



Faith Pulpit

The Missionary Wife

Introduction

More and more women are graduating from Faith Baptist Theological Seminary. Some of these women are going on to serve the Lord on foreign fields. Praying believers in American churches should have an accurate picture of the lives that their missionary wives are living. We often pray for the ministry needs of our missionaries in response to their regular prayer letters and e-mail updates. However, rarely do we think to pray for the missionary wives and for the personal and family challenges that they face.

Call

Most mission boards consider the wife to be a co-worker with her husband. Nonetheless, the missionary wife should also have a call to missionary work. Rough experiences will come, and it is a great help to her if she has had her own call to service. It is a wonderful thing when a missionary wife can say to her husband with confidence, in the midst of a trial, "God has brought us here to serve Him together, and He can be glorified in us in spite of the circumstances." I think we need to pray that our missionary wives will have their own definite call to service. The missionary wife will have a ministry to her husband and to her children, but she will also have her own niche in ministry based on her education and talents.

Culture Shock

The new missionary going to a strange field may experience something that those of us living in the United States have probably never experienced. This is called culture shock. The people on the field will be different, the food will be different, and even the currency will be different. Initially, missionary wives may be tempted to lock themselves in their houses and shut out all the differences!

Housing can be a challenge, and shopping is even an adjustment since U.S. currency usually needs to be exchanged for national currency. In many countries, the missionary wife will be confronted by beggars. Should she give them pennies or should she ignore them? How will her response affect the nationals who observe it? We can pray for wisdom for our missionary wives, even for these small decisions.

Language study is another area that can cause frustration and tears for the missionary wife, especially if she is not skilled in language acquisition. Attending church during those first months is challenging when she is asked to put aside her English Bible and read a Bible in the national language. All the sermons and Sunday school lessons she hears will sound strange to her. Lest her spiritual life dry up, she needs prayer partners who will faithfully pray for her language studies.

Loneliness

A missionary wife may be alone with the children for long periods of time while her husband is out preaching and teaching in remote areas. There may not be close friends or family around. Sometimes there are cliques among missionaries on the field, and she may feel left out. Missionaries are not perfect, and they can exhibit the same personality glitches and struggle with the same sins that Christian workers battle here in America. Sometimes it is inadvisable to make close friends in the church her husband is establishing on the field. Loneliness can cause her to seclude herself from the very people to whom she has gone to minister. This is one area that we can go the extra mile to uplift our missionary wives. Besides praying for them, we can send them personal letters to encourage their spirits.

Illnesses

In many foreign fields, diseases are different from what we experience here in America. Illness is a challenge here in the states, but it poses additional challenges on a foreign field with unfamiliar medical care. A mission board executive recently remarked that the single most common cause for a missionary couple to return permanently to the United States is the failing health of the missionary wife.

The health of children in primitive countries can also be a real concern for parents. Many times children must be flown elsewhere for treatment, because local facilities lack the necessary advanced technology and supplies.

Household Help

In third world countries, missionary wives usually need household help. Back here in America, we often assume that because we can get along without such help, our missionaries should too. Then we

offer a financial objection to national help: “Why should missionaries hire help with our church’s money?”

But think for a moment about how much time we spend in this country doing housekeeping, from cooking, to cleaning, doing laundry, ironing, shopping, more cleaning, and providing a taxi service for the family. Such domestic responsibilities often require much more time overseas, and if no one assists, the missionary wife is tied to the house and rendered unable to carry out her ministry.

Imagine trying to serve as a missionary wife in a third world country with no domestic help. My husband and I were without a maid for several weeks while we were in language study. During that time I made no progress in French, since my time was completely taken up by boiling our drinking water, making everything from scratch, and trying to keep our house clean—a house without glass windows, situated on a dusty road.

Securing good household help may take some effort. Some maids prove to be a tremendous help. Some are illiterate and therefore unable to read recipes. The missionary wife must teach her help how to cook and clean. In short, a missionary wife serving in a primitive area may find herself running a household in a way that she has never experienced before. Praying believers here in America should pray that she will find good help so that she can carry out her ministry, and that she will follow biblical insight provided by the example of the Proverbs 31 woman.

Conclusion

Amidst the joys of serving the Lord and seeing lives changed, missionary wives face some very real tests. These challenges are in addition to the challenges of her missionary work and her husband’s. We should pray specifically for strength to face these challenges and for wisdom to handle them well. Proverbs says of the faithful woman, “Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her. Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her” (31:28, 31).

Though we may have limited opportunity to communicate with her in person, we can personally pray for her so that she will not dwell on the sacrifice she has made, that she will have joy over a life well spent, and that she will have the satisfaction of making a contribution to her generation and perhaps to the next. God is faithful, and He will enable the missionary wife who delights in Him to have a joyful, fruitful ministry, in spite of any challenges that she faces. Our responsibility is to pray faithfully and specifically for our missionaries while we serve the Lord here on our own mission field.

June Delnay

[Other Articles](#)

June Delnay (1926–2013) was a devoted Christian, accomplished writer, and loving partner in ministry alongside her husband, Dr. Robert Delnay. June graduated from Wheaton College and was an author and editor who contributed significantly to Christian literature, particularly in crafting compelling stories that pointed readers to God's grace and truth.

June's gentle spirit, literary talent, and commitment to serving the Lord left a lasting impact on those who knew her.

Mrs. Delnay graduated from Moody Bible Institute and Columbia Bible College and holds a Master of Library Science from the University of North Carolina, Greensboro. She also received a Master of Arts in Religion from Faith Baptist Theological Seminary. She and her husband have served as missionaries in Haiti and held various positions at several Bible colleges and seminaries in the states, including Central Baptist Theological Seminary of Plymouth, Minnesota; Denver Baptist Bible College; Piedmont Bible College, Baptist Bible College in Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania; and Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary.

Mrs. Delnay served as an associate professor and head librarian at Faith between 1984-1997. Her faithfulness and hospitality were evident as she supported her husband's ministry in churches and Christian colleges, including Faith Baptist Bible College.