

Tips on
Family
& **Marriage**



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Why & How
Build a Love House?

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Tips On Family & Marriage

Part I

Ideas about Parenting.

Some adults believe that parenting is educating their children to the highest possible level of tertiary education. Hence, they spare no effort to provide the best intellectual training, with or without other areas of education, for their offspring. Many do not hesitate to take on overtime work in order to save enough to pay the bills for their children to obtain paper qualifications.

Others, especially in traditional cultures, consider parenting as ensuring that the children feed and clothe themselves well. It does not matter if they are obese. As long as they look chubby and well dressed, they are symbols of good parenting.

Still others see parenting as effective psychotherapy with a view of helping the child follow their footsteps or at least do what they plan for them. If they choose to disobey, the children may lose out in their inheritance.

What really is good or effective parenting then?

All the above views may be proper in themselves but, if taken to the extreme, children of such parenting methods may grow up with a significantly distorted view of their personality, self-image, self-worth, socializing skills and moral and spiritual development. In our search for biblical principles and models for parents to learn from, we need to ask the Father of all mankind what parenting is all about.

The urging of this discussion is that the purpose of parenting is to help a child become more and more conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, we shall endeavour to answer questions such as:

- *Why do we need to parent our children as best we can?*
- *What is the reason for perpetuating responsible and accountable parenting, generation after generation?*

We need to ask these questions because children become the usual victims of adult wrong choices. They will also be tomorrow's adults in churches and

society. Parents arrange activities for them to improve themselves when "*all they want is a room somewhere*" in order to spend time with their beloved *Papa, Mama, Ko-ko, Ti- Ti, Che-Che and Mei Mei*. They want a place where they may be themselves and where busy parents accept them as they are. They yearn to be able to reach out, at any time of the day or night, and find Papa or Mama there to hold their small hands.

The goal of this discussion on marriage and family is to bring us together to read His word again, to think with Him, and to hear Him for ourselves what God says about marriage and family. We hope that our minds will be renewed, our hearts warmed, and our limbs strengthened, so that we may rise to live as His children and to be used by Him to parent the next generation for Him. When this happens, we will be gradually ushering into completion His growing new family bought with the costly price of the blood of His Son, Jesus. We will learn to live with one another as brothers and sisters in the huge family of God our Father and Jesus Christ our Brother (*Hebrews 4:11,12*)!

We also desire to encourage growth in family relationships and to prevent personal, family and social problems, as best we can. How? We shall achieve this

through recapitulating the Creator's purpose for marriage and families. Without His sense of direction, mankind will continue to search in vain for Utopia. Solutions rooted in mere human wisdom may seem to work for a while, but they will soon be superceded by failures or newer, better methodologies.

Without God's enabling, we can neither prevent problems nor effect permanent growth in people and hence, society. Ultimately, *"the slum has to be taken out of man"*; we cannot merely take the man out of the slum and leave him elsewhere but still wallowing in the same spiritual state as when we found him.

Malaysians, together with all fellow peoples of the world, stand at the doorway of the 21st century. Many adults fear that we may ignore the breakdown of families when issues like advanced information technology transfer and industrialization take centre stage in our nation and the rest of the Asia-Pacific region. Volumes of information reach the young and old everyday. We can no longer protect those in the countryside. Films portray lifestyles that twenty-five years ago were foreign to most people in Malaysia. Christian homes possess no immunity from such an onslaught. Some of our own Sunday

School children ignorantly read, with keen interest, game books that promote principles of occultism and the New Age philosophies ¹. Indeed, one has begun to feel that:

The media is mightier than the bomb.

As children of the Creator and Saviour God, we need to search for His guidelines and answers for our generation. We need to differentiate between God's voice and other voices in the world. For most times, we hear His voice through the study of Scriptures. At times we may hear Him speak through what is good and right in our Asian traditions about family life. Sometimes He may guide us through what is right and good in Western traditions. At all times we need His wisdom to discern between what is from Him and what is not from Him. Then, we need His power to choose only what is from Him. This is no easy task.

To be salt and light, we need to draw our insights from Him who is the Light of the world, not merely from experience and expedience. We need to know why He makes families to be the basic structure of the church and society, and hence find meaning for the existence and continuation of families.

*We need to know whether
the husband-wife relationship,
the parent-child relationship or both should
be basic to a given family.*

Once we are convinced that God wants His people to exist as family units in this world, all concerned must do whatever we can to see that we adhere to His guidelines. Consequently, more of our children will develop as healthily as possible, even if we are still imperfect in our own parenting.

But if, in our hearts, we choose to believe that godly parenting is not essential for the healthy development of children in this world, then mothers and fathers might as well do what they like irregardless of their children's needs. However, we would then have to admit that we are following the human theory of evolution, which propounds that only the fittest will survive. Thankfully, we do have some lessons to learn from the developed nations. Let us choose the good and put aside the bad. Some day, God may yet use people from this part of the world to reach out to other nations, as is already happening in the last decade.

We know that there is a growing need for parents to encourage parents. We want to do our best in this God-given task of parenting. We need to come together - to talk, discuss, laugh, learn, weep and pray together. We have an awesome task for, in our homes, we are nurturing the future generations of Malaysia, which is part of the global village. If this short discussion opens doors for fellowship and sharing in parenting, then it has achieved its purpose.

Could the Lord Jesus Himself be asking
parents,

*"Do you love Me more than these...your
other vocations ... good though they may
appear?"*

If so, then is He saying

*"Feed my lambs ... My little children ... in
your care ... "?*

(adapted from John 21:9-17)

The Reason for Family

In the face of the increasing number of severely broken homes where children seldom or not at all receive tender loving care from those responsible for them, it may be necessary to ask ourselves how we can help strengthen husband-wife and parent-child relationships and hence spare our children from the pain of separations, divorces and negligence. Then, in the security of parental oneness, we will try our best to grant our children the blessing to grow as God desires them to do so, without having to carry too much of the burden of parental failures. However, I have also discovered, through my own struggles as a fellow human being, that:

*If I know why I am doing something,
there is more joy and gusto in doing it than
if I just do it blindly.*

For this reason, let us ask the first question concerning the human family ...

Why Do We Need To Build a Loving Home and Not Give Up?

Since so many young and even older couples are finding it more convenient to live together and then split up any time

they like, why should we persist in teaching our church members to build loving homes and stable relationships? The answer, I believe, may be discovered in re-discovering the Creator's purpose in making families the primary unit structure in His church and in society.

When God first created the heavens and the earth, He parented the male person, Adam, and the female person, Eve. He loved them, nurtured and provided for them all that was necessary for their perfect communion with Him, their Creator Father, with each other, and with all His other creation. Genesis 1:28 records that God then gave the man and the woman the mandate to reproduce, fill the earth and take care of it. He fathered them lovingly so that they might father and mother their children lovingly too.

But since sin (rebellion against God as Creator Father) entered the world, as recorded in Genesis 3, at the stage when there were only two people (a potential father and mother), all subsequent human relationships with God, each other and the rest of creation has been tainted.

Adam and Eve spoilt their own childhood and, consequently, their own future parenthood ¹.

The human parent-child relationship was one of those relationships that was badly damaged.

Parents could no longer fully reflect the image of God the Father to their children even though children still first taste the likeness of God through them. Thus, all of us grow up with a distorted view of God.

I believe that God has not changed His means of calling men and women, old and young, to be redeemed so that they will become His children again. God the Father and the Son function as One in the Trinity Family and He has made us in His image. Parents that believe and obey God are His first channel for calling His created people back to know, fear and worship Him. Many would agree that:

The parental missionary role to children needs to be reinforced.

Parents are God's ordained channels for the transmission of His truth and grace to each succeeding generation

(Deuteronomy 6).

In Malaysia we have some difficulty in accepting this. Perhaps it is due to our coming from non-Christian homes or from first or second generation Christian families.

At times, we look at ourselves and our parents, and then realize how inadequate we are in the task of evangelizing our own family members or in building up the body of Christ in our natural homes. We watch loving Christian homes from a distance and say to ourselves,

"I don't think we as a family can make it like them ... maybe God makes some families better than others. We might as well settle for more realistic half-broken homes or, let the younger generation try out new ways of living together without getting married and just don't bear children."

It is at this very point in our nation's history, however, that I believe God's people need to take a long hard look at Scriptures again. Maybe it is proper to begin at the creation accounts in Genesis in our attempt to understand God's purpose when He places every person in a family to be brought up through parental care.

1. God Lives in Community

*God lives as community in
the Trinity and has both
feminine and masculine qualities*

Therefore, God has a reason for making the family community. To be restored in His image is to learn to live as a community within our families and to express the feminine and masculine aspects of our personalities.

This does not mean, however, that God wants us to use the feminine pronoun to refer to Him in the Bible, as those active in the feminist movement would propose. Far from it; for not only does He have His sovereign purposes for referring to Himself as the Father of His people and Jesus as His Son, He is also over and above the mere use of words.

Jesus prayed in John 17:20-23,

*“My prayer is not for them alone.
I pray also for those who will believe in
Me through their message, that all of them
may be one, Father, just as You are in me
and I am in You. May they also be in
Us so that the world may believe that
You have sent me.*

*I have given them the glory that
You gave Me, that they may be one as
We are one:*

*I in them and You in Me.
May they be brought to complete unity to
let the world know that
You sent Me and have loved them
even as You have loved Me.”*

In Isaiah 66:12-13,
God said about His people,

*“I will extol peace to her river, and the
wealth of nations like a flooding
stream; you will nurse and be carried
on her arm and dandled on her knees.
**As a mother comforts her child, so will
I comfort you;** and you will be
comforted over Jerusalem.”*

Jesus taught His disciples in
Matthew 6:9,

*“This, then, is how you should pray:
‘Our Father in heaven ... ’”*

In the passage quoted from John 17 above, while Jesus Himself implies that the Father and the Son are intimately one in their thinking, feeling, speaking and doing, He taught in John 14, 15 and 16 that the Holy Spirit is the One who enables us to move into this oneness with the other two Persons in the Trinity. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit live as family members in love and harmony.

*Therefore, those made in His image are
designed to live in the community
of a family.*

*The saying that "no man is an island" is
in fact biblically valid.*

Further, the Isaiah and Matthew passages above point show us that this personal God does have feminine and masculine qualities in His personality. Of course, He is more than just those qualities. We do not fully know God although some aspects of His nature and character has been revealed to us through the general revelation of created things around us (*Romans 1:18-20*). He also reveals Himself to us through the written word and specifically through His Son, the living Word, who has come to us in human form. Our vision and understanding of Him are still blur because we are still so broken though we are in the process of being made whole.

God has shown Himself to us through His Son's life on earth. He is perfect in character and personality. He also wants us, ultimately, to become like Him. In His wisdom, He has given man and woman the privilege of being created in His likeness. Together, they also have the privilege of showing that likeness to their offspring so that the younger generations will know their God. The children will then want to return to this good, everlasting and almighty God who has a marvelous plan for all repentant sinful human beings in the new heaven and the new earth.

God intended His grace to be passed on from generation to generation through parents to children. The fact that we sin does not negate this intention. Our sin has caused us to pass on to our children 'DYSgrace' instead.

*Dr.D.A.Seamands, in his book
Healing Grace, used this term
'DYSgrace' to mean distorted grace.*

When we give our children a wrong view of God - that He is like a monarch instead of like a good father or mother, that Jesus was so "meek and mild" as a man that He obeyed God as a weakling, not as a loving Son who willingly submitted to Him - we are passing distorted grace to them. Godly parenting, therefore, seeks, by His enabling, to pass on more of the reality of the true God.

2.

The Value of a Man and a Woman

Man (a potential husband and father) and woman (a potential wife and mother) are equal in status in the eyes of the Creator.

In the beginning, when God created the first man and woman, He initiated the parenting process of human beings made in His likeness (*Genesis 1:26-31*). The mandate was then given to the first man and woman to be parents through the call to be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and care for it (*Genesis 1:28*).

Both received the commission; both were to take care of the fish, birds, livestock, the earth and, later, their children.

There was no indication that one bears more responsibility or is favoured over the other. There is every reason to safely conclude that God means it that way, according to what the rest of the Bible reveal to us about His character of impartiality and justice: that each person, regardless of gender, is of equal value to Him, is equally loved and nurtured to grow into His likeness. Since there is no mention of gender roles up to *Genesis 2*, it seems to me that, before the fall, the man and the woman lived and worked happily and harmoniously in the tasks that God had assigned to them together.

It was only after the fall in *Genesis 3* that the different roles, in relation to the painful consequences of sin, were spelt out for fallen man and woman. It appears to me that, since then, men and women have been struggling to be free from the unnatural confines of such roles, normal though the roles may be. We no longer enjoy being equal though different. Man wishes to dominate woman; and woman wishes to prove her equality by performing the same roles as man.

However, God has begun to restore that joy in us through His redemption in Jesus Christ. Some men and women do enjoy their equality in Christ within their differing roles in their families and society.

Further, it seems to me also that the oneness described in Genesis 2:24-25 between a husband and a wife does not mean that each loses his or her personality. Indeed,

"all they lose is their individuality but only in exchange for his or her identity as a human being"
(David Hugget).

And, to be human is to be in community. It will then be an experience of deepening joy to be able to have communion with another human at the deepest level, as God meant a married couple to do so.

However, we must recall that this order of events (without the mention of singlehood) was given before the fall.

God later showed us how He redeemed broken human relationships through the coming of His Son as a single man and through the "second" birth of repentant sinners.

The Lord Jesus stated clearly that those who do God's will are His brothers and sisters and mother

(Mark 3:31-35).

The love of God transcends gender. All men and women can communicate intimately as brothers and sisters in Christ and share in His image as His community, apart from the physical oneness, reserved for married couples only.

3.

Man and Woman Basically Differ in Giftedness and Roles

God makes a male human being and a female human being basically different although they may share certain qualities. They have different basic gifts and roles.

If equality of status and mutual submission are so important for human beings, why did God create them male and female? Is the difference between a man and a woman basically in their bodies only or in their gifts of personalities and talents as well? After all, if they are all alike as basic human beings, why do children seem to need both father and mother to bring them up healthily in normal circumstances?

I believe that at least one major purpose for the differentiation of gender is for man and woman to fulfill a basically different role in this world. In this life (since at the resurrection of the dead, when His children will have new bodies, it would be unlikely to have male or female persons as we know them now (*Mark 12:25*), man and woman are to be in charge of and to take care of God's creation. This includes their offspring.

Though they may have different roles to fulfill within the wider duty of caring for the earth, parenting, especially, needs both types of persons for the task to be effectively carried out according to the Creator's ways, because He has both masculine and feminine characteristics.

Since our heavenly Father is so creatively and wisely humorous, I have a reasonably strong feeling that:

Another reason why God differentiated the gifts of the human race into male and female is so that no one may say that he or she does not need the other to obey God and to live lives fully pleasing to Him. Every person is made a social being to depend on each other within God's overall Fatherhood.

If children need both father and mother to nurture them towards wholeness (or Christ-likeness as Christians understand wholeness), let us consider why many families of today, whether Christian or otherwise, increasingly place the self-fulfillment of the husband or wife high above the day by day and moment by moment care of their children. One clue to a reasonable answer is to look at some of the influences that have reached our society and our homes.

A large proportion of the Christian literature on marriage and family found in our local bookshops, for example, have been written from a Western mind-set that has been influenced by the humanistic philosophies of the enlightenment that has lasted for about 400 years ². We are swallowing much of the current teaching that stems more from influences of secular psychology, popular culture and social norms than the Bible. Much of them are clothed in

Christian terms. Of course, there are many good thoughts in them, but a little wrong thinking is enough to overshadow the good.

Suffice it to mention here that, generally, humanistic thought patterns have influenced many modern young people to see marriage as for more of the fulfillment of the husband and wife and not so much for the nurture of children, if God so gives them. Therefore, when either or both spouses do not feel fulfilled, the pressure is on them to separate or divorce. Since the children's welfare is not as important to the family, the sacrifice of self-fulfillment for their sakes does not appear reasonable or attractive. This does not include cases where there is marital infidelity (*Matthew 19:3-9*).

Conclusion

How does understanding that God ordained parenting and not just a husband-wife relationship help us in our family life? What is it that holds us broken wives, husbands and children together? It is the covenant love of God our Father.

The covenant that God made with His people in the Old Testament times, before His Son came as Jesus the Man, was a unilateral agreement between the Creator and the creature. God initiated this care for them irrespective of their inability or ability to obey Him. This covenant love is "particular, intentional and unconditional" ³. This is still the good news of His grace to us.

The agreement is not a contract which is a bilateral agreement between two equal parties. God has ordained marriages and families. He upholds them with His covenant love. These institutions will not be shaken by changing world theories and ideas or by broken human marriage vows.

Sometimes, Christians absorb the culture of instant, transient and impermanent relationships and rewards around us as if they are God-given. When things do not turn out our way, we either try to please God to get what we want or we blame Him. However, we need to remember that when we fail in our marriages or parenting, when the walls of our idealism come tumbling down, there is hope for us because the good news has reached us in the coming of Jesus, the Son of God (John 3:16-21).

On this side of the cross, we have the privilege of understanding that the redemption of a person unto Christ-likeness is a process that started in the mind of God even before He created us and it will continue till we see Him face to face (*Jeremiah 1:4,5; Psalm 139:16*). Though this process may be through marriage or singlehood, through childlessness or parenthood, each of us is upheld by God's covenant love.

However, you may wonder ...

Why Bother about Family ... When Mine Did Not Love Me?

There is every reason to do so because GOD not only wants to and can give you a new life through Jesus dying on the cross for your sins and your parents' sins,

He has a purpose for you on earth. He wants you to be His ambassador for true and eternal peace between man and God and then between man and man, from generation to generation till He comes again. This new life can start right now by your telling Him,

“Heavenly Father, please forgive my sins and give me Jesus’ life, I pray in His Name.”

**You may ask:
What is God like as Father,
if He is not like my natural parents?**

Deuteronomy 32:1-18

God is the faithful Father who gently cares for His children like an eagle training its young to be independent.

Deuteronomy 8:5; Hebrews 12:5-13

God is the Father who disciplines His children.

Deuteronomy 1:29-31

God is the One who will carry us like He carried the Israelites in the wilderness. Even when His people could not take care of themselves in their weakness, He will still care for them.

Jeremiah 3:19-23

God is the forgiving Father who waits for our return when we stray from Him through disobedience.

Hosea 11:1-4

God is the Father who proclaims His compassion for His children who continue to be ungrateful to Him.

So, you may ask further ...

“How Do We Build a Love House?”

Parenthood is a lifestyle of beliefs, values, behaviour and sacrifice. It is an ordinary job given to ordinary fathers and mothers, whether they are Christians or not, by the Creator God. He calls them, provides for them and then shows them how to fulfill the roles of fathering and mothering so that the children of every generation will know that their heavenly Father always loves them, no matter what happens. He authenticated this call with His divine commitment, through the covenant of unconditional love, to be our Father from the beginning of creation. No matter how we fumble, He continues with His plan to save and bring home those who would trust in His fatherly goodness. He has not left us to have children and to nurture them on our own.

His original divine calling to "Adam" (in Hebrew, this word in text may mean male person or, generally, human beings) is to "*Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it*" (Genesis 1:28).

Through His example in parenting Adam and Eve by personally and intimately communication with them, God wants man and woman to learn from Him how to provide family love and security for every

child. We dare not and must not treat our children as economic or political partners or subordinates. If we do, then our children may grow up wrongly feeling and believing that God is good to them in order to get something out of them. Wrong beliefs about God include fearing that He may reject them if they were to make some serious mistakes.

Another consequence of being treated like business or economic partners is that the children may grow up trying to please God just so that they may get something out of Him.

However, the truth is that God is not like some such parents. He loves us with a deep and secure covenant love that will not let us go (Romans 8). Though we may fail, He still waits for us to return to Him. He loves us, forgives us and lifts us up repeatedly because of what His Son, Jesus, has done for us on the cross at Calvary. To love like God - how are we going to manage this gigantic task?

According to Ken Medema, a Christian musician and social activist of this decade, the " *hows*" may be aptly described in one of his songs called "*How Do You Build A Love House?*"

"How do you build a love house?

How do you make it strong?

How do you build a love house

So it will last you long?

Well, you cannot build a love house

With wood and bricks and glass;

*It takes talking, and working, and
playing and praying,*

To make a love house last

Talking ... in the good times and

*the bad times, it takes a life time
to talk it through;*

Working ... to build our nation for

*tomorrow, it binds us all together
when there shall be work to do.*

Playing ... in the winter times and the

*summer times, with children then
we need some time to play;*

Praying ... lovely days and lonely nights,

*in the living and the dying we will
pray."*

**Pause and Reflect on what you have read
thus far.**

We shall now touch on two areas of parenting that bothers many parents through the ages.

Bonding and Relinquishment.

Bonding

Traditional mothers know by intuition what many modern mothers know from reading books - like the one written by Dr. Spock in America - that babies need their Mums to hold, cuddle and rock them. The humming of homemade lullabies will make it all the sweeter. Infants need to feel accepted, wanted and loved even while growing in their mothers' wombs. If they sense this affection early in their lives, they will be able to forgive their parents' many mistakes more easily.

This basic bonding of a child to his or her parents tells him/her that this world is a safe place to live in, that it is indeed their Father's world!

The father's part is not only to bond to the child, but more significantly, to be the primary support for the mother as she fulfills her mothering role. This is especially true in the first few years of childhood before she weans her baby. Again, traditional fathers, as the main breadwinners, have been doing this for a long while. Some modern couples, however, are trying out new ways e.g. full-time fathers with mothers as breadwinners. Hopefully, the father will remain as the functional head of the household, as established by God to

reflect the absolute headship of Christ over His church.

Bonding also means telling our children about their history. Whether it is important or not to others, it is important that children know something of their ancestors' background so that they will begin to appreciate their own significance in making history themselves. History lets our children sense the reality of their lives on earth, as God has made them. They need to accept the fact of their original sin and seek God's forgiveness. The children will then gradually understand that God created them significant to influence others and to be influenced by them in the world. It seems to me, for example, that in *Matthew 5:17-20*, Jesus is implying that what we practise and what we teach others to do go together. Hence, if we obey Him, others around us will be more likely to obey Him. If we disobey Him, the converse will more likely be true too. If children recognise this, they will learn to be responsible for their own words and actions. By God's grace, we hope they will choose to be a godly and gracious influence on others for Him.

However, bonding between parents and children takes time, effort and planned sacrifices for men and women today.

Hindrances to Bonding

1.

Many of us have been influenced by priorities that were passed on to us through the negative aspects of the women's liberation movement which was particularly strong in the 60's and 70's. Much good also came out of the movement and many women have been blessed by its positive aspects. In the Malaysia of today, many women enjoy the freedom to exercise their giftedness in various fields which was once undeniably open for men only.

However, it is also sad that some of the earlier negative influences of the women's liberation movement e.g. the burning of brassieres, an action supposedly symbolic of the abolition of differences between males and females. Another negative influence is the direct or indirect urging of women to believe that their worth as human beings lies in what they do. The choice by women to believe this idea has produced *the superwoman syndrome* which has left so many mothers confused and extremely tired mentally, emotionally and physically. Many are caught in "no win" situations.

While at home, some full-time homemakers feel that their other gifts cultivated through higher education are wasted. They are afraid that one day their children may accuse them of not working so that they could give them a more sophisticated education, holidays and other luxuries. They are often made to feel inferior to other women who, because of their ability to earn and be useful to more people outside the home, are often more highly regarded as friends, acquaintances or even church leaders, by those who require their services.

Working mothers, on the other hand, also feel as if they are born losers. At work, they have to please their bosses; at home, they feel that they have to please their husband-bosses too. The primary day-to-day caring of children still land on their shoulders, especially where their husbands choose to leave the running of the home to them instead of sharing the financial and domestic responsibilities.

2.

Since the fall, male chauvinistic ideas and practices have taken root in human history, often aided by wrong interpretation of Scriptures, even among the people of God. The status and roles of man and woman are sometimes taught to be identical when they are not.

Men and women are equal in status before God. Whether single or married they are of the same worth and value in all aspects of their beings, by virtue of their having been created in God's image as a community.

However, their roles on earth may be different or over-lap with the roles of men ⁴.

In the course of listening to women casually or during counselling sessions, I have come to understand that many Christian women want their husbands to lead them in the making of major decisions in their personal and family life. One such decision is whether they should take care of their children full-time. Many are unsure of their spouses' respect for them, appreciation of them as persons, and willingness to share their income freely with them if they should stay home for the sake of their children.

On the other hand, some modern Christian fathers, upon facing the impact of their wives' increasing independence, have become afraid of exercising spiritual and overall leadership in the home. They are fearful of their being accused of hindering their wives' self-development. Some husbands request counselors to talk to their wives about taking more care of their children at home. Some are afraid their wives may accuse them of curbing their freedom if they reveal their

real desire that their wives become full-time homemakers. Misunderstanding and uncertainty of the roles of husbands at home, especially in the spiritual realm, appear to prevail especially among the more liberal minded parents. The observation of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the former Soviet dissident, seems to coincide with this finding. He said,

*"If I were called upon to identify the principal trait of the entire twentieth century, here to I would be unable to find anything more precise and pithy than to repeat once again:
Men have forgotten God."*

Alexander Solzhenitsyn ⁵

It seems, therefore, that husbands and fathers need to fulfill their leadership roles at home more courageously and lovingly, believing it is God's will for them. At the same time, wives and mothers need to fulfill their God-given roles at home as well. However, both need to do this in harmony and not in competition with the respective spouse.

How we hope that more father and mothers would honestly and lovingly communicate their hearts' desire (to love their children) to each other. Someone has to sacrifice something if we are to nurture the next generation for God.

Many modern mothers know that early maternal-child bonding is essential for their growing children and for them, but they find it extremely difficult to provide their infants with tender, patient, loving care.

Please do not conclude that I am against mothers of small children working outside the home. By no means. But I believe that as people of God, we need to sort out whether our children come first in our vocations and, therefore, arrange our other duties around them, or that our other interests come first and so arrange our children around those interests.

Ultimately, it is relationships that last, not ideas, or things or even self-fulfillment.

God's people have never been given a mandate to be self-fulfilled, but to be Christ-fulfilled.

Therefore, as parents are bonded to God for their ultimate reality and security, they are better able to bond to each other and, then, to their children.

Malachi described the task of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus Christ, as one that calls parents to turn to their children and children to turn to their parents. This would be a sign of their repentance and of the depth of God's

redemption in human hearts and lives (*Malachi 4:5,6*). Nevertheless, in case what I have just written hints of over-protection of our children, let us now discuss the need for parents to relinquish their children to the Lord.

Relinquishment:

Godward-Direction and Purposeful Independence from Parents

When Jesus was 12 years old, we catch a glimpse of what it means for Joseph and Mary to learn to free Him so that He could obey His Father in heaven. Eventually, after Jesus commenced His public ministry around His thirtieth birthday, Mary really had to let go of Him completely so that He could do God's will.

One day, someone told Jesus that His mother and brothers were at the place where He was ministering, looking for Him. What did Jesus do? He did not rush out but replied,

*“Who are My mother and brothers?
... whoever does God’s will is My brother
and sister and mother.”*

Mark 3:31-35

Mary knew and loved her Son enough to let Him go, even though painfully and gradually. Her motherhood was only a delegated authority entrusted to her by her Creator God who is the true Father of all mankind. She did not coerce Him to stay home to support the family even though He was the eldest son in a traditional Jewish household.

In a similar manner, we need to train ourselves to relinquish our children to God's care and will from an early stage of their lives or it may get harder as both they and we grow older. We dare not overprotect, smother or possess them. Did Mary's relinquishment of Jesus lead to the diminishing of His sense of responsibility towards her? Not at all. We read in John 19:25-27 that Jesus cared for her by asking John to take His place as her son when He could not be with her any longer.

Herein lies the tension between the bonding to our children to provide them the security that they need, and the relinquishing of our children to God, who really owns them. This, I believe, will prevent us from impeding their freedom to find and obey God for themselves. It will also prepare us from harbouring false guilt if and when they should stray away from God. We will continue to pray,

watch and love them back into His fold. We, parents, have simply been entrusted with the care of His children for Him. It is indeed an awesome privilege, strewn with pains and failures, decorated with humour and joy!

Some may ask when parents need to completely let go of their adult children. Again, if we consider Mary's example, it will be as soon as the child has developed into a person capable of receiving and giving love. This means granting the child the freedom to express his own personality even if it is significantly changed at the end of childhood. The test of good parenting is not whether our children turn out good but whether we as parents are willing to love them unconditionally when we do not agree wholeheartedly with their lifestyles and actions. Are we able to respect and accept them not as our appendices but as independent people with their own privileges and responsibilities in this world?

Would we help them feel welcome whenever they need us again, as the weaned child mentioned in *Psalms 131*?

"Rearing children is like holding a very wet bar of soap ... too firm a grasp and it shoots from your hand, too loose a grasp and it slides away. A gentle but firm grasp keeps it in control."

Elaine Hannigan

Your response to God's purpose or destiny for mankind and the social dilemma of today?

Parental labours of love will still be worth it all as we consider the wisdom and patience of God in allowing us to watch our children grow.

*How do we build a love house?
We need talking
 and working
 and playing
 and praying ... together,
... parents communicating with God
... fathers communicating with
 mothers
... parents communicating with
 children
... children communicating with
 each other.
... children communicating
 with God.*

As relationships within families are strengthened the church will grow in maturity. As the church grows, society will be more salted and lit up with the truth of Christ's grace!

As this happens, our Father in heaven will receive praise and many will be added to His larger family.

Eventually, Christ's Bride will be prepared for Him. May the Lord Jesus help us to build loving homes for Him.

With His help and His grace we can do it; we shall do it!

Part II

Ideas about marriage

Many of today's young people are confused about the need for marriage where there is a mutual permanent commitment between a man and a woman as husband and wife, as long as they both shall live. While studying in Melbourne in the 1970's, I saw my peers as well as older friends already trying out alternative intimate-sexual relationships which left many individual lives in a lurch after a while. I sometimes wondered whether my homeland, Malaysia, would reach such a stage. After 24 years back home, I can now say that the infection of alternative lifestyles of intimacy has arrived and is getting more aggressive for the last two decades. As God's family who asserts that His written word has the final say in how we live our lives before the holy and gracious God, where do we go from here?

Is marriage basically for companionship (through sexual fulfillment) of the man and woman or is it as much for nurturing children in a family?

Much of our western Christian literature seems to emphasise that the marriage

relationship is the basis for a family. Even Bible teachers sometimes hold the view that sex is primarily for a married couple's enjoyment and not necessarily for procreation and the enjoyment of children. Husband and wife fulfillment seems to be the 'in' thing for the last few decades here. Have we ever wondered whether this trend of thinking is from Scriptures or from human philosophies (even if they come from research experts in psychology, sociology, anthropology or academic theology)? Are swallowing everything that is imported and dynamic as gospel truth?

God's Views of Marriage

1.

Marriage is described as a high honour though an imperfect reflection of the approaching perfect relationship between Jesus Christ and His body, the church
(as in e.g. Ephesians 5:21-33).

Marriage is also a permanent and exclusive relationship between a man and a woman on this earth
(Luke 20:27-36).

There is no marriage in the next world. Monogamy is God's original calling and order for married couples before sin entered the world through mankind
(Matthew 10:4-6).

2.

Though marriage often starts, for modern couples, with an emotional attraction, the emotional element is to lead to the use of the of the will to co-exist and to commit oneself sacrificially and unconditionally to the other.

It is not to be entered into primarily as a solution to personal unhappiness or loneliness.

Marriage, therefore, is to be differentiated from the wedding ceremony. The wedding ceremony is, in the eyes of society, an occasion to regulate, confirm and legitimise the private and personal marriage covenant between the man and the woman. By itself, the wedding vows, without the personal commitment to care for each other "*for better or for worse, till death do us part*", cannot make a marriage.

3.

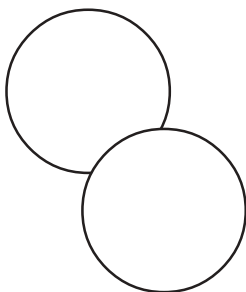
Marriage between two individuals entails more than just the two persons involved.

Each party to this matrimonial contract comes with his or her background that has helped form that particular person and made him/her into a unique personality and character.

The relationships that one party has with the other relationships are not severed but carry on in increasing complexity in interaction with the spouse's sets of relationships.

The Interpersonal Relationships in a Marriage

**Other relationships
+ Man**



**Woman +
Other Relationships**

This means that when a man and a woman are joined together in marriage, they bring with them all the people and events that have made them what they are.

These influences are not merely external but internal as well. Central to our personal internal influences, of course, is one's original sin, for which the holy and righteous God holds us accountable.

Let us consider the couples and families that we tend to admire and seek to imitate.

What do we recall when we think of good family relationships?

Often, what strikes us is the mutual respect that husbands and wives have for each other.

Even though they have differences in personality and behaviour, they seem to be able to accept their spouses and seek to understand their needs rather than try to overpower the spouses with their own opinions.

They also exude a oneness in life goals, be they Christian or not, and a willingness to forgive and rebuild trust when things go wrong for a while.

Caring for the whole person is the rule.

*When we experience marital conflicts,
recalling this reality will stop us from
blaming the other party and help us to
acknowledge our own responsibility.*

Let us recall the fable about the two
goats which met in the centre of a
bridge.

Both refused to give way.
A fight started and ended with both
goats falling into the river.

Selfish pride says,
*"To show that the other person is wrong, I
mustn't budge, even if I am also wrong!"*

Why?
*"So that I can show that the other has lost
and I have won."*

Even though there are other relationships
with relatives and friends outside the
nuclear family, the husband-wife
relationship takes priority over all other
relationships. As we know from
Scriptures, God often uses this temporal
priority and exclusivity to portray the
absolutely unique and permanent
relationship between Him and His people.

No one else is to take the place between His people and Him; no other party is to come between husband and wife.

(Ephesians 5:21-33)

It is within this intimate relationship that parents are entrusted with children, whether they be natural, adopted or fostered children.

*However,
the oneness shared by members of the body of Christ on earth is a oneness of soul and spirit.*

Brothers and sisters in Christ do not share oneness in the physical body.

Nevertheless, when they marry within the body of Christ, the particular pair of man and woman share a physical oneness as well. Though it is an incomplete oneness tainted by sin, it is still an exclusive oneness. We often see the physical oneness in marital life rather than the soul and spirit oneness and, in our moments of worldly thinking, assess the compatibility of couples according to their physical attributes more than their soul and spirit attributes. Many of us are guilty of this, no matter how careful we may try not to view them in this manner.

However, as our world is still imperfect, the interaction of two imperfect human beings in a loving relationship does not mean that there will be no disagreements or heated arguments.

The two persons in a marriage covenant come with past influences.

Marriage is altogether a complicated matter, often romanticised into unreal bliss. That could be one reason why, nowadays, so many disillusioned couples choose separation or divorce.

Nevertheless, there is hope. It will require persistent love, forgiveness and hard work.

Jesus, the Son of God, changed water into wine at the start of His public ministry, while attending a wedding celebration.

Could not that be symbolic of His ability to change every marriage into one with renewed hope for celebration and mutual encouragement?

Part III

The Grand Finale

Belonging to God's new family starts with the second birth of a person through the death of the perfect sacrifice, Jesus Christ and His resurrection from the dead.

Apart from Jesus' sacrifice for sins on the cross, there is no way of becoming a child of God the Father.

Blood ties do not count (John 1:12,13).

Voluntary associations and choices to become a member of the organized church do not make us part of God's family in the sense that we cannot join the living body of Christ like joining a club.

The call to care for one another as family members did not come primarily from any government or human institution.

*The call to care comes from the eternal Creator and Father God.
Our adoption into God's family comes from God's initiative and total enabling, through "losses" on our side in exchange for the exquisite "gain" of becoming His beloved children in Jesus Christ.*

*One day, when we see Him face to face,
even our natural parent-child and husband-
wife relationships must go. One missionary
to South America, Jim Elliot, summed up this
gain as such:*

"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep
to gain what he cannot lose".

God alone is our eternal Father, and Jesus
Christ is not only our Brother but also our
Bridegroom, something of which we still
do not fully comprehend.

Therefore, all believers in this true God
are siblings, whether we are parents,
children, husbands, wives or in-laws in
this world.

We have become the blessed household
of faith!

We have *a new sense of "belonging"*, as
members of God's family, to the
household of the living God because God
has adopted us as His beloved children
through Jesus Christ
(*Romans 8:14-17*).

We have *"a new measure of worth"*
because God chose us
(*Deuteronomy 7:7-9*).

We have *a new framework of equality*, whether single or married, with child or childless, because we are all assigned to be brothers and sisters of His Son (1 Corinthians 12:26; Hebrews 2:11,12) ⁶

Central to this new family are two relationships:

1.

The Father-Child Relationship between God and all believers

(John 17:1; Hebrews 2:10-13).

This is a covenant relationship created and initiated by God the Father, and Jesus Christ His Son. God's grace reaches out to us through His plan of redemption in His beloved Son. We may enjoy fellowship and inheritance with Him who has become our Brother. Being His children brings a sense of security and worth for us. God is now our Father.

2.

The Bridegroom-Bride Relationship between the Lord Jesus and His church

(Revelations 19:6-8).

This second relationship calls for intimacy and oneness between two parties who choose to mutually love one another in deepening ways. Our human marital

intimacy is only a temporal sign to this eternal intimacy between Christ and His church. A hymn writer once exulted,

"How marvellous, how wonderful, is the Saviour's love for me!"

The Holy Spirit is the One who enables God's children to enter into and to grow in these two relationships.

Perhaps, by now, we are beginning to see the wisdom of God in ordaining the parent-child and husband-wife relationships in our natural families. These temporal relationships are to prepare us for the eternal ones with God.

If only we could get together to give this reality of *God's new "extended" family on earth* some thought and action.

If we do not believe in the reality of God's family, then we cannot give a reason for our faith in His wisdom of making us social beings. We are social beings who emerge first from within our natural families, and then become His eternal family.

If we do believe in its reality, then our actions must follow our belief.

Are we willing and ready to take the first step of trusting one another?

Are we also willing and ready to take the second step of sacrificial risk by getting closer to each other so that we may be really His people before a watching world?

Jesus says,

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.

Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.

By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

(John 13:34,35)

Is this vision of the church family impractical?

I do not think so. In fact, it may just be a decision away for many of us in local churches. What better means of witness than this which has been laid down for us in Scriptures in the early church!

Therefore,

Our Lord Jesus may be gently asking us right now:

*“Would you accept, highly regard and love
My brothers and sisters as your own
from today?”*

Other Books to Read

1. *Psychology and Christianity:
the View Both Ways*
by Malcolm A. Jeeves, IVP 1976
2. *The Shattered Mirror*
- *Reflections on Being Human*
by John White, IVP 1987
3. *Parents in Pain*
by John White, IVP 1979
(A great comfort to "needy" parents.)
4. *"The Family: At Home in a Heartless World"*
by Rowland Croucher,
GRID (A World Vision Australia
Quarterly Publication) Autumn 1994
5. *Baptism-It's Purpose, Practice and Power*
by Michael Green, Hodder &
Stoughton Ltd. 1987

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1. *The Seduction of our Children - Protecting Kids from Satanism, New Age and the Occult*, Neil Anderson & Steve Russo, 1991
Harvest House Publishers
2. *Building a Love House is Hard Work*
by Lee Bee Teik, MCARE 1996
3. *On Being Family-A Social Theology of the Family*, chapter called "Spirituality is a Domestic Skill"
by Ray Anderson &
Dennis B. Guernsey,
William B. Eerdsman
Publishing Company 1985
4. *Building a Love House is Hard Work*,
Chapter 1
by Lee Bee Teik, MCARE 1996
5. *Counselling and Children*, Page 47,
by Walter Byrd M.D. and Paul Warren
M.D., Word Publishing



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Dr. Lee Bee Teik (MBBS, Monash University) practised medicine till she turned fulltime homemaker.

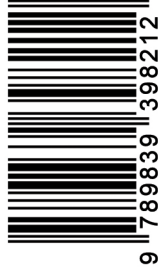
She is married to Dr. Hwa Yung and they have three adult children.

Having heard God's call for her to write in 1992, Bee Teik has penned books on prayer, pastoral counseling and her experiences as a Malaysian Christian woman.

This series of 18 titles, classified under the overall theme, On Being Human, is drawn from the positive feedback from her seminars.

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