



Guidance
for
**Knowing & Doing
God's Will**



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A Reconre Publication



Title: Guidance To Know & Do God's Will
(Adapted from parts of Chapter 9 of
"Building a Love House Is Hard Work",
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Publisher: Reconre Sdn Bhd
P.O.Box 91
70710 Seremban
Negeri Sembilan
Malaysia



1st Printing 2004
2nd Printing 2005

www.reconre.org

Design: Cornerstone Corporation Sdn Bhd
(455936X)
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Printer: Akitiara Corporation Sdn Bhd
(390199-U)
1 & 3, Jalan TPP 1/3,
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Batu 12, 47100 Puchong,
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Guidance for Knowing & Doing God's Will

Is Knowing and Doing God's Will Real?

A. General Principles in Seeking God's Will

Knowing and Doing God's Will is not only Real, it is also a Joy, even if it is through hardship and suffering. This book hopes to wet the appetite for knowing God's will for one's personal and community life. God's will is so wide and deep that we can merely suggest some guidelines and leave the readers to meet with God and put into daily practice His known will.

Remember

There are issues that God has spoken and hence no one needs to argue about His will.

It is a matter of obedience and not a matter of ambiguity concerning His will. For example, God's will is that we are to love one another as Jesus has loved us.

Remember

However, there are also issues where the reader is left to seek, read, question, wait, fast and pray, if they really want to know His specific will for their specific need e.g. which course to take after Form 5, through following the principles involved for knowing His general will.

God wants us to be our best for Him, whether we are rich or poor, school dropouts or graduates, ordinary looking or stunning, young or old. Therefore, we need to put this high up in our priority list when we are confused about His direction for us.

Below are principles weaned from Dr. John White's book, *The Fight*.¹

1.

God will guide us if we humbly seek Him

The psalmist says in Psalm 25:8-9,

*“Good and upright is the Lord; therefore He instructs sinners in His ways.
He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them His way.”*

In order for us to know God's will in any area of our lives, our attitude needs to be one of humility. We have to acknowledge that we know less than what God knows, and that He alone knows everything. We need to desire to share His outlook, to obey Him and to trust His fatherly goodness.

This kind of thinking goes contrary to what the world around us believes in. The world tells us in no uncertain terms that, to improve ourselves in this age, we are to determine what we want, assert ourselves, and go get it! The media often glorifies such achievers and they pass on to us a message of self-fulfillment, often at the expense of others' needs. Young adults are the primary target of such heavy propaganda.

Frequently, local Malaysian newspapers would publish sections on the lifestyle of the Malaysian 'Yuppies' (those between the ages of 20-40 and who earn relatively high salaries). They, the prime consumers, are encouraged to spend, so that others can become rich. This creates a bottomless pit of wrong desires in the hearts of thousands of other young people who seek to imitate the yuppies' lifestyle even if they cannot afford to do so. Such selfish desires often affect the way we chose how to lead our daily lives. However, this is not what the Gospel of Jesus Christ teaches.

Jesus tells us in His word that God will speak and give us answers if our will is to do His Father's will (*John 7:17*). We have to be humble before the Almighty but compassionate God of the universe. If we are unsure of making right live choices, let us face our fears of making mistakes and bring these fears to Him. Let us ask Him to show us His values and priorities for us.

2.

God is more interested in our overall moral (principles of good behaviour) choices than the exact details of choice.

God wants us to do things that, above all else, please Him who has made us (His community) to relate with Him in an everlasting unchanging love. Therefore, our actions must do good to others in His world.

For example, we cannot simply play truant in order to attend a church event. This will set a bad example for fellow prevent His beloved humanity from rolling into self-destruction and chaos. He loves us enough to grant us more time to return to Him and His original design of a peaceful and harmonious world. He does this because He loves us deeply and wants the best for us.

3.

When God leads His people, He goes with them but may not show them everything all at once.

When Moses asked God regarding their entering Canaan, God told him that He would go with him and will give him rest but God did not tell Moses everything in advance.

How then can we know which way to turn when we arrive at a T-junction regarding any issue? We need to talk to the Lord about the matter. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to us. Be ready to listen when He does speak and obey promptly. Otherwise, we may have to wait longer to hear His voice.

4.

God is more interested to guide us than we are willing to follow Him.

The Father sent the Holy Spirit to teach us which way to turn (Isaiah 30:19-22). The Lord knows that we are often afraid to cast out our idols (what our selfish selves want). However, when He shows us His better way, we will be willing to set aside our own ways, to disengage ourselves from the sins and weights that pull or slow us down (Hebrews 12:1-3).

Why Is It So Difficult to Know God's Will for Small or Big Issues?

Let me first persuade you to stay tuned and "Listen" to what Jesus, the obedient Son of God who became a human being like us, says and shows about ...

1.

The Necessity of Doing God's Will

John 4:34

"My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to finish His work."

2.

The Desire to Do God's Will

Matthew 6:19,10

*"Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be your name,
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done on earth
as it is in heaven."*

3.

The Unifying Common Factor Because of Doing God's will

Mark 3:35

"Whoever does God's will is My brother and sister and mother."

4.

The Certainty of God's General Will

Matthew 18:14

*“In the same way your **Father in heaven is not willing** that any of these little ones should be lost.”*

5.

The Condition for Knowing God's Specific Will

John 7:14-17

“Not until halfway through the feast did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach. The Jews were amazed and asked, ‘How did this man get such learning without having studied?’

*Jesus answered, “My teaching is not my own. It comes from Him who sent Me. If anyone chooses to do **God's will**, he will find out whether My teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.’”*

6.

The Simplicity of Knowing God's Will

John 9:30-33

*“The man answered,
'Now that is remarkable! You don't know
where He comes from, yet He opened my
eyes. We know that God does not listen to
sinners. He listens to the godly man who
does **His will**. Nobody has ever heard of
opening the eyes of a man born blind.
If this man were not from God,
He could do nothing.'”*

7.

The Struggle to Do God's will

Matthew 26:39-42

*“ ' My Father, if it is possible, may
this cup be taken from me.
Yet not as I will but as You will.' ...
'My Father, if it is not possible for this cup
to be taken away unless I drink it,
may Your will be done.'”*

8.
The Joy of Completing God's
Will ²

John 17:2-5

*“Father, the time has come.
Glorify Your Son,
that Your Son may glorify You ...
I have brought You glory on earth by
completing the work
You gave to Me to do.
And now, Father, glorify Me in Your
presence with the glory I had with You
before the world began.”*

Exercise

**Apply the above Check List to yourself
in order to answer the question:**

*“WHY have I yet to know God's will for me
generally or specifically?”*

B. God's Will Concerning Careers and Vocations

At creation, God gave man and woman the mandate (also a great privilege) of taking care of His world. The targets especially include the care of people, and the animal and plant kingdoms (What else is there in the world that we have?).

- **His assignment to the human couple was clear:**

Genesis 1:27,28

“ ... God created man in His own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’”

God also ensure that other issues about work (careers or vocations) is clear:

- **Christ alone is to have all the glory:**

Colossians 1:15-20

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created for Him and by Him. He is above all things, and in Him all things hold together. And He is the head of His body, the church; He is the beginning and the first born from among the dead, so that in everything. He might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross.”

- **God Cares for All, Not Just Christians**

Matthew 22:35-40:

One of them, an expert in the law, tested Him with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

Jesus replied, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Therefore, we may focus on how to do whatever work God has given us according to the above two requirements or guiding light; therefore, we may know how to choose careers or vocations which will fulfill these principles for God's joy! Now it is time to consider the difference between a career and a vocation.

The Difference Between a Career and a Vocation

A *Career* is just a job by which we earn a living for daily basic needs or luxuries.

A person, therefore, may change jobs rather easily as he may or may not have passion for it. As long as he can do the expected job well and earn a reasonable expected income, he feels contented.

He may not really like or dislike the work.

A *Vocation*, however, is a calling. It is an area of work for which a person really feels passionate. He will be inwardly restless until ... one day ... he is able to fulfill that task e.g. as a nurse, a pastor, a kindergarten teacher, a social worker.

If we reflect on the above descriptions of careers and vocations, we will notice that vocations are usually related to

service to fellow people in order to do them good. A person pursues a vocation because he does not have a choice, whether that urge is from God directly or indirectly.

For example:

- a social worker feels the sorrow when he hears of the starving sick children in some nations and cannot get to them fast enough in order to bring relief
- an artist deeply longs to put his feelings and thoughts onto canvas that will portray to the world its beauty and ugliness, with the hope of calling others to action to make ours a better world
- a pianist craves to express her heart cries and joys through her fingers onto the keyboard so her listeners may be comforted or be constrained to rejoice!
- A preacher may feel, "*Woe is me if I do not preach God's word!*"

The person with a calling to serve in a particular task is not so concerned about the benefits received personally. He is concerned that the work done is for the good of the other, the neighbours that Jesus mentioned in the verses quoted above. He may also be equally concerned for the other living creatures and natural

environment that God has made. Something inside him will not be satisfied until he is free to dispense his psychological, intellectual, mental and spiritual energies through his work. This fulfillment is not satisfied by mere material income though he needs some income to live on and to fulfill his vocation.

Examples

1.

Mr. A grew up being in a family where he was very much encouraged to become a doctor. He also wanted to help the sick and weak and was often moved by their plight. God called him into full time Christian work while he was in Form 5 though he was not told how, where or when to be trained and in which field. Therefore, since medical work was a good and acceptable option, he became a good doctor. However, he knew deep inside him, that medical practice for medical practice's sake will not satisfy something inside him. But he could not nail it down for over ten years in a city. Finally, a door for mission work opened and he was then able to put his whole heart into medical missions in the slum.

The career Mr. A had become his vocation as well. This is a case where vocation and career overlap.

2.

Miss B graduated with a law degree in order to be rich. She actually did not care which job she held as long as she could enjoy life as she liked. After about 5 years of legal practice and marriage, she became a mother. She then knew she wanted to put her heart into her family life. When her 3 children were in school, she considered practicing law to earn some extra income and socialize again. However, God called her to stop practicing altogether and help the poor and needy in town.

B's career did not become her vocation as voluntary social work has replaced it. However, her legal skills were not wasted as she began to use them to help those who could not defend themselves in society.

3.

Mr. Y has a good job as a teacher. However, he grumbles about his daily work all the time. Nevertheless, for the sake of bringing up a family, and since he has no particular liking for any other jobs, he carried on his work until retirement. He then saw his teaching as a means of keeping his family alive without any other specific purpose in mind.

Mr. Y ended up living a purposeless life without enjoying any career or vocation.

Mr. K was a successful businessman who has made it when he reached 40. He had saved up enough for the family's needs. Then he knew he was called to the pastoral ministry. However, he was unable to detach himself from the excess wealth accumulated. Hence, though trying his best to shepherd God's people in a local church, he was never contented or joyful in the pastoral ministry as he had not experienced the joy of total abandonment to God. He became manipulative and calculative in his relationship with fellow church leaders but felt too guilty to quit. His former position in society and material assets became hindrances to God's plans through him. A struggle ensued and the church was split.

Mr. K is the stereotype of a child of God who has one foot in His kingdom and one foot out.

Maybe it would be better for him to continue in his business and give his money to others who need it more than his family. God wants all of us, not part of us.

Question

What is He saying to you as you consider your near and distant future?

Which of the above four positions would *you choose* for your life?

How to Start Searching for God's Vocation

1. Commit your life completely to God as He is wiser than you. You are already His child. Ask Him to make you His servant too, just like Adam and Eve are His children but were also given a mandate to take care of His world. They went astray only when they allowed themselves to be distracted by wanting to become somebody they were never meant to be ... they wanted to be like God.
2. Get your natural and spiritual gifts assessed by those who know how to interpret your scores and not just read the answers out to you. Count the cost of each possibility, especially when weighing the pros and cons of each career or vocation to which it will lead you. Consider your Creator's views in Matthew 16:26; Do you really want a career, a vocation or none at all? Remember that God's ways and thoughts are higher than ours (Isaiah 55:1-11).
3. Find about the needs of Malaysia in various fields, not only those which will give you prestige, pleasure and money.

4. Find out through your local church and mission or non-profit organisations what sort of workers they need so that you may consider training for such good works.
5. Read widely about the various career options available locally or overseas. Generally, local qualifications are sufficient for many careers and are more economically achieved. Therefore, it may be wiser to get your training in Malaysia unless your choice is not available here or you obtain a scholarship to travel and study.
6. You may want to discuss with your parents or other mentors whether one option is to become a trainee at some workplaces-for exposure or longer term work in order to evaluate God's specific will for you regarding a career and/or vocation. Once you are certain of a vocation, for example, then you will not be so worried about the time taken to be trained through apprenticeship or tertiary education. When you look back 10 years from now, time spent before your actual calling will not seem so long any more. God is not in a hurry to finish moulding you as long as you are a willing lump of clay!

7. Please do not torture your parents to provide funds that they cannot afford for a course of your choice. Go earn your way round and just take a longer route to achieve a career of your choice.

Remember

Education is not making it to receiving just paper qualifications but simply going through disciplined training. Tertiary education is only one of many options available.

You are well educated if you know how to take care of yourself, family and neighbours through honesty and diligence, whatever job you may take on.

There are many out there who have health, wealth and degrees but are rude and uncaring. Can we say then that they are educated well?

Ultimately, in God's eyes, education is all about Character Nurturing, not even what we can give to others. God is the first and will be the final Educator of mankind. For those who place their trust in Him, He is also Saviour and Renewer of all minds and heart, all emotions and will and Giver of eternal life, which is friendship with God (*John 17*). Now for the practicality of choosing a course of action ...

Check Your Personal Motives for a Particular Course

Firstly

Will my decision glorify God
(i.e. in this issue, will it help others know that He is my Father and Lord of my life)?

For example, if your family does not know Him yet, will your decision make you look like an inconsiderate child or a selfish/unwise teenager?)

Secondly

Will my decision do good for others?

Thirdly

Will my decision be conducive with respect to my talents and current available funds?

If there are no negative points, ask for His peace, enroll for the course or job and trust Him to open and shut doors. While waiting, spend time with Him alone and go about your normal routines.

God's Call to Four Noble But Neglected Vocations for Your Consideration

*Why should we call these careers/vocations
NOBLE?*

Noble means

*“having fine personal qualities that people
admire, such as courage, honesty and care
for others”*

(Oxford Advanced Genie Dictionary,
Oxford University Press 2003)

If we think about what dedicated nurses, teachers, pastors and pastors' wives do and endure, day in and day out, I believe we may sum them up as playing obscure but deeply **Healing, Educational** and **Peacemaking Roles** in our nation. In any nation, for that matter, without doors for the fulfillment of these roles, society will decay faster than what it is now. Praise God for such noble tasks!

Would you dare to be Nurses, to be Teachers, to be Pastors or to be a Pastor's Wife? Would you love God enough to give of your sons and daughters to God so that they could follow Him in the redemption of our society and the world? Count the cost (*Luke 14:34*). Ultimately, only God can win (*Luke 11:23*). Nevertheless, He promises to care for us, and ours, always (*Jude 24-25; Titus 1:2*)!

I. **DARE to be NURSES**

Reasons for the Nursing Vocation

1. The nursing role meets a basic need in everyone when physically unwell, starting from within our homes.
2. Many patients land up in hospital when their families are unable to cope with more serious diseases. Hence, they need someone with trained skills to nurse them back to health. Doctors merely give orders but without efficient and compassionate nursing care, many will not recover as well and walk home again ³. Doctors need nurses to care for patients effectively, with nurses spending more time with them than doctors. Therefore, nurses can get closer to patients' emotional and social needs through listening and observing family interactions. Her reporting of such events to the doctors significantly add to the overall care of the patient in need. In today's medical care, the goal is towards treating the whole person rather than an organ.
3. Nursing coincides with the heart call of those who want to care for the physically ill.

4. Therefore, one doctor needs many nurses. But whereas the cream of the academic school systems aspire to become leader doctors, few would go near to fighting for nursing jobs. However, though hospitals may function without doctors for some time, they cannot function without the nursing roles that need to be fulfilled all the time.
5. Too many are reaching out for the more “interesting” and lucrative occupations in e.g. IT., Mass Communication, law, marketing, adverting, entertainment, publishing, journalism, creative art when we jolly well know that the world will keep turning without professionals in these fields while the world may stop turning if the nursing role is not fulfilled.
6. Nursing enhances team work spirit among workers who forget themselves in the midst of placing patients first.
7. Nursing duties humble the providers of such service so that they may serve others joyfully. It can become a spiritual discipline by itself.

Reasons against the Nursing Vocation

If *you* think that nursing is:

A "dirty" job;
A lower paying job with slow promotion
opportunities;
Too menial for our children who deserve
better;
Too intolerable because you have to see
and touch blood.

Remember

Love Overcomes All Fear

Hence, many who entered this profession before the 80's have changed line, including those who emigrated overseas for freedom's sake more than for the sake of nursing the sick.

Qualifications

Ideally, compassion is a basic necessity though this may be nurtured on the job as experience moves the nurse's heart.

Future prospects

- Continuation in practical patient care
- Bridge to administrative roles through degree courses
- Instrumental to health care development for locality or nation
- Open door to foreign missions when necessary

For those interested in the nursing vocation, call up the Nursing Colleges at Government or Private Hospitals and Universities for information about application procedures.

II.

DARE to be TEACHERS

Reasons for the Teaching Vocation

1. In 21st century Malaysia, every child needs teachers. Hence, if you have a message to pass on and a heart to share with children during their crucial formative years of an adults' later life, the door is wide open for fulfillment though hard and sometimes frustrating work.
2. There is an urgent and significant lack of multicultural teachers with wide worldview and exposure to teach and nurture multicultural kids who need firm discipline and yet creative

- methods to get through to them and get them to the world in need.
3. It provides shorter working hours at work place than many full time jobs, with defined duty boundaries though some may have to do more than others ... but see it as all for the children's sake.
 4. As parents who are teachers, they may fit into most of their school going children's daily rhythm and more easily identify with them.
 5. Children feel proud to have teacher parents whom they respect and are able to coach them to a certain extent. This enhances family life in natural ways.
 6. It is an excellent way to be salt and light as teachers are transferable and "*scatterable*"!

Reasons against the Teaching Vocation

If *you* think ...

The teaching work is boring;
You have a phobia of crowds and noise;
Teaching carries a lower middle-class
social status;
You will have a slower promotion
prospect;
Cannot accept transfers away to
unfamiliar towns/cities;

Qualifications

1. Heart for children
2. Patience
3. Open worldview
4. Desire to nurture the next generation without seeing immediate results apart from academics
5. Diligence and perseverance
6. Good language command
7. Systematic thinking
8. Good character
9. Healthy psychology

III.

DARE to be PASTORS

Reasons for the Pastoral Ministry

1. If God has called you specifically.
2. When God did not say "No" to you and mature Christian friends encourage you into the pastoral work, this could be your duty to take it as your grateful duty to God who needs shepherds for His lambs and sheep.
Note: Dedicated and efficient teachers and doctors make good pastors as they are merely switching their people work from one area to another.

Reasons against the Pastoral Ministry

1. When you are running away from family or social responsibilities.
2. When you cannot have your choice of career e.g. results too low for college entrance.
3. When you are an emotionally dependent person who assumes that church members can meet your emotional needs.
4. When you assume that Christians are too kind to sack you when you repeatedly give slip shoddy work performance.
5. When you can but will not stand the rigors of spiritual discipline and work.
6. When you do not believe in Jesus' endorsement of poverty in spirit, grief for one's sins or loss, gentleness of heart and actions, hunger for God, giving of mercy, purity in heart, peacemakers and acceptance of suffering for His sake. (Check the Beatitudes in *Matthew 5*).
7. When you do not attempt to be the best for God.
8. When you disagree to be a servant to all for God's sake.

Read *Behold Your Pastor* for a deeper understanding of the qualifications for the pastoral ministry and a pastor's life ⁴.

IV. DARE to be a PASTOR'S WIFE

Reasons for Marrying a Pastor

- If God has called you specifically.
- When God did not say "No" to you and mature Christian friends encourage you to marry a certain pastor or one preparing for the pastoral ministry.
- Have a willingness to be strengthened to father and mother your children, when necessary, so that your husband can focus on his pastoral roles outside the home.
- Have the humility to call church members for help when necessary.
- Have the ability to change hats and adjust to new environment without too much anger and emotional upsets.
- Have the willingness to forgive and receive forgiveness.
- Is able to be like a lamb led to the slaughter without a voice.
- Be able to accept God's will when marriage seems to be at breaking point.
- Be able to protect your children and enable them to grow up in as natural a manner as possible.
- Is a child of God.
- Be able to believe that you are as ordinary or special as any member in God's family and behave likewise.

Reasons against Marrying a Pastor

- The man is handsome.
- The man has many degrees.
- The man can be a father figure to you.
- You may be able to persuade him from the pastoral ministry so you can have a better materialistic life for you and your children.
- You will draw nearer to God as you will be talking about spiritual things all the time.
- The man can make you more spiritual or your children will become God's great servants.
- The pastoral ministry gives you a certain status which you could not have in the world.
- You count yourself better than others in church.
- You want to compete with your husband or others in ministry.
- You do not know how to be a body guard to your husband regarding other women. (unwritten role, often misunderstood as members usually think that pastors do not have androgens).

Advice to gifted wives who need to develop their own identities/ministries when they are married to someone holding demanding leadership positions in church ministry

Every person is gifted. It is a matter of whether one has discovered those special gifts and found avenues for using them.

Be aware that our priorities, especially for wives and mothers, should be God first, family second, followed by outside ministry. Otherwise, we cannot really pass on His grace to the next generation with freedom and joy. If our husbands are called to serve others more, than we have no choice but put our family as our top priority. Many women today cannot accept this calling, to the poverty of families, church and society. *Marriage and mothering are really vocations in their own rights.* I believe a woman must make a decision about this before they think of getting a boyfriend with the potential of marriage in mind.

Wait patiently for God to show you your particular ministry. Meanwhile, use whatever ability you have to serve His people. I was a pianist at the small church where we first served. But when a professionally trained one surfaced, I relinquished that task and concentrated on other needs.

Ask God for grace to understand, accept and be yourself as much as possible, without damaging relationships, and be always open to His nudge to be changed. Many wives today blossom after their children are independent. There is no limited timing for ministry. Moses had to tend sheep for 40 years till he lost confidence for ministry but he made a better leader after that, having learnt to be totally dependent on God's daily direction and provision.

Helpful Qualities for a Pastor's Wife's Vocation

1. Know God personally.
2. Woman of good character .
3. Able and willing to handle home alone much of the time.
4. Firm yet supportive in relating to husband.
5. Large dose of sense of humour...may be requested from Him and learned.
6. Willing to learn from others.
7. Discover own gifts and use them for Him anywhere any time, as long as her home is peaceful and comes first at the human level.

Three Ways of Becoming a Pastor's Wife

1. Called before marriage.
2. Called during marriage.
3. Never called but willing to be his wife.

Three Ways of Living through Unique Trials

1. Look to God alone.
2. Take mothering as a primary calling.
3. Secure in God's love enough to widen contacts and friendship to circles wider than church and yet to love them for Christ rather than to be tempted to follow the world's ways.

Reflections

1. Take your time to Reflect, Journal and Pray during your daily communion with God alone. You may like to share with a confidant later on and pray together.
2. Ponder on the words of the following hymn. You may want to make them your personal prayer ...

*“It may not be on the mountain’s height,
Or over the stormy sea;
It may not be at the battle’s front
My Lord will have need of me;
But if by a still, small voice He calls
To paths I do not know,
I’ll answer, dear Lord, with my hand in Thine,
I’ll go where You want me to go.*

Chorus:

*I’ll go where You want me to go, dear Lord,
O’er mountain, or plain, or sea;
I’ll say what You want me to say, dear Lord,
I’ll be what You want me to be.*

*Perhaps today there are loving words
Which Jesus would have me speak;
There may be now, in the paths of sin,
Some wand’rer whom I should seek.
O Saviour, if Thou wilt be my Guide,
Tho’ dark and rugged the way,
My voice shall echo the messag sweet,
I’ll say what You want me to say.*

*There’s surely somewhere a lowly place
In earth’s harvest-fields so wide,
Where I may labour thro’ life’s short day
For Jesus, the Crucified.
So, trusting my all unto Thy care,
I know Thou lovest me!
I’ll do Thy will with a heart sincere,
I’ll be what You want me to be.”*

Mary Brown 1922

C. God's Guidance Concerning Singlehood or Marriage

Let us listen to what God has to say
through Paul the apostle in
Philippians 4:11,13 ...

"... for I have learnt to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learnt the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through Him who gives me strength."

**Understanding God's will generally
seems difficult enough.
Understanding whether we are to
stay single or get married seems
even harder.**

We shall first look at God's views on singlehood and marriage as two ways of life through which we may carry out our vocations here in an imperfect world.

Secondly, we shall try to clarify a number of common ideas about marriage and falling in love.

Thirdly, we will present a few suggestions for the preparation of ourselves for our future spouses.

1. Concerning Singlehood

Each human being is made to live in co-humanity with the rest of humankind. The community in which we live consists of both single and married people. Christian communities such as certain student or professional Christian groups, for example, are not representative of a local church (though believers are part of the overall church) because they consist of people of the same peer group and sometimes of one gender. Such groups may meet a need in a certain phase of our Christian lives; but to experience wholesome community life, we need to be integrated into a local church fellowship that comprises singles and families of all ages and backgrounds.

In *Matthew 19:10-12*, the Lord Jesus gives us three basic reasons why some people remain single.

A group of Pharisees had just questioned Him about divorce. He explained that from the beginning, God meant marriage to be a permanent institution on earth. There was no provision for a trial run in marriage. Due to man's hardness of heart, Moses granted divorce to prevent abuse or neglect of spouses. Jesus told them that they could only divorce their wives on the grounds of her unfaithfulness, presumably, not if the men desired other women.

The disciples, sensing that marriage could well lead to painful experiences instead of bliss, commented that it would be better not to be married. Jesus then took the opportunity to clarify the reasons why some men and women do not get married.

One group, He says, has been eunuchs from birth. I guess this could include those born with congenital abnormalities whereby the anatomical differentiation of sexuality may be indistinct or absent.

The next group may remain single because others have made them so. One possible example of such a reason for singlehood is the psychological victim of rape or any other sexual abuse, whereby the person just becomes unable to relate to the other gender naturally. False guilt and confusion as to their eligibility for marriage sometimes plague them for the rest of their lives. Some suffer from non-consummation of marriage.

Another example that is rather common in Asia is the obedient and filial daughter who, for the sake of taking care of the younger siblings in the family or aging dependent parents, grudgingly forsakes marriage out of false guilt impressed upon her by possessive mothers or fathers who are afraid of being left alone. In this

instance, there is often a love-hate relationship between the possessive parent and the daughter. Both get entangled in a mutual dependency state.

Wars have also left many more women alive than men in the past, thus leaving a higher ratio of women to men, causing more women to remain single.

Thirdly, Jesus explained to His disciples that there are eunuchs who make themselves eunuchs for the sake of heaven.

Peter C. Wagner, in his book *"Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow"*⁵, encourages singlehood and marriage to be accepted with thanksgiving. The single believer experiences less restrictions in the use of his time for the Lord but may feel lonely more often than the married peers. However, the married man or woman, though enjoying family companionship, often wishes that he or she has more freedom to use his or her money, room and time.

Jesus, in the above passage, closes this topic with these words:

"He who is able to receive this let him receive it ..."

We may thus understand that He gives us the freedom of choice to ask for grace to remain single or to get married ⁶.

However, we may not choose to remain single for selfish reasons, which, in modern days, sometimes surface in the form of arguments like:

"We do not like the fuss of having children"
or

"We do not wish to have to relate with in-laws"

or

"We prefer a more luxurious and carefree lifestyle"

or

"We will only marry someone of a certain socially acceptable standing" (who may not appear!)

Reflection

- i. Does God want me to get married?
- ii. If so, who will be my spouse?
- iii. If not, remember that you have not lost anything. Build up your intimacy with God who is the constant Companion to all who trust in Him. He will continue to be with you through thick and thin ⁷.

2. Concerning Marriage

1. God made marriage to be an exclusive and permanent partnership on earth (*Matthew 19:4-6*). Today's Western viewpoint, that allows several sexual partners, is nothing new. Traditional cultures sometimes condoned the same type of behaviour. Intentionally arranged single parent-child families (whereby a woman has a sexual relationship with a man just to have a child of her own), cohabitation of two persons of the opposite gender and homosexual relationships are not ordained or approved by the Creator ⁸.
2. As in the parent-child bond, *the marital bond is also a relative one compared to the eternal bond between Christ and His church.* ⁹. In the New Testament, the call to marriage is a relative command, though, in the Old Testament the men are actively encouraged to get married. It was also a great blessing for the couple to bear a son to continue the lineage and responsibilities of a father. As the Father-children and Saviour-church relationships deepen, the other relationships (parent-child, husband wife) will come second to them, and will soon fade with time, as death will part us (*Luke 14:16-26*).

3. “*Falling in love*” is usually made out to be a surge of good emotions for someone of the opposite gender, with a view to experiencing physical closeness. This may happen at any age, commencing from about the stage of puberty. The feeling and desire may be one-sided or mutual. Hence, by itself, “*falling in love*” is not a valid indication that you are really the right person to marry the one you adore. If this happens around the adolescent years, it is called “*puppy love*”, implying that such feelings will change with time. As we grow older and have formed some basic inner values and goals in life, we may be better able to control these strong emotional surges, though we may still make mistakes when we let our emotions run ahead of what we know is right in God's sight. Some adults, however, seem to be forever in the “*puppy love*” stage and are not able to move on to make a commitment in marriage. If such episodes of infatuations are harming someone else (e.g. themselves or their spouses if they are married), it may be advisable for them to see a professional counsellor for help.

4. To be married or single is irrelevant as far as God's acceptance of us is concerned. Each one of us is special and beautiful to Him. He loves us just as much either way, even if friends, relatives and society do not agree.

Know Yourself

In the mid-seventies, I met an Indian Christian lady in Melbourne. In her thirties, she was a nurse endowed with a cheerful and pleasant personality. Being keen to understand her, I enquired as to whether she was worried over her singlehood; many of her contemporaries in Australia would have been married by then. In a matter-of-fact way, she replied:

"Bee, my sister once shared this with me ...

In this world, there are three types of people who consider marriage. The first type says,

'I have to get married, I must get married ... so, it does not matter who I get married to. I want to get married!'

Consequently, this group will not be fussy or choosy about the type of spouses they have. As long as they are married, they can carry on in life reasonably happily.

The second type says,

'I want to get a certain type of spouse. However, if I really cannot find one of my preference, someone with similar qualities will do.'

This group," my friend continued," will be choosy but not fussy. They will also be contented in their marriage."

"The third type says,

'I want to get married, but only to one type of person ... if I cannot meet that particular type of person, I will prefer to stay single.'

These are both fussy and choosy!"

Then my friend concluded,

"I belong to this last group of people and this is why I am still single and contented!"

Pause

At a practical level, the person we wish to marry must at least be attractive in our eyes. Beauty often truly lies in the beholder's eyes. External beauty or attractiveness is not an essential asset but inner maturity is. Some are out to

exalt and use those external attributes to get what they selfishly desire e.g. money, fame or favour.

In such an important matter, where emotions are necessary in order to build a lasting relationship, it is easier to weigh the pros and cons of entering into marriage if we have sorted out our principles before getting emotionally involved. Most of us would probably already have certain principles.

However, will we submit to God's basic principles as mentioned earlier?

If we are unsure of meeting the right spouse, let us face our fears of remaining single for the rest of our lives or fears of marrying the wrong person and bring these fears to Him. Let us ask Him to show us His values and priorities for us.

God wants us to be equally yoked with those that are His children. Therefore, we need to put this high up in our priority list when considering who to date. There is no need to ask for God's will when His will has been shown clearly in His written word.

Whether the person is a Chinese, Indian or of any other race is not the main issue; it is also not as important whether the person in mind is rich or poor, educated or illiterate. These are factors that need careful and prayerful consideration, but they are not moral issues.

3.

How then, some may ask, do we prepare ourselves for our future spouse, if and when we do get married?

I believe that the best we can give to our future husband or wife is not so much in the area of external refinement e.g. in the use of cosmetics, the pursuit of a career or the acquisition of material possessions, but in the area of life preparation. Allow me to explain.

Paul writes in Romans 12:1 & 2 ...

“I appeal to you, therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God-what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

And

John writes in Revelations 19:6-8 ...

*“Hallelujah!
For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.
Let us rejoice and exult and
give Him the glory,
For the marriage of the Lamb has come,
And His bride has made herself ready;
To her it has been granted to be clothed
With fine linen, bright and pure,
For the fine linen is the righteous deeds of
the saints.”*

If we, as Christ's bride, realise that we are to prepare ourselves for Him, our Bridegroom, then we can be sure that as we have that overall perspective and live accordingly, we will definitely be easier to live with after we get married.

I once read in a devotional book describing how some people are like velvet: smooth, cool and a pleasure to live with. Others are like sand paper: rough, heated up when in close contact, and hurtful to be near to. Just imagine what it would be like for a velvet type of person to marry a sand paper type, or for a sandpaper type to marry another person of his kind. Let us begin now to ask God for grace and mercy to make us easier to live with.

We need to renew our minds by the reading and meditation of Scriptures. Our views of God, of man, of woman, of children, of relatives and friends, of life goals, of money, of things that last versus things that do not, will then come in line with His word.

Exercise

1. Look into the mirror and tell yourself that Jesus loves you as you are. Learn to love yourself too.
2. Allow Him to minister to you in your areas of weakness through whichever means He chooses (*Isaiah 53:4,5*).

Reflection

Take your time to Reflect, Journal and Pray during your daily communion with God alone. You may like to share with a confidant later on and pray together.

Remember

BLOSSOM WHERE YOU ARE,
single or married
because
GOD LOVES YOU
and accepts you as you are!

Quiet retreat guidance is available for those who are ready to seek God face to face in small groups or alone.

Website : <http://www.reconre.org>

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