

CULTURE CHANGE: SINGLEHOOD, MARRIAGE & FAMILY ITEMS

Understanding Culture and Culture Shock

Culture has been defined as the rules by which the game of life is played. Culture shock on the other hand could also be defined as cultural stress. Culture shock/stress is a consistent and severe attack on your self-worth and self-esteem. Hopeful thought....most missionaries adjust remarkably well!

Outline of the Process of Culture Stress:

- Fun- Honeymoon Stage
- Flight- Avoidance
- Fight- Anger (Different and Bad)
Mockery (Different and Foolish)
- Fit- Tolerance (Different but O.K.)
Understanding (Different but Reasonable)
Creativity (Different but Open to Interaction/Transaction)

Unhealthy Coping Mechanisms are attack, blame-assigning, attention-diverting, and flight.

Our view of our value or worth (self-esteem) must be based on some assessment other than our own in order to be valid to us in times of testing. In other words, if my assessment of my worth is only based on what I think of myself, then Satan will have a heyday tearing it to shreds! So I strive to find my worth or have my value affirmed outside of myself. I can find that affirmation in many places: in my role, in my work, in my family, from my friends, etc. But because these affirmations are all conditional, my striving will never cease. (Read Henri Nowen "Out of Solitude" pp.18-29)

I can never feel confident in my worth as long as it is dependent on how I perceive others feel about me or how I feel I am doing. My self-esteem will ride the roller-coaster of my emotions which are subject to every change in my circumstances. Culture stress often brings my emotions to the very depths as my relationships are minimal and my accomplishments non-existent.

I must have an unchanging, positive assessment of my value in order to withstand the storms of life and especially culture stress. There is only one true accurate, unchanging high value assessment of my worth. That is the value God has assigned to me in Jesus Christ.

Singlehood and Missionary Service

Biblically, singleness is seen as a unique gift (1 Cor. 7:7), a major temptation (1 Corin.7:8-9) and a great opportunity (1 Cor. 7:32-35; 1 Tim. 6:6). Some examples in Christian history and missions of people who did things for the Lord while they were single are:

Old Testament: Ezekiel, Joseph, and Ruth

New Testament: Jesus, Paul, Mary (Martha), and Lazarus

History of Missions: Amy Carmichael, Hudson Taylor, Corrie ten Boom, and Mother Theresa

The coping stages for accepting singleness are: embrace, reject, reach out, and development. (See articles on Being a Single Missionary)

Marriage and Missionary Service

It is very common for missionary couples to report that their marriage underwent more challenges once they moved overseas than it had ever faced at home. Is this to say that missionary service should not include couples and families? On the contrary, many of those same couples report that as they faced their challenges, their marriages became stronger and more loving than they believe ever might have been possible before their ministry in another culture.

Ultimately, the effect is dependant upon the couple's response. Reliant encourages couples to take the results from their MPPI/IPPS survey and build their marriages both in the areas of greatest need as well as where tremendous strength already exist. Whether taking advantage of the excellent bible studies found online and on bookstores, or utilizing the services of a solid Christian counselor, this is an investment which will undoubtedly shape your ministry overseas. Our prayer is that God will allow you to serve from a solid foundation in your marriage and family as an example to those He is sending you to reach.

A key component going into your missionary service is reconsidering the expectations that you have for one another as a couple in your new culture. Living circumstances, adaptation, and ministry may affect who takes care of what. Consider using the chart below to talk through the 'who' and 'what' of expectations before you go:

HUSBAND

WIFE

Support Discovery

- Where to live
- Speaking time

Language Learning

- Both?
- Child care
- Study time

Ministry Roles

- Attend team mtgs.
- Ministry involvement

Family Development

- How often
- Who leads
- Measure of Spirituality

Finances

- Decision making
- Checkbook
- Pay Bills
- Taxes, overseas

Hospitality

- Friends over how often?
- Can either invite w/o asking other?

Children

- Discipline
- Changing Diapers
- Babysitting

House Work

- Who does that?
- House help?

Schooling

- National
- Home
- Boarding

Entertainment

- What kind?
- How often?

Correspondence

- Personal
- Prayers letters

Physical

- Exercise?
- Sex life?

Furlough

(Home ministry)

- Where to live?
- Where to go?

Sexual Purity

Sexual purity is increasingly a significant problem for pastors, missionaries, and their families. What makes missionaries more vulnerable? The normal stresses of cross-cultural life and ministry combined with the ease of access to images, books, etc. in other cultures and on the internet. Reliant takes very seriously this potential pitfall and strongly encourages both singles and couples (older children as well) to establish and maintain healthy, transparent, safe, accountable relationships. In addition, personal encouragement may be found in the following wisdom:

ANTHEM: Strategies for Fighting Lust by John Piper www.desiringGOD.org

- **Avoid:** as much as possible and reasonable the sights and situations that arouse unfitting desire. (2 Tim. 2:22; Romans 13:14)
- **No** said to every lustful thought within 5 seconds, and said with authority in Christ (James 4:7)
- **Turn** the mind forcefully toward Christ as a superior satisfaction. Saying no will not suffice, you must move from defense to offense. (Eph. 4:22; 1 Peter 1:14; Prov. 7:22)
- **Hold** the promise and the pleasure of Christ firmly in your mind until it pushes the other images out. Fix your eyes on Jesus. (Heb. 3:11) Take the kingdom violently (Matt. 11:12)
- **Enjoy** a superior satisfaction. Cultivate the capacities for pleasure in Christ. Satisfy yourself in the Lord (Ps. 90:14)
- **Move** into a useful activity away from idleness and other vulnerable behaviors. Lust grows fast in the garden of leisure. (Rom. 12:11; 1 Corin. 15:58; Titus 2:14)

Should you ever find yourself overly tempted in this area, there exists ministry help for persons dealing with online sexual addictions:

www.pureintimacy.org www.porn-free.org
www.victimsofpornography.org

Moving the Family

Moving the family is an important issue to take into consideration when preparing for life overseas. Getting the whole family involved requires making this a family affair, finding the each member's strengths, and not assuming but clarifying their basic assumptions. After finding and meeting the needs of the family, it is very important to prepare by securing family coherence.

The family is a divine institution; it must be running as a community learning to be obedient to our calling. The family needs to be seen as a place for personal development and procreativity. Some regular activities might include family worship, memorizing the scriptures, acquiring and maintaining family traditions, and exploring fun ways of teaching values to your children.

A foundation for relationships is built when self-esteem is developed within the family. After self-awareness is established, the family may go deeper in communication. A family will need also look into managing stress, because it will be inevitable. Three types of stress commonly seen include unpredictable stress (things go wrong for which no one could have prepared), predictable stress (the regular challenges that both individuals and the entire family face) and avoidable stress (things which have gone wrong which can have contingency planning to offset their effect). By taking time to be attentive and develop strategies, the family may reduce many stresses experienced in cross-cultural living, while learning to tackle others that are unavoidable.

Facing cultural differences and engaging the new lifestyle will be imperative for your family to be prepared, such as being a learner, having tolerance for ambiguity, and being patient.

Are you listening to your children? Take time to investigate and evaluate the effects upon your children throughout first six months of transition. Contrary to common belief, it is hard for children to correctly adapt and accept a new lifestyle and culture. The next sections covers this more.

Resource: Sojourners: *Preparing for the Move* by Ruth and Samuel Rowens

Third Culture Kids

Definition of TCK: A Third Culture Kid is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parent's home culture. The TCK builds relationship to all of the cultures, while never having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture factor into their experience, the sense of belonging is only in relationship to others of similar background.

Developing a Healthy Identity:

- 1) Early attachment to mother in the 1st three years of life
- 2) Relationship between mom and dad (this determines the child's sexual identity)
- 3) Healthy family life- security to come back to
- 4) Culture factors/influences
 - a. Self-culture-personality , gifts, talents,
 - b. Family culture- immediate & extended values/disciplines/friends/ethnic, geographic, and religious background

Significance of Culture:

From TCK experience- one of the major developmental tasks that help us form our sense of identity and belonging is to:

- 1) Successfully learn the basic cultural rules of our society while we are children
- 2) Internalize those principles and practices as we move through adolescence
- 3) Use them as the basis for how we live and act as adults

Remember that an adult's identity is already established and a child's identity is still forming. Also, culture balance is important, feeling like you belong wherever you are!

Four Possible Ways of TCKs Relating to Surrounding Culture

1. FOREIGNER

Look Different
Think Different

3. HIDDEN IMMIGRANT

Look Alike
Think Different

2. ADOPTED

Look Different
Think Alike

4. MIRROR

Look Alike
Think Alike