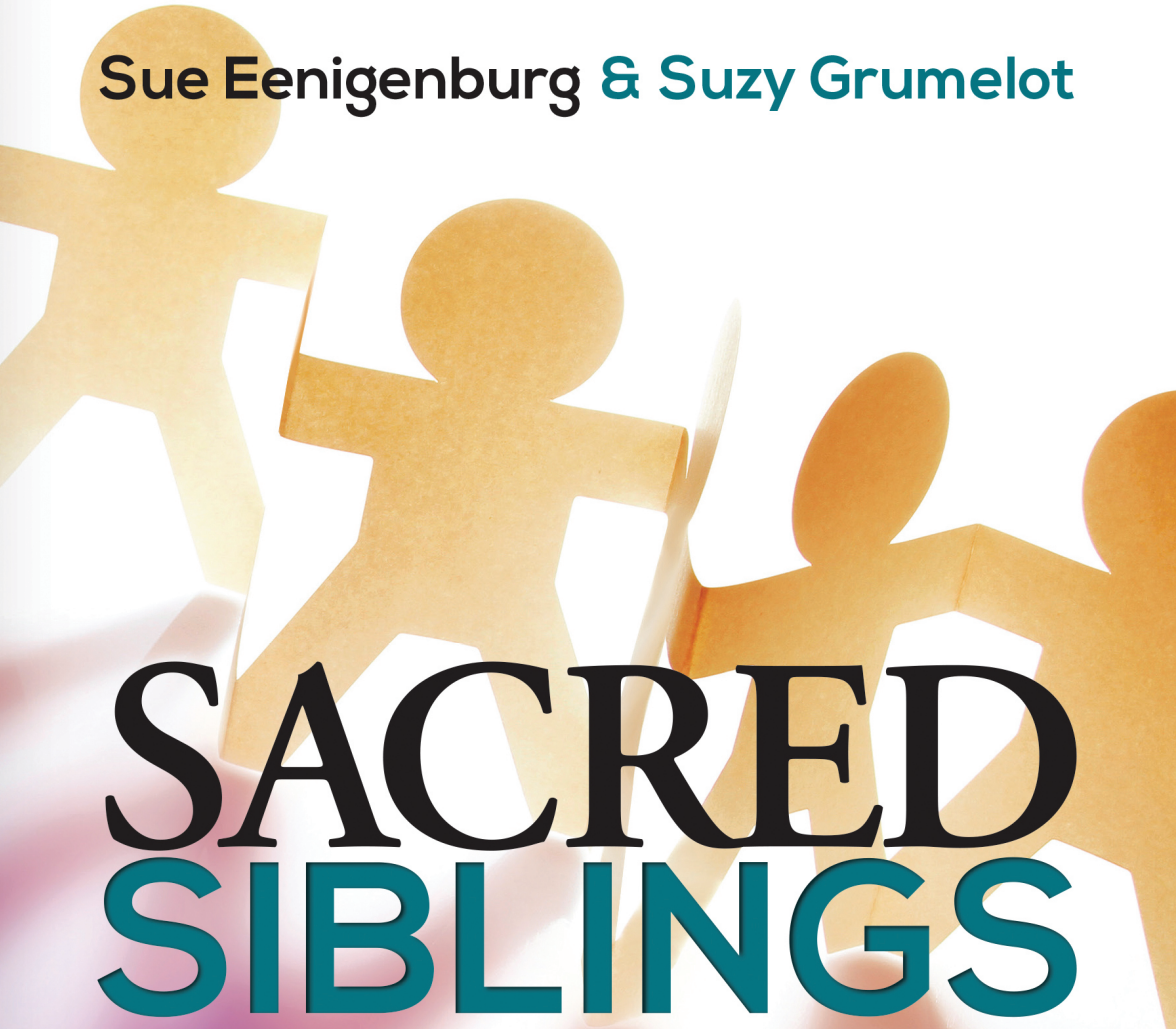
Sue Eenigenburg & Suzy Grumelot



SACRED SIBLINGS

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Valuing One Another for the Great Commission

Sacred Siblings: Valuing One Another for the Great Commission

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CHAPTER 1

Equally Valuing =Valuing Equally

STATEMENT	MEAN
My organization values single and married people equally.	Married 3.58 Single 3.20 *P*-VALUE .000

More married people than single people thought that marital status had no bearing on the value organizations placed on single and married people. Single people are more likely to believe there is a difference in value. Reading through feedback in the survey, we concluded that single people felt less valued than those who are married.

Jeannie Lockerbie Stephenson points out that she had never heard the term "single missionary" until she became one:

> I had never run into the term "single missionary" until I became one. In the business and professional world a person is an executive, a teacher, or a nurse, not a "single" executive, teacher, or nurse. I was introduced to the term in missionary candidate seminar the year I joined ABWE. (2008, 1)

For some reason, we have felt the need, in the mission world, to distinguish between married and single missionaries. I (Sue) am not sure why, but it might prescribe or describe some of the issues we face!

As a married missionary woman, I had my own set of challenges. Years ago, when Don and I were visiting our organization's US office, we met with the staff for their time of prayer. We had four young children at the time and it was a delight to stop back in to see people who prayed for us and did so much for us in the States while we were overseas. Someone asked my husband to share about ministry. After he shared, it felt to me like someone finally realized I was also in the room and asked me to share as well. I don't remember why, but I sensed I was an afterthought. I am sure it was unintended. Possibly I was still suffering from jet lag. Maybe I was feeling insecure, fearful my ministry was less important than Don's and therefore projecting that onto others. Regardless of why, I felt slighted and therefore shared only a brief portion of what

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I had prepared to share with supporters. I did not feel as valued as my husband, nor did I sense that my role and ministry were as valid to them as my husband's.

Afterward, one of the leaders suggested that I should be more prepared, because when we would go to churches I would probably be given opportunities to share about ministry. I was prepared. I had more to say. But I didn't because I didn't sense people really wanted to hear about me.

I didn't know how to put into words how I was feeling or why. It might have been my fault; it could have been theirs. The important point is that I didn't even talk about what I was feeling with those in the US office. So now, thirty-one years later, I still don't know if it was me or them or both! If I had it to do over again, my more mature self would say, "I don't know if it was me or my jet lag making me feel this way, but I felt less valued than my husband. Can we talk about it?" That would have helped me. It would have helped them. They might have gained a clearer understanding of how to communicate value to married missionary women. I might have gained encouragement, through that conversation, that I and my ministry were valued.

I thought single people would have an advantage in situations like this. When a single woman comes to the mission office or goes back for debriefing, she is asked directly about her ministry. No one asks her just to share about her family. No one discounts her if she is "only" homeschooling or mothering small children, while barely maintaining her sanity. She is seen as a professional full-time missionary. I imagined she would be valued and her ministry seen as a clear asset because it isn't mixed with ministry to a family in her home. Her opinion would be respected more because of her role in ministry. I thought she would be seen more as an equal in ministry than a married woman would be. Her opinion would be sought after because her role, on a day-to-day basis, isn't as divided as a married woman's; and her status would be seen as an asset.

According to the survey, I was wrong in my assumption that singles would feel more highly valued. Is it possible that organizations are somehow miscommunicating the value they think they are communicating to singles?

I (Suzy) would say I agree with Sue's assessment that when I'm interviewed at the home office, I'm respected as an adult with a vibrant ministry. I'm treated with fairness and asked to share my story and ministry with the support staff.

However, I sometimes feel more vulnerable in decisions or questions related to human resources. I remember, years ago, feeling called on the carpet about the length of my home assignment in a private interview with the personnel director. I had taken only five months as I needed to get back to the field. But I was questioned as though I'd taken too much time and was being extravagant. He even added that I should have included some educational

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training in the package. I was stunned, since several of my supporters had expressed concern that I had no opportunity for real rest.

I felt blindsided by the criticism I picked up from the director. As we waded through the itinerary of my home assignment and I explained my reasoning, he got out the policy manual. After looking at the numbers, he slowly retracted his criticism and said I could have taken several months more. It felt like he assumed I was cheating the mission or something.

There have been other occasions when it's been difficult to help with aging parents. My mission board was firm, stating that I could only have up to two weeks a year for family leave. I remember thinking, "Great—that would be for a funeral." Yet my married friends regularly took far longer periods visiting parents, children, and grandchildren, because one of them could "cover" for the other. I'm not against my married colleagues having freedom to deal with family issues, but it sometimes feels like singles don't have as much, if any, freedom in this area.

I've sometimes wished there was a man to defend me when someone assumes the worst or questions my integrity. I can't imagine leaders being so quick to assume the worst or asking the same probing questions of my married counterparts.

These are two of our stories. When asked on the survey how their organizational leadership viewed singles, respondents gave a wide variety of responses. Comments that reflected valuing singles included:

> "[I feel] like a valuable contributor to the work of the kingdom of God. I feel no different value, treatment, or expectations on me simply because I am a single lady."

> "I believe that singles are valued in our organization. From my perspective, I have seen ways in which singles have unique struggles which require additional (or maybe just different) support, interaction, and energy. Even so, I have never seen that influence the value the leadership places on singles."

> "As a VP, I mentor two people each year. Both of my mentees this year are single women who have great leadership potential."

> "[Singles are viewed] as incredibly valuable in their ability to give themselves to work in hard places without the burden of family that married couples have to carry."

> "[Singles are viewed] as persons with an equal status and standing. Singles are paid less, however, than couples. There are other financial inequalities that are too complex to explain here."

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"I believe our organization is growing in caring for and empowering singles on the field, especially women. It is a slow process, but there is movement."

"I have always had the impression that the leadership has a very high view of singles in our organization. A number of singles have roles in leadership, and I have always felt that a high priority is placed on making sure singles receive care and that the needs of singles are always discussed in training. Special events and discussions are always available for singles at conferences and retreats."

"I have been approached by leadership and asked how I feel about it. This leader encouraged me by pointing me to some resources, and he made me feel appreciated. I have never felt like I don't have room to share my thoughts about things, and I have never felt discriminated against."

"It seems to me that [singles] are viewed as people who are treated and evaluated with the same criteria as married people. If they have talent, skills, diligence, etc., in particular areas, they will be given appropriate responsibility, authority, and influence."

"I feel that my marriage gives me resources that my single colleagues lack. On the other hand, I believe that their singleness gives them a freedom in ministry and work that I lack. So we have something to offer each other."

There were also some comments that expressed concerns about how singles were viewed by the leadership in their organization:

"If single women are assertive, I think they are sometimes viewed as malcontents or aggressive. [Leaders] often feel more protective of young single women than single men or families. [Singles] are seen as capable, called, and effective."

"They view singles well and aren't afraid to use them in ministry. However, I feel our voices aren't heard as much as others.'"

"I think we are valued for the jobs we can and do do. Because we don't have 'families' on the field, we are tasked with more responsibility. Comments are made [about]how easy we have it, and the 'If you only knew the challenges of marriage, you wouldn't sign up' sayings just about destroy any could-be relationships."

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"I am not aware of a particular 'view' of singles. I do know that, in evangelical circles, matrimony is seen as ideal and singlehood as less than ideal."

"[Leaders] are mostly great. The only issues come when they expect singles to maybe work conferences or other times so that families can be together. Very annoying. Also annoying when married colleagues get away with using 'family' as [an] excuse for laziness!"

"Most often [we're viewed] as valuable people. But I have sometimes seen rules in place that imply a single woman is a temptation for men, while not taking into account that things happen between married people as well. So [there is] a kind of false dichotomy that singles are more tempted or tempting than married people."

"Currently we have one single guy on the team. We will have a girl joining us soon. Our team leader has mentioned possibly finding another male single who could come on, but dissuaded another girl because he states that two single girls on a team can sometimes cause team dysfunction."

"I think they give lip service to valuing equally, but I think married people get more 'benefit of the doubt.' A married pastor/church planter is going to have higher automatic regard from others than a single. A single person in the same role is going to have to prove themself more."

"There are many of us, so I think they value us. In a lot of ways, we are more flexible because we don't have to think about families and have more time to commit to relationships among our host culture. I have noticed, however, at conferences put together by our organization that there are tons of support for families, with tons of workshops and resources for marriages/third-culture kids/homeschooling on the mission field. I think maybe there could be more single support."

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