

It's OK to be single

By Timothee PATON

when you meet someone in Cambodia, (usually for the first time), they often ask: 'Which country are you from? How much do you earn? Do you have a wife and children?' I reply, 'I'm from France, I have enough to live on (I still think it's none of their business to know how much I earn) and I am single'. When they hear I do not have a family, they either tell me: 'I don't believe you' or they laugh thinking it's a joke.

Before coming to Cambodia I had never worked with so many single people.

I know singleness is not easy for everyone. Some of the single folks I have known on the field are struggling a lot with being single and longing for someone to share their lives with.

I will tell you how it has been for me:

Being single thankfully has never been a burden. I do not get up in the morning and say 'I can't believe I'm still single! This is terrible, I'm still living all alone in this house!'. I am 37 years old, single and happy.

Some of my married friends really feel for me. They cannot understand how I can stay single and really be satisfied.

I have one brother. He married quite young. I don't think Marc could have ever stayed single. And the Lord knew that. He and Rachel have 4 wonderful children. My brother is 39 years old, married and happy.

I have joked with my brother at times and told him that if he has 4 children, I have dozens of them...in the slums and the streets of Phnom Penh!

I don't think married couples are happier than singles nor single folks happier than married ones.

If you are who God wants you to be...you will be fulfilled.

If you are single and feel this is alright for you, don't let peer pressure from your family, your friends, your church or your culture try to make you what you are not meant to be. There are many Scriptures encouraging us to be married and many Scriptures encouraging us to pursue singleness.

None is better than the other. Both are good. God blesses both.

There are many advantages in being married. We all know the many blessings there is in sharing one's life with someone else, especially when both are serving God together.

Some of the blessings I've had in being single have been:

- Much freedom in my service for God. There is no way I could have traveled overseas, preaching on all 6 continents, on the road at times for months, if I had a wife and children back home.

Also I don't have to be back every day for lunch or at home at 6 every night.

- A lot of time on my hands. A missionary friend who is happily married with lovely children told me: '*The day I got married, I had 50% less time for ministry*'. He has no regrets being married but he knows that now he can't do all the things he used to do.

In The USA, I have a friend, Dave, now in his late 60s. He has been single his whole life. On one occasion we thought he had found a wife but it did not happen. Dave, who lives in Utah, has ministered to thousands of people caught in the web of Mormonism. He has done so much with his life.

I have a friend in France who was very gifted with the youth in his church. All of his time was spent reaching out to them. Many came from broken homes and heard the Gospel through his ministry. Then he got married. The marriage sadly did not last very long. He was so taken up with his work he gave little time to his wife. I wonder if he should have stayed single. For some people who are so passionate about their calling, their vision, singleness is sometimes the best option.

Being single does bring some challenges too:

- Not having someone to share your heart with at the end of the day. (Thankfully the Lord has provided some very good 'older brothers' over the years, men of integrity who have given me encouragement and wise counsel.)

- Being out with a single woman at a coffee shop for a meeting or driving a single woman back to her home. I need to watch out for me (temptations don't die on the mission field!), watch out that I don't give the wrong message to the girl, and watch out so that neighbors and people who know me in town don't suspect me of not behaving well.

After almost 11 years in Cambodia, working mainly with single girls, it has been interesting and challenging. I am still learning about boundaries as well as walking right before God.

This week I was actually speaking with a Cambodian friend about the different single girls I've met and worked with in Cambodia who are not serving on the field anymore. Girls who had such a clear call to this country, doing a great job among the children and the youth. And then they went back to their home country for furlough or for a holiday. Back home they met a nice guy. He loves God but has no desire to go overseas. They got married (or are still looking for the right man) and settle. The girl had such a passion

for the work on the field and even a vision of what she felt the Lord was calling her to do there in the future.

Back in the late 50s when my mother was a nurse in England, she had a call to be a missionary to France. She had a friend, a single girl too, who had a clear call to serve in India.

My Mum went over to France with WEC where she met my Dad. (They are still serving in France today). Her friend met a nice Christian man who had no plans to go leave England for some foreign land. They got married, had a family, and bought a house. My Mum's friend never went to India. She did serve God throughout her life but never moved into what God was preparing her for. I remember meeting her once in a Christian bookshop in the North of England a few years before she died of cancer.

A few years ago, I remember praying with a single girl at the end of a youth rally I was speaking at in France. She was telling me of how God had given her a heart to serve him among the girls being trafficked in India. At the end of the prayer, with tears in her eyes she said: ' But my boyfriend, also a Christian, has no desire to go to India. 'I thought of my Mum's friend and wondered if this fine Christian girl will ever serve God in India.

If God's called you to serve Him, don't let anyone or anything distract you for moving into God's Will for your life. You have only one life. Don't waste it. In Cambodia I know some great married couples doing a fantastic job for God. But I also know great single men and single women who are very satisfied in who they are and what they do.

And finally, not all singles stay single for life. Many do get married. I am not obsessed with it. But open to sharing my life too and having children of my own. To folks who ask me why I am still not married, I say, " I don't go out searching for a wife, but I keep my eyes open".

Don't be so preoccupied with getting a wife or a husband that you miss out on God's great plan for your life. He's got the best for you.