said, 'If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand.' [Luke 11:17] Tragically, some 'houses' (churches) have fallen, caused in part by the loss of too many singles who either left or decided not to attend in the first place. Others that remain 'standing' are weakened by the loss of some fantastic talent and commitment of singles who leave. Despite the quiet exodus, I don't think Christians necessarily view the church as fractured by this issue because the division isn't intentional or malicious."¹ Jesus wants us to nurture and strengthen our Christian family—the one that will transcend the grave—the one Body joined by baptism in His name.

And yet, “we don’t seem like one whole family. Whenever we are missing the mark, there will be hurt and unfortunate consequences. Jesus said that you will know a tree by its fruit. I believe the fruit produced by the existing division between couples and singles proves it is not God’s best and highest for us.”² Why should we be concerned about the division that exists between singles ministries and other more family-oriented ministries? Am I suggesting that we should do away with family-based programs? Absolutely not. They serve a vitally important purpose. Yet we should consider the words of Terry Hershey, who led the way in encouraging singles ministries across the country from his staff position at Robert Schuller’s church in California: “Churches should never be divided along gender or marital or generational lines. As soon as we ghettoize people—*Oh I’m glad you’re in our church today; are you single? Then go to room 207*—then we’ve done something wrong.”³

On the mission field, we have a great opportunity to relate to other believers, regardless of marital status or age, on a more intimate level, out of necessity. If we are truly blessed, we have experienced the closeness of family with other missionaries as we are physically separated from our loved ones in the U.S. After all, Jesus said, “And everyone who has left houses, brothers or sisters, father or mother, children, or fields because of My name will receive 100 times more and will inherit eternal life.” (Matthew 19:29)

The following stories are examples of how the mission field can draw believers together into God’s “best”:

We needed someone to come and teach our two children. One of our boys has special needs and we just weren’t able to do it all on our own any longer. We put in a request for a specific person and then we waited. When we heard that she had been approved and would be coming, we had our reservations at first. We were joyful that the Lord was seeing fit to meet our need, and yet we were concerned about how having another person working so closely and intimately would impact our family life.

We consulted with another family who had a great relationship with their MK teacher and they gave us some good advice. “Treat her as a member of your family...prepare to be blessed...don’t just see her as a ‘worker’, see her as a friend...be open and honest and allow her to be as well...really make her a part of the team and value what she has to offer...” That all sounded so nice, but my wife and I were already maxed out on relating to other missionaries and working hard nurturing our friendships with nationals. Honestly, our first response was, we don’t need any more friends—we just need someone to teach our children so we can maintain the relationships we’re already involved in.

Then our teacher came. Right away we felt a strong connection. My wife and she became fast friends. I don’t quite know what to call our family’s relationship with her—it was more than just friends and still is. Sometimes

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I felt paternal—but it was never condescending. She wasn't like a daughter—it was more like a dear sister. She brought something special to our family—her ability to teach our boys was coupled with a dear friendship and fondness. Our lives were enriched by the years she spent with us. I don't think I'm speaking out of turn to say hers was, too. (Career)

The missionaries I was blessed to work with genuinely cared about me as a person. When I expressed sadness about leaving my family in the States, my supervisor said to me, "Don't think of it as leaving your family; think of it as gaining even more family."

That's exactly what happened too! They encouraged my walk with the Lord, included me in on family events, and protected my free time as if they were a concerned brother and sister—and I guess they really are in terms of the Christian family. When I needed medical tests one time, they wouldn't let me take the trip by myself. The husband suggested his wife and I should drive their only car—he was without a vehicle for a week and he was left behind to take care of their three children. They never complained or even hinted that I was inconveniencing them. I felt so loved! I hope I blessed them even half as much as they blessed me.

Being a family in Christ wasn't something we just talked about—we lived it. Our Christian witness was given flesh in how we cared for one another, and nationals—even other missionaries—took notice. The career couple I worked with is still among my closest friends—they really are a part of my family now. I never imagined what dear relationships would come of my time on the field. God blessed me way beyond my wildest dreams. We all said that we felt He'd given us a glimpse of what Heaven would be like. (ISC, single woman)

When relationships like the ones described above are lived out before nationals, the results can be great. "By being integrated, we reflect to the world something uniquely precious about who God is and who we are as His people. God uses this to draw others in. The world is a lonely place for a lot of folks. We want to be an inviting place that has open arms."⁴ When we are willing to incarnate the unity and love that Christ taught, others will naturally be attracted. Why? Because "people are hungry for love, especially love that demands nothing from them, love that expects nothing in return, love that offers unexpected and undeserved forgiveness. They want to know more about this love, where to find it, and how to keep it."⁵

Our witness is damaged, however, when we do not care for one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. If a national observes one Christian treating another Christian in a less than appropriate manner, why on earth would they be attracted to our Lord? If we are the Christ-bearers in their society and we don't have the capacity to love one of our own in their time of need—or just as a matter of daily life—what basis do they have to trust that our walk is genuine?

.....

8.2 Consider the two quotations from above and contrast them with the quotations that follow. Use the margins to note how observers might be affected by witnessing these situations.

My frustration was the lack of family. After a while I began to feel accepted by one family—it would have been so beneficial if we had been able to form a strong relationship. One lady, a career missionary, told me that she has never felt welcomed after years and years on the field, working alongside the same couples. As a single you're not called on holidays. Everyone plans things and the families get together—singles are left out. What happened to Christian community out there? (ISC, single)

I could have used the protection of my supervisor—you know, just someone to call on when things got really hard or even dangerous. One of the most hurtful things said to me was when my tire went flat very early in my term—I was with some female national students. No one had shown me how to get the spare down. My orientation had been very basic. A little bit of help up front about what to do in such a situation would have been nice. I called my supervisor's cell phone and his wife answered. She said to me, "You came to the field single. You knew what you were getting yourself into. My husband can't be expected to just drop what he's doing with us to come and take care of you." I felt punished for my singleness—like she was saying, this is the life you chose, deal with it. In that culture, what other male was I supposed to go to? I felt so alone and so vulnerable. (Journeyman)

An IMB missionary friend and colleague who grew up as a TCK in a country that dealt with civil war shared a story that deeply affected the way I see the importance of unity in the body of Christ. The details may not be entirely accurate, as it has been years since the telling and even more years since the event, but the underlying truth remains:

We lived on a mission compound with several other families. Our host country was in the midst of upheaval as warring guerilla groups roved across the country, terrorizing villages, killing nationals and foreigners at will. It wasn't long before one of these groups reached the village in which our compound was located. Their leader sought out locals and demanded to know how we, inside the compound, treated them. The villagers replied that we were very kind to them—sharing food, providing medical care, and educational and employment opportunities. The guerilla leader said he would allow those of us within the compound to live based on that report.

Time passed and yet another guerilla group surrounded our village. They knew that a sizeable community of foreigners (our mission compound) lived there and they had come to dispose of us. Their leader approached the villagers and asked, "How do those people treat one another?" The villagers answered that we treated each other with love and respect. They said that we

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appeared to be one clan rather than many separate families. Upon hearing this, the guerilla leader replied, "Then I will let them live."

Our earthly families are ours through birth or adoption. Our Christian family becomes ours through faith and baptism. One is for a season; the other is for eternity. Those from the outside will readily observe the importance and value we give to each. While we should never neglect our physical family—that is clearly not God's will—we must be just as adamant about nurturing and relating to our family in Christ.

8.3 Read the following verses. What do they speak to you in light of this topic?

John 17:11, 20-25

Romans 12:5

And they'll know...

One missionary couple put it this way:

Christianity is all about relationships—investing in or duplicating yourself in someone else's life. Discipleship! Right? Anyway, when I am dead and gone, what will I have to show? I hope and pray that any investments I made in others—whether they are colleagues or nationals—will continue in them so that they, in turn, will invest in someone else. Christian life is investing oneself in people. That is an eternal investment. I am accountable to the Lord for every relationship I have—whether a person is single or married—there should be no distinction. I'm to love them and treat them as Christ would. Am I a stumbling block or a stepping stone? Am I drawing people closer to Christ or away from Him? I think that's what it's all about. (Career couple)

Read Ruth 1:16-18. (Read the whole book if you have time. It's only 4 chapters.) The single adult who has committed to long-term service overseas might relate to Ruth, who knew that by choosing to follow her mother-in-law she was probably closing the door to any future marriage. Ruth did not know the whole story when she chose to put Naomi's feelings and needs above her own, but God had plans for this young widow that neither one of them could have even imagined. See Ruth 4:18-22 and Matthew 1:2-16 for the rest of the story.

This story is often cited as an example of sacrificial love and is frequently used in weddings. But this sacrifice and devotion is not limited to the marriage relationship. In fact, Paul makes it clear in 1 Corinthians 13 that Christians are called to this kind of love within the body of Christ.

J.R.R. Tolkien, a devoted Christian and well-respected professor at Oxford University, is perhaps best known for his writings, including *The Hobbit* and the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. In *The Fellowship of the Ring*, there is a small band of travelers on a mission to defeat a great and ever-growing evil force. The group is made up of four hobbits, an elf, a dwarf, and two men. Working together to defeat scores of dangers, the eight finally arrive in the land of Lothlorien—an enchanting elven forest. The majority of the group is greeted with reserved welcome, but the dwarf, Gimli, is refused entry, based on the distrust that exists between dwarves and the elves of Lothlorien. After much discussion, the elf of the group, Legolas, convinces them that Gimli is harmless, loyal to the fight against the Evil One, and should be permitted to pass. The Lothlorien leader, Haldir, finally agrees—on one condition: the dwarf must be blindfolded. Gimli blanches at the prospect of being led along, dependent on the others who go freely through the forest. In a show of unity, all eight of the travelers agree to be blindfolded so as not to single out the dwarf. Once their eyes are covered, the following exchange takes place:

“Alas for the folly of these days!” said Legolas. “Here all are enemies of the one Enemy, and yet I must walk blind, while sun is merry in the woodland under leaves of gold!”

“Folly it may seem,” said Haldir. “Indeed in nothing is the power of the Dark Lord more clearly shown than in the estrangement that divides all those who still oppose him.”⁶

*...by our
love.*

We can be sure that Satan delights in anything that causes us to be estranged from one another, defying Jesus’ prayer that we would be unified. If we were to fully grasp the richness of what our family in Christ is meant to be, apart from this fallen world, our task would be made easier. For now, we must be wise. Strengthening the family, encouraging open and loving communication within its ranks, is the best defense against the tares that have been sown in our midst. (See Matthew 13:24-30) When we are united, fully employing the gifts of all those in our Christian family, it becomes more difficult for the tares to do their damage. Whether as an individual or as a family unit, we are much more vulnerable alone.

If, however, we accept the pleasures of belonging to a large family, we must also be willing to accept the obligations entailed: loyalty, concern, help when needed, advice—all summed up in the word: love. The Bible gives the command, “Let brotherly love continue,” or as the NIV gives it in Romans 12:10, “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.”

This will mean, at times, keeping your mouth shut, not divulging mission business to those outside the “family”. It may mean sticking your neck out for somebody when he is in trouble. It always means showing at least the same respect and affection for this colleague brother or sister as you show, or ought to show, towards your own brothers and sisters.

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Just as at home, it may be that on the mission field you are automatically more drawn to one person, one couple, one family than to some of the others. That is fine, but you need to try to get to know all the people with whom you live and work. This takes effort. It takes spending time together, both in the working situation and especially in the off duty hours. It means doing thoughtful little things for one another.⁷

Would you agree with that? In an earlier lesson we said that often you have to make the first move at being a friend, and living in community with other believers requires effort. Something else that's important is to keep short accounts—advice that's often given to married couples that definitely applies to families as well, no matter how they're defined. Don't keep a list of offenses, but deal with them as they come along. Many times that will mean just letting go of them, realizing that the differences—those things that make us individuals—are the way we are made and not something we deliberately do to annoy others.

Jeannie Lockerbie comments further:

If the actions or characteristics of a person with whom you live or work drive you crazy, ask yourself, "Is what this person is doing adversely affecting the Lord's work, or is it just something that bothers me personally?" If the latter is the case, it could be that praying for that person will change your attitude about him entirely.

An even more penetrating question to ask yourself would be, "What am I doing that may be driving somebody else crazy? Are people having to spend time praying for grace to put up with me?"

A mark of maturity is to work on eliminating your own quirks and accepting those of others. Rather than deciding your colleague is out to rub salt on your wound, learn and practice the words of Jonathan Goforth of China. In 1894 he compiled seven rules for daily living. Among them, "Put the very best construction on the actions of others."⁸

I have a friend who paraphrases that rule: ***Always assume positive intent.*** We have to resist looking through our own filters and try to see the situation through God's eyes. He hasn't set us up as a judge over others, and we usually are not privy to their decision-making processes. Just assume that they are acting in what they believe are the best interests of the situation. If you've got a problem, speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), be flexible and commit to working it out.

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8.4 Your turn...We've brought up a lot of stuff here in a couple of pages. If you didn't take the time to read Ruth and 1 Corinthians 13, do it now. Look for the applications to the lives of Christians as they function in the larger Christian family, and then look for the applications to your particular situation. Write your thoughts and insights here.

**7 Rules for Daily Living by Jonathan Goforth
quoted from his journal**

From www.wholesomewords.org

1. Seek to give much—expect nothing.
2. Put the very best construction on the actions of others.
3. Never let a day pass without at least a quarter of an hour spent in the study of the Bible.
4. Never omit daily morning and evening private prayer and devotion.
5. In all things seek to know God's Will and when known obey at any cost.
6. Seek to cultivate a quiet prayerful spirit.
7. Seek each day to do or say something to further Christianity among the heathen.



Families can be a challenge, particularly when you didn't grow up there. And maybe more particularly when you *did*! We'll look at the rest of the family in the next lesson.

END NOTES

- 1 Virginia McNerney. *Single Not Separate: How to Make the Church a Family* (Lake Mary, Fla.: Charisma House, 2003), 130.
- 2 Ibid, 126.
- 3 Lauren F. Winner. "Solitary Refinement," *Christianity Today*, Vol. 45, No. 8, 30.
- 4 McNerney, 154.
- 5 Jan Turrentine. *Take the Road Called Unexpected*. (Birmingham, Ala.: Woman's Missionary Union, 1996), 21.
- 6 J. R. R. Tolkien. *The Lord of the Rings*. (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2003), 339.
- 7 Jeannie Lockerbie. *By Ones and By Twos: Single and Double Missionaries*. (Pasadena, Cal.: William Carey Library, 1983), 14-15.
- 8 Ibid, 82-83.

Lesson 9

Family...really

In this learning task you will consider ways as a single to accept and deal with your family regarding your career and the issues that come with it.

This lesson has been difficult to begin. Even as I write, I don't know exactly where we're going to end up. There isn't a lot of material available for single missionaries on dealing with your family, but it is a very needed resource. I've searched the Web and other sources, and I've found information for singles who need to move out of their parents' home (obviously not you!) and for people who find themselves single again, which may speak to some of you but is not generally the case in our ranks. So whatever comes here will definitely be God's leading. Hold on for the ride!

Let's revisit the Christophers. Do any of their problems—*opportunities!*—apply to your family? I started to say "birth family", but that might not be the case for you. The "family with whom you grew up" might also not be the case, so maybe we need to define family. For this lesson we will say that "immediate family" refers to the people you would call your parents together with the people you would call your siblings. That also probably raises a flag for some of you who might have been raised by grandparents or others. I'm trying to be sensitive here as an adoptive parent who also helped raise about half a dozen others over the last thirty years. Let's agree to let you adapt *parents*, *siblings*, and *family* to fit your situation.

So, getting back to the Christophers and their opportunities....

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- 9.1 Compare your family with the Christophers. What do you have in common, particularly in regard to the single members of the family? Reflect on some of the hurts that might color your thoughts as we explore family relationships. Try to lay them down before the Lord, using separate paper or your computer if you need more space.**

Lesson 9: Family...really

We're going to take this journey kind of like peeling away the layers of an onion. We'll look at the family as a whole and then go into some of the specifics with parents and siblings.

Let's begin with some comments by IMB missionary Ken Blackwood¹ outlining the story of Joseph's rise to power through his obedience to God. "It is also the story of a family's journey from jealousy and strife to peace." I think Ken makes some great observations about families in general as he looks at this large family who became the nation of Israel.

*The survey
says...*

As a young man Jacob was well known for his tendency to selfishly seek his own best interests, causing a rift in his family. As an old man, Jacob was forced to watch as his own sons followed in his footsteps. But as envy and strife took root among his twelve sons, one son refused to fit the pattern.

Joseph was a young man who was sold into slavery by his heartless brothers who hated him for his vision that he would one day rule over them. But Joseph remained faithful to God's calling in spite of several setbacks and many years of suffering. Finally, in God's timing, Joseph found himself the highest official in the king of Egypt's court and personally in charge of the life-saving granaries of Egypt during a terrible famine. It was at this dramatic moment that God reunited Joseph with his family and gave him and his brothers a new opportunity to re-establish peace among the sons of Jacob.

In Genesis 42-46 we find the part of the story where the brothers are reunited with a grown-up Joseph. Take some time to read the whole account, but particularly notice the following verses and concepts:

1. Dependence—Genesis 42:7

Family members who recognize their mutual dependence upon each other will seek to live in harmony. Dependence among family members tends to hold families together.

2. Affection—Genesis 43:29-30

Family peace is largely dependent upon how much family members love each other, whether in the home or in the church. We just let our affection for Jesus overcome any bitterness we may hold against our family.

3. Authority—Genesis 44:1-16

We must remember that God holds all authority in family relationships, just as He does in all things. We are not free to abandon our family responsibilities as if we had no one to answer to. Families who want peaceful relationships must submit to God-given authority in those relationships.

4. Character—Genesis 45:3-8

Joseph's attitude demonstrated forgiveness, compassion, and even courage. But mostly, it demonstrated character. Joseph was made of such a moral fiber that he repeatedly chose the higher path. He recognized God's hand in all human relationships. Today's families need men and women of character.

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9.2 Rate your own family on the four characteristics Ken cites, using a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 meaning “we are not like this at all” and 10 meaning “this is who we are”. Circle your answer.

1. Dependence 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. Affection 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. Authority 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. Character 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Now rate yourself individually using the same criteria, but put a square around the numbers that indicate where you see yourself on the scale.

Do you look more like Joseph or more like his brothers? How do you feel about that? In what ways can you grow and be more “faithful to God’s calling”?

I’m thankful that God has given us some great examples of less-than-perfect families. Think back to the Prodigal Son’s family (Luke 15). I’ve known some prodigals and I usually sided with the other brother—*what about me??* Did I miss the point? And then there’s Hosea’s family. There really is nothing new under the sun. God has seen it all and heard it all before.

We have a great family in the book of Ruth, which you read earlier. Boaz showed us how important it is to treat extended family with love and respect so that the outside world will see what we really believe about family relationships.

I wonder if Ruth’s family of origin complained about her “breaking up the family” when she went with Naomi? Do you suppose anyone asked Daniel, “How’s your love life?”

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9.3 What do you say to well-meaning family members who use those lines with you?

Lesson 9: Family....really

Dr. Henry Cloud gives some suggestions for making peace with your family when they criticize you for “breaking up the family.”

...your primary call is to go into the kingdom of God to affect the world.

Sometimes, that call takes us away from our family or all that’s familiar. Abraham, Lot, and many others were asked to leave their homelands. At other times, we choose to remain with family to take care of them as Ruth did. Whatever the situation, we’re called to follow the path God has for our lives....Start by affirming your life and gifts before God, then reach out to your family to mend the fence your natural growth has broken. Be sure to mend it with a gate, because more fences would keep you in the yard your whole life....Understand their feelings, but do not buy into the guilt. Just say, “I understand this is hard for you. I miss you too. But, this is what I have decided to do, and I would cherish your support of my decision. I want us to have the best relationship that you’re willing to have with me.”

In reality, your success is a tribute to them and all they have instilled in you. Ask them to celebrate what they have helped you become.²

This is really hard to do. I would rather go without chocolate for a week than have to confront family members, but this kind of interaction will free you to be who God has called you to be and help you to lose some of the baggage we talked about when the lesson began. And if you can talk about this one, maybe the next one will be easier.

So, Why Aren't You Married?

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9.4 How many ways can they ask it? List the ones you’ve heard and any snappy comebacks you’ve used.

Camerin Courtney offers some insights in an article at lifeway.com called “Stop Giving Me a Hard Time!”³ She said her grandfather suggested she go to the USO to find some “good men.”

I know I’m not alone in such eye-roll-inducing conversations. One of my single friends was once asked by her grandmother if she really liked men. Another friend had a woman at a Christian conference ask her if her parents were disappointed since she hadn’t provided them with any grandchildren yet. (Is it just me, or is that not in the same category of walking up to a stranger and asking her when she’s going to lose those noticeably extra pounds?)

How do you respond to these kinds of questions? Courtney says many times you can just turn the question back to the asker. Or when they offer solutions, just say, “Thanks. I’ll keep that in mind.”

As for the question that titles this section, she says,

I’m dying to know how these folks expect us to reply. “Well, John, because my expectations are too lofty for any mere mortal to meet.” “Married? I’m supposed to get married? Wow, nobody told me.”

...“I’m not really sure, but I’m learning to trust God’s timing. Do you think He’s taking too long?”

This brings us to one of the spiritual classics, offered by Kristi: “God still wants to keep me all to Himself.” Awwww. Now who can argue with that?

My favorite is “Why do you ask?” It kind of puts it in perspective. But maybe we need a different perspective. Back to Camerin’s grandfather.

I caught a glimpse at the answer to that question in the you-didn’t-really-just-mention-the-USO conversation with my grandfather. Toward the end of our chat, when my frustration had no doubt become evident, he explained, “I just want you to be happy.”

“I am happy!” I snapped, my tone an ironic contrast to my words. I wanted to explain in no uncertain terms that I’d be happier still if I didn’t have to deal with these nosy questions, but instead, I took a moment to let two important truths sink in. One, in his day, a single 32-year-old woman such as myself would’ve had a difficult time being happy. And two, he really was asking these questions out of loving concern for my welfare.

And in that moment, I made another note to myself: to remember to talk and live in a way that those around me can see that singleness is a great gig (at least more days than not). I challenged myself at that point to give voice and action to the wonderful blessings and freedoms of singledom: to see the world, to love on lots of people, to get to know our strengths and weaknesses, to serve God with all our time and energy, to respond to spontaneous calls for help (or fun) and to truly learn the skill of being content in any and every situation. (Phil. 4:12)

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If we're living the kind of abundant life Christ said He came to this planet for us to have (John 10:10), then the next time someone asks, "What's a nice girl/guy like you doing still single?" we'll be able to give the best response ever: "Having the time of my life!"

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- 9.5 Go back to activity 9.4 and look at your "snappy comebacks." Do they show who you really are? Reflect on how you want to handle those questions in the future. Practice your responses aloud. Sometimes to you have to "fake it til you make it" into a natural response.

Parents—
gotta have 'em

Time to peel back another layer. Inside that extended family is the core group, with parents and their children, including you. Parents set the tone for the life of the family. They can make it God-centered, or they can make it self-centered. Some are supportive and some are not. Thank God we have Him as the example and the foundation for parents, so even if our earthly parents aren't perfect, our Father is. And He can use our less-than-perfect parents to help us achieve what He has in mind for us.

How can you understand your parents and help them understand you? At the website for the National Network of Parents of Missionaries (www.pomnet.org) Diane Stortz and Cheryl Savageau list some tips (shown in italics) that might be useful⁴:

1. *Show your parents that you are willing to listen to them and that you care about how they feel and your relationship with them.* If you're not genuine, they'll know it, so know thyself before jumping in here.
2. *Include your parents in your decision-making. Try not to surprise them with the news.* This is mostly about making the decision to go overseas, but including them in any major decision shows respect.
3. *Give your parents time to adjust.* Depending on how they process information, it might be wise to prepare them with a letter or e-mail before you discuss important stuff with them.
4. *Your parents' lives are not going to be what they have expected. Your parents have some grieving to do, no matter how supportive they are of what you are doing.* Your decisions, particularly as a single, affect how they see you and your future. Parents often expect a predictable (safe) life for their children. You probably don't fit the scenario they have envisioned, and they have to work through it. Even beyond your decision to be a missionary, your timing for visits and other interactions with family may not live up to their expectations. God can give them new and

different expectations, but it takes time. Be sure to pray for them and try to walk in their shoes.

5. *Give your parents lots of information*—about the place where you serve, the medical care, the safety issues and evacuation procedures, what you and they can expect from the IMB.

6. *Do not try to argue your parents into supporting your plans. Instead, let them know that you are sorry that they have fears and sadness because of your plans. Learn to talk to your parents adult to adult.*

You may feel disappointed by your parents' lack of support or you may feel that their reactions or objections are unspiritual. You may need to grieve this disappointment and accept it in order to have a positive relationship with your parents and still be able to go on with your life and plans.

7. *Some parents are very supportive of their adult child's mission plans but do not know how to deal with their own grief. Encourage your parents to have good connections with others, especially other parents of missionaries. The IMB has a Missionary Parents Fellowship. See the resources at the end of this book for contact and conference information.*

8. *As much as possible, involve your parents in your training and ministry. Help them experience where you live, work, and spend your stateside assignment time. Help them find prayer support.*

9. *Help your parents learn to use technology to be able to stay in touch with you, including e-mail, digital photos, and international calling. If they are very new to technology, help them find a techie they can call on for help when you're not there.*

10. *Say goodbye well. Spend time together and work through any unresolved conflicts or issues that could cloud your relationship. Pray together.*

You're right—many of these tips are for people who are just going to the field or are in the appointment process. But don't they still apply? We often never *really* grow up in our parents' eyes, and we're not released from the commandment to honor our parents just because we reach a certain age. We are their children for life.

-
- 9.6 **What tips can you add to the list? How would you change the list? What is here that you have not considered before that might make a difference in your relationship?**

He ain't heavy...

"The good news about brothers and sisters is this: They're the people with whom you usually share the most memories of childhood. But the bad news is this: They're the people with whom you usually share the most memories of childhood."⁵ Those memories can be really good or really bad, but it's probably fair to say that they're both. Even the bad times can have traces of light, and the good times may have little bits of stuff that can make you livid.

Dennis Rainey says, "Adult sibling relationships in families are like the weather—stormy at times, defying predictability, and disruptive....Realize that everyone comes from a less than perfect family."⁶ Remember Cain and Abel? Sibling rivalry from the beginning of time! We've already talked about Joseph's issues with his brothers (or their issues with him). And have you looked at King David's family? I'm thankful Absalom wasn't in my family!

You have complicated these relationships by answering God's call to the mission field. That's not good or bad—just a fact that comes into play and must be considered as you attempt to deal with difficulties that will inevitably arise.

As a single, there's every possibility that your married siblings will expect you to shoulder the responsibility for aging parents since "you don't have anyone else to consider." That's only one of the conflicts that can arise. How do you handle them?

-
- 9.6 Write down 1-2 issues you have dealt with in your family and the conflict that resulted. How did you work through it? Was it resolved?

Compare stories with a married colleague. How much difference is there?

Carol Smith offers some help for working through the difficulties⁷:

There's no quick fix. These conflicts exist in knee-jerk reactions, born of experiences early in life. We know this, though—God was there. He remembers what created the broken places that still exist for us with family. He can help us now find new ways to be with the people we shared bedrooms and bathrooms with years ago.

If you're serious about diffusing the difficulties between you and your siblings, prepare yourself for action with the following steps.

- 1. Think about the relationship. Envision specifically how you'd like it to be. What do you want? Mere civility? More authentic conversations?*
- 2. Evaluate how realistic your hopes are. Once you have an idea of what you'd really like to happen, give some prayerful thought to whether your hopes are realistic in terms of what your family has to offer.*
- 3. Whatever your relationship dance, change just one step. Move your goodbye up a level in sincerity. Ask about something important to your brother or sister that you don't usually ask about. Soften your reaction when your buttons get pushed.*
- 4. If you need to do something directly, decide how you want to communicate: in writing, by telephone or in person. Does your sibling hate confrontation? Do you? Maybe a face-to-face encounter isn't the way to begin. Respect the way both of you deal with life.*
- 5. Spend time together. If there's been tension, even out-and-out hostility, spend some time cultivating simple yet authentic conversations. There's not a one-shot remedy, just little steps with meaningful moments along the way.*
- 6. Focus on a common goal. If no resolution is in sight, try a truce. Agree to deal with a current family situation despite your differences. Maybe it's Mom's health or another family member's difficult transition. Focusing on something else enables people in conflict to humanize each other a little more.*
- 7. Set boundaries for yourself. Romans 12:18 says, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." You can only do so much. As an adult you get to decide how much is enough for you. Do what is your responsibility to do.*

She adds a caution: don't revert to childlike behavior. Because we've been children together, we often get caught in replaying the roles we had when we were younger. These conflicts only serve to distract us from who God has called us to be. "Let God use your difficult family relationships to do His work in you."

- 9.7 Look back at your examples in 9.6. Did you follow some or all of Carol Smith's steps for mending the relationship? Think through the situation in light of her list of suggestions. How would it have ended up differently? Which steps do you have the most difficulty with? What can you do about that? Will these ideas work outside of family relationships?



Families—everybody's got one. And none of them is perfect. They've helped shape us into who we are today. In the next lesson we'll consider how that shape looks in cross-cultural ministry.

END NOTES

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- 6 Dennis Rainey. "Dealing with Adult Siblings." http://www.familylife.com/articles/article_detail.asp?id=805 (accessed 4/28/06).
- 7 Carol Smith.

Lesson 10

Why Do We Serve?

This learning task will help you to examine your motivations as a single for ministry in your cross-cultural context.

Ministering as a single adult in an international setting can be somewhat daunting at times. It can sometimes seem like the single missionary is facing the powers of hell alone because of their long separation from loved ones and supporters. This sense of isolation might lead to an intense focus on the task at hand, getting them so wrapped up in their identity as a “doer” for Christ that they lose sight of the fact that they are first called to simply “be” in Him. Christ defines us—not our ministry. It is essential that we remember that we should be motivated *by* Christ *to* minister. The reverse can become the reality—using our ministry as a way to get His attention and approval. The ministry and our success and dedication to it becomes our focus. Properly deriving our identity from His throne and drawing our motivation from Him is a discipline all missionaries need to practice. Single missionaries do face unique challenges above and beyond what may be readily observed.

.....

10.1 Let’s jump in here and see where you stand. From what role do you derive the most affirmation? For example, are you most encouraged when you hear yourself described as a loving son, a great soccer player, a trailblazing journeyman, a terrific cook, or what?

As humans, we seek out an individual identity from the moment we take our first steps away from our parents. It is amazing how a baby, completely helpless and dependent on his parents, will transform in less than twenty-four months into a stridently independent toddler. If a two-year-old is determined to do something, woe to him who would dare to interfere! Taking great pride in what he accomplishes alone, he will speak out with a firm, “I do it!” if someone steps in to facilitate. It is equally amazing to consider how we, as children of God, seek out our identities in activity rather than in the certainty that we are completely helpless and hopeless except that we are His.

“Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus...” This simple introduction to the Romans and the Philippians gives us insight into his understanding of his own identity. It is completely dependent upon who he is in Christ. His works are a result of his identity—not the reverse. John tells us in Revelation 2:17

Who am I?

that Jesus “will also give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name is inscribed that no one knows except the one who receives it.” Can we pause for a moment and consider the incredible significance of this fact? Just as a two-year-old has a narrow view of what life is about, who he is and how he is so completely dependent upon his parents for life, so we have but a tiny understanding—a knot-hole view—of what our lives are truly about, who we are in Christ, and how He completely sustains us. We do not even know our true names yet! Just as two-year-olds can become totally fixated on a task or identity (one child I knew was certain she was a cat), we can become fixated on a task (teaching, preaching, managing) or identity (missionary, musician, mountain climber) that the task and/or identity begin to define us. ***But we don’t even know our own names!*** Our identity comes only from Him who holds our name—not from anything we do ourselves.

Oswald Chambers wrote, “The central thing about the Kingdom of Jesus Christ is a personal relationship to Himself, not a public usefulness to men.”¹ Certainly this man, if it can be said of any, was and is extremely useful to men and women today. We cannot begin to calculate the lives he has touched through his writings. Chambers had his identity nailed down—it was nailed down on the cross of Christ. Only through that event did he find significance and purpose in his life. As a result, the power of the cross was unleashed in his life in an amazing way. This power continues to work through his writings.

We live in this time and in this place. We live in a work-driven culture—note I did not say *works*-driven. The job culture we live in is driven by the amount and success of the work we do. Weekly or monthly reports elicit positive or negative feedback based on what has been accomplished. How would it be received if, on your weekly report, you informed your supervisor that you had not led a Bible study or had the privilege of leading a lost person to Christ, but that you had had a personally meaningful time with the Father that week that helped you grow closer to the image of Christ? Would you write that? Would you be joy-filled to share such news, or would you be somewhat shamed by your apparent lack of “output”?

How do we react to others’ opinions of us? How do we evaluate ourselves—in light of the evaluations of men or in the light of God’s estimation of us? Paul reflects on this situation: “It is of little importance that I should be evaluated by you or by a human court. In fact, I don’t even evaluate myself.” (1 Corinthians 4:3)

The point here is not to say that we should all just hole ourselves away to spend time with the Lord and experience personal growth. Oswald Chambers didn’t do that and Paul didn’t do that. However, they both had the right aim: “Instead, just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please men, but rather God, who examines our hearts.” (1 Thessalonians 2:4)

.....

10.2 How do you define yourself? Can you identify with Paul? How difficult is it to separate you from your work?

There is nothing wrong with putting in long hours and working hard. But if you must be active just to feel good about who you are, your identity may be based on your performance instead of your infinite worth to God apart from anything you accomplish.²

.....

10.3 Consider the following verses, noting what each says about who we are and any thoughts you feel are pertinent.

Romans 8:16

1 Corinthians 1:9

Psalms 100:3

Romans 12:3

1 John 3:2

1 Peter 1:4

Hebrews 13:14

Hebrews 3:14

Lesson 10: Why Do We Serve?

Why is this talk about identity so crucial for the single missionary? Because without a spouse or children, our ministry often becomes our sole source of affirmation. The married missionary may derive satisfaction and a sense of achievement from helping his or her spouse get through a trying time or by sharing household chores. We can do the dishes and cook but it is just a means of taking care of ourselves—not a source of fulfillment because we have helped another person. The missionary with children can find blessing in caring for those children. In other words, many other roles help diversify their identity—it's possible, but less necessary, for their work roles to have such a deep and encompassing impact on how they perceive themselves and their usefulness to God. As single missionaries, however, we may find it difficult to see who we are apart from our jobs.

Missionaries should go with and maintain realistic identities and expectations. They need to pray for wisdom and patience. They need to have a long view of who they are in God's plan and of the time and effort it will take for them to develop fruitful work. This will take years, not months or weeks. Time is the price we pay. People who are goal and time oriented will suffer the most, if their self-image is measured by their achievements.³

From the research and interviews I conducted for this course, it seems clear that married missionaries expect more work from single missionaries—and that single missionaries feel obligated to work more—because they are single and because of the prevailing opinion that they *ought* to work more because they don't have spouses or families to take care of. But the following selections from Oswald Chambers' *My Utmost for His Highest* (August 5 and August 30) shed light on the fallacy of this thinking:

God intends for us to live a well-rounded life in Christ Jesus, but there are times when that life is attacked from the outside. Then we tend to fall back into self-examination, a habit that we thought was gone. Self-awareness is the first thing that will upset the completeness of our life in God, and self-awareness continually produces a sense of struggling and turmoil in our lives. Self-awareness is not sin, and it can be produced by nervous emotions or by suddenly being dropped into a totally new set of circumstances. Yet it is never God's will that we should be anything less than absolutely complete in Him. Anything that disturbs our rest in Him must be rectified at once, and it is not rectified by being ignored but only by coming to Jesus Christ. If we will come to Him, asking Him to produce Christ-awareness in us, He will always do it, until we fully learn to abide in Him.

Never allow anything that divides or destroys the oneness of your life with Christ to remain in your life without facing it. Beware of allowing the influence of your friends or your circumstances to divide your life. This only serves to sap your strength and slow your spiritual growth. Beware of anything that can split your oneness with Him, causing you to see yourself as separate from Him. Nothing is as important as staying right spiritually.

And the only solution is a very simple one—"Come to Me..." The intellectual, moral, and spiritual depth of our reality as a person is tested and measured by these words. Yet in every detail of our lives where we are found not to be real, we would rather dispute the findings than come to Jesus.

"Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven"—Luke 10:20

Jesus Christ is saying here, "Don't rejoice in your successful service for Me, but rejoice because of your right relationship with Me." The trap you may fall into in Christian work is to rejoice in successful service—rejoicing in the fact that God has used you. Yet you will never be able to measure fully what God will do through you if you do not have a right-standing relationship with Jesus Christ. If you keep your relationship right with Him, then regardless of your circumstances or whoever you encounter each day, He will continue to pour "rivers of living water" through you (John 7:38). And it is actually by His mercy that He does not let you know it. Once you have the right relationship with God through salvation and sanctification, remember that whatever your circumstances may be, you have been placed in them by God. And God uses the reaction of your life to your circumstances to fulfill His purpose, as long as you continue to "walk in the light as He is in the light" (1 John 1:7).

Our tendency today is to put the emphasis on service. Beware of the people who make their request for help on the basis of someone's usefulness. If you make usefulness the test, then Jesus Christ was the greatest failure who ever lived. For the saint, direction and guidance come from God Himself, not some measure of that saint's usefulness. It is the work that God does through us that counts, not what we do for Him. All that our Lord gives His attention to in a person's life is that person's relationship with God—something of great value to His Father. Jesus is "bringing many sons to glory..." (Hebrews 2:10).

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- 10.4 Look back at the places you underlined in the quotation from Oswald Chambers. (If you didn't underline anything, read it again and underline what stands out to you.) Why are those places underlined? How do they speak to you?**

Lesson 10: Why Do We Serve?

We as the body of Christ need to reset our priorities in some cases. On your next “report”—whether to a supervisor or an internal self-assessment—which area of your life will be most significant in defining your success or failure? We cannot share the eternal hope of God if we do not continually focus on preparing ourselves for eternity as well. “God is most concerned that we love Him and that we follow Him in obedience. He is fully capable of reaching down at any time in our lives and moving us wherever we need to be to accomplish His will...But this divine direction is always His to worry about—never ours.”⁴ We are who we are in Him—we are not who we are by what we do for Him, but rather what He did for us defines us now and forever.

Not because of who I am.

But because of what You’ve done.

Not because of what I’ve done.

But because of who You are.

—Mark Hall⁵

*Motivated
by Christ,
Motivated
to Minister*

Recently I had the privilege of leading a discussion with missionary women, both married and single. One woman who had been on the field for many years with her family made the statement that what she and her husband were doing was much more important to the Kingdom than what her sister (who was raising a Christian family in the States) was about. I was shocked at the arrogance of her statement and I was strongly impressed that I had to address it since there were many new missionaries in the room. This woman’s point in saying what she said was to demonstrate that her family in the States would never be able to understand or appreciate what she “had to endure.” My mind flipped to the opposite, wondering if she had any idea, after spending so many years on the field, of what it was like to live, work, and raise a family in America. Probably not. (Career missionary)

We have to appreciate the fact that it is God who calls all of us to service. Service is not limited to mission work on a foreign field. John the Baptist said, “God in heaven appoints each person’s work,” (John 3:27) as stated in the New Living Translation. Our lives, our work, our opportunities are appointed by God. Each believer is as useful and precious to the Father as every other. We cannot service any needs of God—He has no needs. What we do for Him must be motivated not by our sense of duty to ministry or the thought that one use of life is superior to another, but it must be motivated by what He did for us. In this way we will recognize that whatever any believer does in love, in an effort to glorify the Father, is as valuable as what any other believer does in the same spirit. Otherwise we are guilty of pride—we think we are actually doing something *for* God. We do not do things for God; we do things because God did something *for us*.

Whether married or single, we can fall into the trap demonstrated by the woman's comments related above. If we define ourselves by our ministry, we will value and pride ourselves by our ministry. Paul, certainly the most effective missionary of all time, wrote most succinctly:

I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.
1 Corinthians 3:6-7

For who makes you so superior? What do you have that you didn't receive? If, in fact, you did receive it, why do you boast as if you hadn't received it [from God]?
1 Corinthians 4:7

.....
10.5 Consider these two verses and the references that are listed below. How do these relate to your life?

1 Corinthians 12:7-11

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

Romans 9:16

2 Timothy 2:15

In the words of Rick Warren, "It's not about you! ...It is God who directs the lives of his creatures; everyone's life is in his power. (Job 12:10, TEV)"⁶ That should take a lot of pressure *off*! The exciting news is that we were not called to be missionaries because we are great spiritual giants or are endowed with extraordinary gifts—any more than a man or woman working and raising a family in small-town America was called to that life for being such. We live and minister and work in His power. If we miss this point, we lose, as is expressed in the following comment:

Some new missionaries arrive with a record of significant accomplishments at home, and they're not prepared to wait years to see results. So, they start to ask themselves if perhaps they have misunderstood God's leading. Satan whispers, "Why would God want you to be where you aren't leading people to Christ? Think how many people would have believed by this time, if you had stayed home." Over and over this thought comes back until the victim concludes he or she is in the wrong place. The pain of a faulty self-image exacts a heavy toll on the missionaries.⁷

Lesson 10: Why Do We Serve?

Again, if you are motivated by your ministry as a means to serve Christ, you will not appreciate His purposes for you if you do not “succeed” in leading many to Christ. You may be fulfilling God’s purpose and plan by shining in a very dark place. If you conclude that your ministry is useless because *you* don’t see the fruit, you may be *ministry*-focused instead of *Christ*-focused. “You may be serving in obscurity in some small place, feeling unknown and unappreciated. Listen: God put you where you are for a purpose.”⁸ Imagine if William Carey had been driven by his ministry’s success instead of an ardent passion for the Lord:

*There were years of discouragement (no Indian convert for seven years), debt, disease, deterioration of his wife’s mind, death but by the grace of God—and by the power of the Word—Carey continued and conquered for Christ!*⁹

If, on the other hand, you feel the creeping tentacles of pride slipping over your spirit as you receive commendations for your hard work or as you share how your work has been instrumental in bringing many to Christ, be careful. You may be finding more satisfaction in your ministry than in your Lord.

*Real servants don’t serve for the approval and applause of others. They live for an audience of One. You won’t find many real servants in the limelight; in fact, they avoid it when possible. They are content with quietly serving in the shadows.*¹⁰

As a single missionary, you may not get the daily affirmation that often comes with being surrounded by a loving nuclear family. You may not experience the frequent hugs, warm words, knowing glances, heartfelt thanks in which one serving with a family or spouse can delight. Some may want to argue that friends and colleagues can provide this type of encouragement. That’s up to you to decide.

.....
10.6 Where do you find affirmation? Not the party line, Sunday School answer. Be honest. Search your heart, and discuss it with the Lord.

I've struggled with how to close this lesson. I guess the best thing to remember is that we each hear God's voice in the way He wants to speak to us. It's up to us to listen. I hope we all serve for the same reason—to glorify Him!

The next lesson is the final one before the Capstone Project and it deals with commitment for the long term, however long that is.



END NOTES

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- 3 Janice Dixon. "Unrealistic Expectations the Downfall of Many Missionaries," *EMQ*, Vol. 26, No. 4, 390.
- 4 Lori Smith. *The Single Truth* (Shippensburg, Pa.: Destiny Image Publishers, Inc., 2002), 38.
- 5 From "Who Am I?" recorded by Casting Crowns on Beach Street Records. Words and music by Mark Hall.
- 6 Rick Warren. *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002), 17.
- 7 Dixon, 393.
- 8 Warren, 263.
- 9 Fred Barlow. *Profiles in Evangelism* (Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1976), <http://www.wholesomewords.org> (accessed 7/6/05).
- 10 Warren, 262.

Lesson 11

Against All Odds

This learning task will encourage your perseverance in and commitment to your cross-cultural ministry as a single.

Challenges

Throughout this course we've talked about the challenges of being single, of accepting who you are and how, then, we shall live. It's not easy—not by a long shot. Here are some responses from single missionaries who were asked to relate obstacles they faced in their ministry as a direct result of being single.

One of my greatest challenges is that in the culture I live in I am an orphan without a father or husband. Bridging the gap in the minds of my people is the hardest thing to do as well as making sure that "label" doesn't affect my self-esteem. Unbeknownst to me, it had impacted my self-esteem and now I am working to address that issue. (Career)

The biggest difficulty I have faced actually comes from my colleagues. Many have a limited view as to how God can use women in His work. I often feel that [the leaders have] limited views in this area, too. I'm not sure if it is just their perception of what is acceptable for a woman in my culture to do or if they really believe that women are just inherently limited. I don't think there is much affirmation for singles on the field—particularly for the career singles. (Career)

My greatest challenge as a single woman is how to be influential in a man's world. This is not only because I am a woman, but also because I am single. In this culture you are not considered truly mature until you are married. Being single puts limits on influence. (Career)

Being in a male dominated culture, a single woman is not heard. Trying to fit into the culture and get the job done is the hardest thing. God's provided me with a male teammate—he helps get things done. (ISC)

One challenge to the ministry as a single male is that I can only "safely" minister to half the population—actually only half of the unmarried population. It wouldn't be seen as proper for me to be teaching a married man. It is frustrating to know that I can't share the Truth with a woman even if she is interested. I would be putting her in danger and my ministry in jeopardy if I did. (ISC)

It's difficult. It's not easy—you may have been accepted by the whole family and suddenly a son in the family asked me to marry him. How was I supposed to handle that? I just said no. How do I keep my relationships with the family without leading the boy on? (Journeyman)

.....

11.1 What ministry challenges do you face as a result of your being single?

How would you respond to the issues raised by the single missionaries quoted on the previous page? Have you dealt with any of these difficulties? How do you find the strength to carry on in spite of the challenges?

Lesson 11: Against All Odds

Andrew Farmer relates a story at FamilyLife.com about his being a transplant from the deep South to Philadelphia¹.

...the more I tried to adapt to northern ways, the more I wondered whether it was God's wisdom or his sense of humor that had been at work in moving me here....It's been 17 years now, and I'm still a hick in the 'hood. Have I adapted? I'd like to think so. Do I feel at home? Not entirely. I've learned that no matter how much I try to blend in, I'll always be a transplant, someone who resides in a culture not ultimately his own. I live in Yankee country, but I'll never be a Yankee. So what does my little cross-cultural odyssey have to do with being a single adult?

As I interact with my single friends, they often describe a similar feeling of dislocation. There is a vague but consistent sense that they are single in a married person's world. Most would not say they feel discriminated against or looked down upon, but simply misunderstood. In the same way that I cannot as a southerner expect my northern community to adjust to my way of doing things, in the cross-cultural interaction between single folk and married, singles usually end up doing most of the adapting.

He goes on to explain that historically singles were only about 3% of the population, but recent forecasts predict that soon singles will make up half the adult population of our society.

Despite what pollsters may tell us about the present-day acceptability of singleness, on a real-life level it is still widely seen as a problem that needs to be solved, escaped from, or avoided. Many, if not most, single people still see marriage as by far the socially superior state of life. For them, singleness is a place, but marriage is the destination...

But there is a single life for the Christian that is full of purpose, vitality, and adventure. God has not overlooked you. He isn't waiting for you to get your act together before he will direct your steps, and he isn't playing guessing games with your marital future. He has a place and a plan for you in your singleness. He has a vital and significant role for you to play in his purpose. God has supplied you with an identity that both transcends singleness and enables you to embrace and benefit richly from this time, for as long as it might last...

"Undivided devotion to the Lord" [1 Corinthians 7:35] is the essence of biblical identity for the single adult. It is rooted in the sovereignty of a God who places people in appropriate situations for the best possible reasons. It is steeped in the love of a God who uses even the most difficult of situations for the greatest possible benefit. It is sustained by the wisdom of a God whose timing is perfect and whose guidance is sure.

... don't despise the task to which you have been called. Live in the gift of your singleness for as long as you have the gift. And whether or not God ever ordains the prospect of marriage for your life, bring faith for the present and hope for the future, because there is much to be done. Who better to set a hand to the task than you?

.....

11.2 We're probably preaching to the choir here, but what do you think of Farmer's analysis? Explain it to someone who has been married forever and can't understand the big deal—doesn't everyone just put life on hold waiting to get married? How can you do meaningful work without being married?

OK, ok, I'm on your side. I just wanted you to get your thoughts together so you'll have an intelligent answer when that subject comes up again.

I was searching for something on "commitment to the task" and I looked in *Voices of the Faithful*². The month of August is about contentment. There are some great illustrations there, from folks with a variety of experiences and callings, but the thing they have in common is commitment to the task. K.K. from Western Europe writes on August 29:

God says, Follow Me. But instead of looking to the Lord, I sometimes look to the situations and qualities of others. I use the excuses, "Lord, they speak the language better ... Lord, they are more outgoing than I am ... Lord, they have more friends than I do ... Lord, they are having an easier term than I am." Taking my eyes off God's purpose for me and placing my eyes on someone else's life shows a lack of contentment.

Another of the devotions, this time on August 31, is from "a worker in the Pacific Rim." This person speaks of "one of those Job moments—when you understand God's awesomeness and your own lack of understanding." They had unexpectedly found a banner imprinted with Jeremiah 12:5:

*If you have raced with runners
and they have worn you out,
how can you compete with horses?
If you stumble in a peaceful land,
what will you do in the thickets of the Jordan?*

The missionary writer took this as an encouragement from the Lord to
“Get up! Go on! Run the race! You can do it!”

.....
11.3 What do you think? Are you worn out? What will it take for you to persevere?

Going back to K.K. (August 29)—consider John 21:22:

*“If I want him to remain until I come,” Jesus answered,
“what is that to you? As for you, follow Me.”*

Peter had asked, “What about him?” Can we commit to keeping our eyes
on Jesus, remembering His question—“what is that to you?”

Wendy Widder has some thoughts on this kind of commitment³:

*Jesus had a mission that superceded His eventual death on the cross. It was
a mission that ultimately led Him to the cross, but it was also a mission that
He could pursue when He was five, fifteen, and twenty-five. The defining
purpose of Jesus’ life was to obey God all the time. We first hear Him voice
His mission at the fresh-faced age of twelve when His distraught parents
finally found their “lost” son expounding on the intricacies of Jewish Law
with the silver-haired religious experts in the Temple (Luke 2:41-50). Jesus
called it being about His Father’s business or doing the will of His Father, and
it was an intention He would repeat often to His followers for the remainder
of His life. He lived every day to do whatever God wanted Him to do, to be
obedient every step of His thirty-three years, all the way to the cross.*

*Our mission as children of God is essentially the same—whether we are
single or married. We are called to live every day to do whatever God wants
us to do, to be obedient every step of our unknown number of years, all
the way to wherever God plans. Through our obedience, we carry God’s
message to places it might not have reached before. God has put within our
individual orbits people that only we can reach and places that only we can
go. Accomplishing our mission demands that we obey Him faithfully, taking
His message to those people and those places.*

I don't think she had missionaries as such in mind when she wrote this, because the larger part of the excerpt is addressed to all singles. But doesn't it just ring with missionary intent? And the issue of commitment is right there in all of it. The idea that Jesus knew His life's mission and did what it took to accomplish it provides such a perfect (imagine that!) example of how we are to approach life.

.....

11.4 You have been called to this life, for this time and season. How committed are you to run the race? What do you need to talk over with the Lord, to just entrust to Him to handle?

*I am a flower quickly fading
Here today and gone tomorrow
A wave tossed in the ocean
A vapor in the wind
Still You hear me when I'm calling
Lord You catch me when I'm falling
And You told me who I am
I am Yours.*

—Mark Hall⁴

I am Yours

Lesson 11: Against All Odds

We're going to end the text with some thoughts from Connally Gilliam⁵. Her title is "So, Why Aren't You Married?" and she starts out talking about the situations when that question arises, and the variety of people who ask it. The real heart of the matter comes as she encounters an older, wiser friend who knows her well.

... Dr. Houston quietly spoke. "You've suffered much being single." I couldn't tell if he was asking me or telling me. "Um, well, um, well ... I ..." I stammered like a person who'd just gotten a wave of indigestion. In fact, that word suffered had hit something in my guts. "I am sorry," he said in the silence.

It was strange, his use of the word suffer. It seemed a bit dramatic. I mean, isn't suffering when you have a horrible disease, lose a family member in a car wreck, or starve in a famine? Isn't that what it is to really suffer? I decided to shake it off. More silence. Then he continued. "Your mother, too; she has suffered in your singleness." Now he was getting in my business...

... "Well, yeah, I think it was really hard on her at first, because it messed up her vision of her daughter's ideal life... But I think it has made me appreciate my parents more and grow closer to them than I otherwise would have."

..."Of course, that's good... The question, of course, is how will you suffer? Will you suffer with bitterness or will you suffer prophetically? ... You see, your generation is experiencing the fallout of a culture profoundly confused about who God is and therefore about what it is to be human and what it is to love. Your relational disappointments and suffering are, sadly, emblematic of the age."

11.5 Let's process this for a minute. Suffering? Put down your thoughts so far.

As she continues to process, Connally recognizes that the word *suffer* does mean something to her life.

... he was legitimizing a part of me that did ache at sleeping alone every night. And the simple acknowledgement—having the ache compassionately seen and known by another—did its own quiet, little miracle. Something in my guts unclenched.

... I wasn't sure what living prophetically meant (images of wild-haired, wide-eyed, angry men came to mind), but I knew at minimum it meant living in the truth... Dr. Houston's words about suffering prophetically had felt like a gut-level punch. But in reality, they were more like the compassion-induced Heimlich maneuver, freeing me to live.

She questions: *How then should I live?* And the answer comes from another friend: ... *today I am called to be single. I cannot say about tomorrow.*

His disciples questioned Him: " Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," Jesus answered. "[This came about] so that God's works might be displayed in him. John 9:2-3

The Message states it this way: You're asking the wrong question. You're looking for someone to blame. There is no such cause-effect here. Look instead for what God can do.

.....
**11.6 Have we been asking the wrong question? What question do you think Jesus would ask?
How would you answer it? How would He?**

Connally returns to the original question: So, why aren't you married? And her answer is one that translates to every situation in which we find ourselves, no matter what: ... *so that the work of God might be displayed in my life.*

My prayer is that we all might live so that the work of God is displayed in our lives, each and every day, no matter where we serve.



END NOTES

- 1 Andrew Farmer. "An Excellent Investment." Taken from *The Rich Single Life* (Sovereign Grace Ministries, 1998). http://www.familylife.com/articles/article_detail.asp?id=463 (accessed 4/28/06).
- 2 Beth Moore & Friends. *Voices of the Faithful* (Brentwood, Tenn.: Integrity Publishers, 2005).
- 3 Wendy Widder. "Singleness...With a Mission." Excerpted from *A Match Made in Heaven: How Singles and the Church Can Live Happily Ever After* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003). <http://www.crosswalk.com/community/singles/1257402.html> (accessed 7/6/05).
- 4 From "Who Am I?" recorded by Casting Crowns on Beach Street Records. Words and music by Mark Hall.
- 5 Connally Gilliam. "So, Why Aren't You Married?" Excerpted from *Revelations of a Single Woman* (Carol Stream, Ill: SaltRiver, 2006). <http://www.christianitytoday.com/singles/newsletter/mind60222.html> (accessed 8/7/06).

The Capstone Project

.....

12.1 Without being blatant about it, we've covered some aspect of being single as it applies in each of the Seven Dimensions of Missionary Learning, the framework that shapes learning for IMB missionaries. The dimensions are listed here with a brief description.

- **Disciple:** You are a disciple of Christ. Your relationship and daily walk with Him distinguishes you from the world. Your prayer life is vibrant and you are growing in Bible knowledge and understanding. You are a spiritual warrior. You practice good stewardship of time, money, resources, and your physical and emotional health.
- **Servant Leader:** You acknowledge Jesus as the model of a servant leader and model your leadership on His. You understand yourself, your gifts, and your limitations. You plan your life and work with purpose. You supervise and are supervised by others.
- **Team Player:** You serve on the IMB team, a field team, and work with Great Commission teams. You reflect a strong Southern Baptist identity. You build and maintain healthy relationships.
- **Cross-Cultural Witness:** You live successfully cross-culturally in a lifestyle that is appropriate in the culture.
- **Church Planting Movement Facilitator:** You are skilled at learning about and relating to a focus people group. You present the gospel in the context of the focus people's worldview. You plant churches. You disciple others.
- **Mobilizer:** You develop prayer networks. You communicate needs of a people group so that others will join in the task of evangelization. You nurture potential cross-cultural workers.
- **Family Member:** You are a member of God's family and a member of an earthly family. Your role in God's family is one of obedience and service to where He leads you. You seek a healthy balance between your ministry and your earthly family.

In the Introduction to this book I asked you to choose where to put the emphasis: Serving.....God.....Alone. Think back to how you felt then, and compare it to how you feel now. Is there a difference? Explain this difference or lack of difference. How does being single impact your life in each dimension? How have you adapted? What do you need to work on? What's your plan? How will you be accountable?

When you complete your Capstone Project, please share it with your supervisor and send it by e-mail to courses@icelonline.com or by mail to

ICEL

16492 MLC Lane

Rockville, VA 23146

Be sure to do the evaluation on the next page or access it at www.icelonline.com. Thanks.

Course Evaluation

You did it! You've finished all the learning tasks for *Serving God Alone*. Even if you don't submit the Capstone Project, please send in the evaluation so we can try to meet your needs in the future. We will also mark your registration *complete*. Send the evaluation to ICEL, 16492 MLC Lane, Rockville, VA 23146, or go to our website: www.iceonline.com and click on the Courses button and look for Evaluations. Thanks!

Your Name: _____

Name of course: *Serving God Alone*

<i>Course Overall</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>			<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	
a. The course contributed to personal and ministry growth.	5	4	3	2	1
b. The content was helpful.	5	4	3	2	1
c. The learning tasks caused helpful reflection and interaction.	5	4	3	2	1
d. I enjoyed this experience.	5	4	3	2	1
e. The materials were clearly presented.	5	4	3	2	1
f. ICEL staff members were helpful.	5	4	3	2	1

<i>Main Course Objectives</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>			<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	
a. I considered the need for developing and continuing spiritual disciplines.	5	4	3	2	1
b. I looked at ways to incorporate spiritual disciplines into my sphere of influence.	5	4	3	2	1
c. I explored some tools for maintaining my physical health as a single.	5	4	3	2	1
d. I explored some tools for maintaining my emotional health as a single.	5	4	3	2	1
e. I considered my contentment in singleness.	5	4	3	2	1
f. I identified boundaries and designed strategies for maintaining balance in my life and work.	5	4	3	2	1
g. I found ways to be proactive in getting my social needs met, including cross cultural relationships.	5	4	3	2	1
h. I determined ways to cultivate and nurture family-type relationships with colleagues.	5	4	3	2	1
i. I looked at ways to accept and deal with my family.	5	4	3	2	1
j. I examined my motivations for ministry in my cross-cultural context.	5	4	3	2	1
k. I was encouraged to persevere in and commit to my cross-cultural ministry.	5	4	3	2	1

Evaluation

<i>Main Course Content</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>			<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	
a. The overall format of the course was easy to follow.	5	4	3	2	1
b. The personal assessment opportunities were valuable.	5	4	3	2	1
c. Biblical applications and uses of Scripture were adequate and appropriate.	5	4	3	2	1

Other comments or observations:

	<i>Reflection, Time & Interaction</i>									
Reflection	Generally, each of my written responses was									
	<i>a few words</i>		<i>a few sentences</i>			<i>a paragraph</i>		<i>more than one paragraph</i>		
Time	Approximately how many weeks elapsed from start to finish?									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10+
	Approximately how many hours did it take to complete the course?									
	5-9	10-14	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40+		
Interaction	With approximately how many people did you interact regarding this course?									
	1		2		3		4		5	more
	Approximately how many total interactions took place?									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10+

Other comments or observations:

Final Observations

What elements were most helpful to you?

What was least useful?

What changes would you recommend?

On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being “not at all” and 5 being “yes, definitely take it,” how would you recommend this course to others?

1 2 3 4 5

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