



Understanding
21st
Century
Single!



Understanding
21st
Century
SingleS

Its Implications and Our Responses

By
Lee Bee Teik

A Reconre Publication



Title: Understanding 21st Century Singles
(Adapted from "Friends of the
Bridegroom" Chapter 12, A Reconre
Publication, used with permission.)

Author: Lee Bee Teik © 2004

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)
27 SS20/14 Damansara Utama,
47400 PJ, MALAYSIA
Tel: 603-7726 6335
Fax: 603-7728 5335
www.cornerstone-msc.com
inquiry@cornerstone-msc.com

Printer: Akitiara Corporation Sdn Bhd
(390199-U)
1 & 3, Jalan TPP 1/3,
Taman Industri Puchong,
Batu 12, 47100 Puchong,
Selangor Darul Ehsan, MALAYSIA
Tel: 603-8061 9988
Fax: 603-8061 9933
www.akitiara.com
akitiara@po.jaring.my

No part of this booklet may be used or
reproduced in any manner whatsoever without
written permission from the author except in the
case of brief quotations embodied in articles and
reviews.

Booklets in this series:

- The Gift of Feeling
- Your Soul Print and You
- Understanding Burnout
- Understanding and Managing Stress
- Understanding the 8 Stages of Human Life
- Understanding Nervous Breakdown
- Mind Your Language - Everyday Uses & Misuses
- Lay Marital Counselling
- Tips on Family and Marriage

- A letter to youths (parents may peep if they wish)
- Understanding Adolescents
- Understanding Human Sexuality, BGR Issues and Sexual Trauma - why hurt so much and so long
- Understanding 21st Century Singles
 - Its Implications and Our Responses
- Freedom & Morality
 - Privileges and Responsibilities
- Guidance for Knowing & Doing God's Will
 - Careers and vocations
 - what's the difference?
- Understanding Addictions to work, alcohol, sexual habits & PEOPLE!
- Global Kids
- The Forgotten Teenagers - Christian Kids

Ordering more copies and further information:

Online Orders:

<http://www.ReconRe.org>

<http://www.Cornerstone.com.my/reconre>

Postal Order:

Cornerstone Corporation Sdn Bhd
27 SS20/14 Damansara Utama,
47400 PJ, MALAYSIA
Tel: 603-7726 6335
Fax: 603-7728 5335

Understanding 21st Century Singles

Its Implications and Our Responses

1 Corinthians 7:8,9

*“Now to the unmarried and the widows I say:
It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am.
But if they cannot control themselves,
they should marry, for it is better to marry
than to burn with passion.”*

Matthew 19:10-12

*“The disciples said to Him,
“If this is the situation between a husband and
wife, it is better not to marry.”*

*Jesus replied,
“Not everyone can accept this word,
but only those to whom it has been given.
For some are eunuchs because they were born that
way; others were made that way by men; and
others have renounced marriage because of the
kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this
should accept it.”*

When the word “*Singles*” is mentioned, what is the immediate picture that flashes across your mind? To me, the mental image is that of an unmarried adult who is above 30 years old. If I have friends who are above forty years of age and they are striving to be recognised as happily single, their faces would also appear in my mind, possibly because they talk about their singleness with freedom of expression. Having experienced both married and single lifestyles and having known many married and single Christians, both happy and sad ones, I would like to list some of my observations:

Who Do We Mean by “*the Singles*”?

They are the:

- Junior unmarried adults
- Senior unmarried adults
- Widowed adults
- Single parents
- Separated spouses
- Divorces

Observations



In today's Malaysian society, the "single lifestyle" is experienced by both the singles and married couples.

Increasingly, husbands and wives are giving each other the freedom to function as he/she deems fit without disrupting family life. Resulting from growing financial and intellectual independence and increasing physical mobility among women in Malaysia, many husbands and wives make their own decisions for their careers and budgets irrespective of their spouse's views. Many have become more like flat-mates, except for the physical oneness. However, for married couples, the significant difference is that they are committed to a life long unique relationship of mutual caring ... "till death do we part". This commitment holds the family unit together and is edifying for society. Why not, when the family is the basic Creator designed and ordained unit for any human social structure.



On the other hand, many singles have learnt to live in healthy communities such as a common household among friends or natural family members who share fellowship and facilities.

Many have learnt to weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice ... without the related responsibilities of caring for one another till death, and for their own children. They seem to be able to function as a sought of practical family community though there is the lingering thought as to how long they will be able to live together, unless, as good friends, they have openly discussed this uncertainty.



Living as singles, whether unmarried, widowed, separated or divorced, in our society, is not as sexually safe as one likes to think.

Internal and external pressures to find intimate companionship with those of the same or opposite gender are increasingly strong.

If our hearts break to hear, now and then, of sincere Christians who are practising homosexuals, whether male or female, then our Father's heart must be bleeding. Is there no answer to the need for genuine caring human relationships apart from the natural married and family life? Though homosexuality cannot be excused as an alternative family lifestyle, we can sometimes feel with the intense cry by many for love and acceptance. This arises out of our mutual need for God's grace as fellow fallen human beings.



Loneliness is experienced by both the singles and the marrieds unless Christian fellowship and friendship goes beyond lip service inside and outside our homes.

Many husbands have long been too busy for their families; many wives are too busy for their husbands and children as well. The marrieds do not enjoy deep companionship unless they work hard at their marriages. In the same manner, the singles do not enjoy companionship either unless they learn to build up good friendship with others around them. The point is that people are still not recognising the fact that the *grass often appears greener on the other side.*

Impressions

Not all singles in churches need help from a special ministry to the singles in local churches though such a ministry may be set up for the purpose of identifying with new contacts.

However, I qualify this impression by saying that this will be true only if the church community is already functioning as a caring family with sufficient open homes for the lonely, whether single or not. Otherwise, a ministry to specifically to the singles may be necessary.

Churches have to be taught to include singles in temporal natural and eternal spiritual families as much as possible. However, singles must respond by taking upon themselves to care for others too. They too need to care for others as they would care for their natural parents, brothers and sisters or children. They must not simply enjoy care from those with families without reciprocating on a long-term basis ¹.

For example:

If someone is sick and you, as a single person, have resources to help, would you use them to minister to that person even though he is not your natural family member?

If someone is in financial difficulty and you can help, would you do so instead of washing your hands off the person just because she is married and has a husband and children?

Vice versa, would the marrieds who have more than enough resources for their natural families share with another person in need, whether she is single or not?

Nevertheless, we are not to get distracted from Jesus' way of caring by singling out a special group in churches. That may lead to party spirit or idolising of our hobby horse project.

*I believe that Scriptures teach us,
and Jesus has shown us,
that God's love is expected to flow both
ways within His community.*

We are to love one another as Jesus has loved us by laying down His life for us. We know that Peter, for example, was married and cared for his mother-in-law (*Matthew 8:14,15*) while the Martha-Mary-Lazarus family seems to be a singles' household which Jesus befriended with a pure heart (*Luke 10:38-42*). Actually, it does not really matter who form the members in a household as long as they love one another for Jesus' sake. In the context of the impressions stated above, I would like to list some myths and some realities of singlehood. This section will also include a biblical discussion on being single and suggestions for specific ministry to singles whenever necessary.

Church activities need to be more wholesome than just having a singles' fellowship. Singles need a more balanced community life with people of all age groups and of both genders. Churches that have encouraged this "family" atmosphere seem to be more beautiful and whole as God's real eternal family.

Whether married or single, we all need community life, private time for ourselves and time to be alone with God.

Hence, singles do not need to feel they are intruding into a family's privacy when invited to join them as part of God's family. Being married, I have felt that, sometimes, the singles feel that I am intruding too. I think this is unhealthy. We need to mutually respect and enjoy each other's company or withdraw without connecting it to singlehood or married life.

Understanding our Single Friends

Some Myths of Singleness ²



*The only fulfilled woman is
a married woman.*

For the Chinese, this is largely due to the belief that the identity of a woman is based on her role as daughter, wife or mother; for Indians, this is due to a woman's accepted role as that of serving men at home. I vividly remember the surprise I had when one of our Tamil church members invited my husband and I for lunch one Sunday afternoon. As I was wondering why the hostess was not seated with us, she smilingly replied that it is their custom for the hostess to serve the husband and guests. She will later eat in the kitchen. Having just returned from England then, I was silently horrified. However, I have since appreciated this custom as long as there is mutual respect at home. For a woman such as my friend, fulfillment in marriage means loving service to her family (who responds with love and respect), not just romance with her husband, which is an often over-emphasised western view of marriage, I find.

Similarly, many single women are fulfilled because they have worked on their relationships with brothers and sisters in Christ through giving and receiving because of the family bonds in Christ.



The natural and main fulfillment of every woman is to be a mother.

Women, generally, have a special dose of the gift of feeling. Hence, many women need the mutual sharing of feelings. This they seldom find among men even if they are their husbands. However, children respond with their feelings more freely. As I perceive, it is this need for mutual sharing of the heart that makes women long for children, even if not their own. This desire may be fulfilled in singles through a giving of themselves in service to young people's work as a vocation or through the teaching of children in church, for example.



Singles are sexually frustrated and are therefore more prone to engage in deviant sexual behavior.

We know that, in reality, all face sexual temptations, whether we be single or married.



Finding the right spouse will solve all their problems.

If this were true, then there will be no solution to most problems because there is no "right spouse" as such. Any marriage between two imperfect individuals will surely be imperfect though in various degrees.



Marriage is God's will for all people

This we know to be untrue by observation and what Scriptures reveal in Jesus' perfect humanity as an unmarried male.



All confirmed bachelors are afraid of responsibility.

Take a look at Paul the apostle and the theologian John Stott. Both excel in being and doing their best for God.



All single adults are uniquely lonely.

Ask your mature single male or female friends.



Singles are basically selfish.

Watch out!



Singles are rich.

"If only that were true", some may sigh ...

The Reality of the Escalating Number of Singles in our Churches.

- The church in Malaysia cannot afford to ignore or neglect the needs of an increasing proportion of single members in their local church families. The Founder and Head of the church remained single as a man for the sake of the kingdom of His Father. He would certainly be addened if we forget to notice the singles' needs in the midst of pressures to care for other groups of people in our churches. This neglect is especially true in cities unless special attention is given to those not as dynamic and extroverted as, for example, worship leaders and youth leaders.
- To commit ourselves to care for the singles in our midst does not mean that we are discouraging Christian marriages but it does mean that we are encouraging singles to grow into maturity in Christ.
- From Jesus' own example in our fallen world (which is in the process of redemption), both married and single lifestyles are valid in God's eyes. Our single and married states are simply different contexts in which we grow into Christ-likeness.

- As God's children, singles and marrieds are as equally loved by Him. He equips both for ministry in His kingdom and His world. It is therefore even more necessary and pressing for churches to value and incorporate singles into ministries, whether locally or further afield.

The Theology of Singlehood

Let us consider God's views on the vocation of singlehood. We need to remember that:

A married man or woman is no more whole than one who remains single.

The Lord Jesus remained single as a man and He was completely whole.

Each human being is made to live in co-humanity with the rest of humankind. The community we are placed in comprises both single and married people. Christian communities such as certain student or professional Christian groups, for example, are not representative of a church because they consist of people of the same peer group and sometimes of one gender. They 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 ground of unfaithfulness, not if the men desired other women, presumably.

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.

Singlehood is as much a gift from God as marriage. Each is to be treasured as it comes. The potential of each state is to be utilized to the fullest for His sake.

Being single, however, does enable one to have greater freedom in certain areas in contrast with their married brethren.

Some of these areas are:

- More freedom to utilise their time without having to consider a second person's needs.
- More freedom to have a lifestyle they choose, whether simpler or more sophisticated.
- More freedom to choose from a wide variety of ministries without worries over family needs, apart from caring for aging parents whenever necessary.
- More freedom to spend time with non-family member friends and be flexible in socialising methods.
- More freedom to serve God in situations that would otherwise incur extraordinary sacrifices on the part of the family of a married worker.

Remember

The examples of Daniel in the Old Testament, and Jesus and Paul in the New Testament, show that singles are capable of emotional and social stability.

Jesus' 12 disciples and many other friends were both married people and singles.

Ministry to the Singles in Our Churches?

Counselling

Peer and same gender counselling seem to be the wisest unless it is carried out in small groups. It is essential that the counsellors themselves have known the security of God's transforming friendship. Otherwise, they will end up being crutches for one another with unhealthy relationships established and no one to hold them accountable. Lesbianism and male homosexuality is more common in churches than we would like to know. It is useless to condemn them after such wrong dependencies have formed. We need to be active in prevention while opening other avenues for His healing grace to flow to them.

A single male pastor pointed out to me once that counsellors need to be extra careful in helping singles with deep problems because, if they feel rejected by counsellors, very often, they do not have a shoulder to cry on when they return to their room. To cry on wrong shoulders would also add to their problems.

In a book called, “*Single Adult Ministry*”³, the author advised:

- Counsel given must be biblically based
- Counsel must be applicable. Every assignment must have measurable objectives. (This is particularly true for singles, I find, because they have less obligation to be accountable to those around them and so need to take accountability more seriously if they really want change in their lives.)
- Counselees must will to and actually learn to solve their own problems with guidance. Many seek counselling just to have some friendship formed, which is not the purpose of counselling per se.
- Counsellors’ relationship with God must be growing .

Understanding of Celibacy: Defined as a Deliberate Choice to Stay Single

If we look at celibacy as a gift from God, we need to accept that it is not of the singles' own choosing. One single said that it remains a mystery to him as to how he is celibate. We need to encourage celibates to receive God's view of them so that they will have a healthy perception of their own personality. We need to accept and respect the choice to remain single as authentic because of their conviction that it is for the kingdom of God. Jesus Himself made this choice. (According to His words in *Matthew 19:11&12*, the two other reasons for men or women remaining single are that they are born unable to marry and reproduce i.e. they may not have the normal reproductive organs for sexual functions or that others have made them so e.g. due to the deep wounds of sexual abuse).

Most of us often forget that our Lord Jesus, as Son of Man, had androgens. It was probably not easy for Him or His cousin John to have remained celibate for over 30 years without friends and relatives asking questions. They probably had to wrestle with the common feelings of failure, disappointment, dissatisfaction

or lack of fulfillment without spouses, parents or children's support. Some are fearful that they may have to die alone even though, in a way, no one can die for us we just have to face death alone as individual human beings though, for God's children, we know that He is with us.

One of the ministries of the church, therefore, is to see that every single person, whether widowed or never married, has loving care continuously showered on them in their later years so that they will be ushered into God's presence with joy! Perhaps the singles could work towards living in communities once past the 40 age group.

Yet,

***all of us need to learn to
be alone with God and to feel
comfortable about it for ...***

***Is He not the only One who will never
leave us or forsake us?***

Conclusion

Though they state that they have chosen to be single, Malaysian singles prefer to get married when the opportunity arises. They seem to feel that there is a greater sense of belonging and security in marriage. However, only God can grant answers to all our problems as He is sovereign. Only He can be our 100% emotional fulfillment. Hence, as His beloved children, while we may categorise people as marrieds and singles, our worship, acceptance of one another, service, celebrations and devotion to Christ, ultimately, is to be expressed as a community of God's people. In that manner alone will we truly become what God meant us to be ... one with Him and with one another. At that Grand Finale when our Lord Jesus comes on the clouds, together we shall be His Bride, together we shall reflect the Community of the Trinity, as His community of males and females, whether single or married! What true fulfillment that will be!

Reflection

*What are my current views of singlehood in
Christ?*

*How does God see and nurture
His single children?*

*Does my home have a place for friends
who are single?*

References

1. *Building a Love House is Hard Work Chapter 9*
by Lee Bee Teik, MCARE 1996
2. *Single Adult Passage: Unchartered Territories*
by C.A.Koons,
Michigan Baker House 1991
3. *Single Adult Ministry Page 228,*
Colorado, Navpress 1991

Other Books to Read

1. *Tips on Family and Marriage*
by Lee bee Teik,
Reconre Publications 2004
2. *Single and Human*
by Ada Lum IVP 1976
3. *Single to Single - Daily Devotionals*
by and For Single Adults,
Douglas L.Fagerstrom, Editor,
SP Publications Inc. 1991



<http://www.reconre.org>

About the Author

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

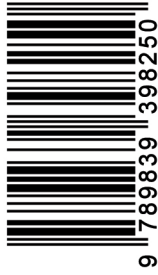
She is married to Dr. Hwa Yung and they have three adult children.

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.

She may be reached at lbt_reconre@hotmail.com

ISBN 978-983-9398-25-0



<http://www.reconre.org>

