

InterSections



Editorial

Welcome to the August 2013 issue of *InterSections*.

This issue has a focus on marriage and family. *Steve Wilson* pens a biblical and theological reflection on God's plan for marriage. On a more controversial slant, *Les Totman* explains scriptural concerns over same-sex marriages – a topic which has generated media and political attention in an election year in Australia.

Shifting to the family front, we interview *Richard & Sylvia Wells* from Hobart. Married for 25 years, the Wells have three adult biological children and two significantly younger adopted boys from Taiwan. The Wells share the joys and trials of overseas adoption and managing an expanded family – all to God's glory.

Our foreign letter in this issue comes from *Kok Bin Ong* in Malaysia. Writing from the city of Seremban, Kok Bin sketches how Christians and churches live in a predominantly Muslim country. Meanwhile, our *ChurchScope* article by *Dale Hartman* spotlights the SouthWest Church of Christ – which recently celebrated its 30th anniversary of ministry in Campbelltown, on the outskirts of Sydney. To round off the issue, we also carry brief news items of the MSOBS lectureship in Sydney and the Klesis-ACCET Church Leadership Forum held in Brisbane.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue. As always, we welcome your feedback and comments (send them to: info@klesis.com.au). If you've enjoyed the magazine, why not forward it along to others who may be interested?

Meanwhile, the Klesis directory of non-denominational Churches of Christ in Australia is being updated and will be on our website (www.klesis.com.au) by the end of August. Do check it out.

Enjoy
Editorial Team

ChurchScope:

SouthWest Church of Christ, Campbelltown, NSW

The weekend of 5-7 July 2013 was a significant week for those of us who have been associated with the Lord's church in Campbelltown. We gathered to celebrate 30 years of outreach, service, sharing and teaching that has been a part of that congregation's existence. Friday evening was spent in sharing a meal and sharing favourite memories of our time together. Saturday noon was a ladies' devotional while the men had lunch during a bushwalk together. Saturday evening was a combination of three lessons and extended times of eating and singing together. Sunday Bible class and worship were followed by a meal and an afternoon of lesson with prayer and praise. After 4pm, when the hall had been vacated, thirty five people were still sharing and catching up as we all finished the day.

Frank Cunningham, longtime minister with the congregation, reflected on his experience: 'One of the qualities of this body that has stood out to me from the beginning is love and acceptance. I did not catch on to everything at first. The



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church here continued to love me and extend to me the opportunity to grow, even when I had not been as faithful as I should have been.'

When the Campbelltown congregation began in 1983, our team was supported by four different congregations in Oklahoma. The 29th & Yale Church of Christ in Tulsa supported Kent & Nancy Hartman. The Britton Road Church of Christ in Oklahoma City supported Charlie & Debbie Powell. The Blackwell congregation supported Tony & Betty Keesee. After supporting David Roper's work at the Macquarie congregation in North Ryde, the Eastside Church of Christ in Midwest City supported Dale & Sheila Hartman. We will forever be grateful for their investment in our families and our work in Australia.

The beginnings of the story started when Kent and Dale visited the church in Australia in 1974. Over the next few years there were individual visits by different couples in anticipation of possibly moving to Sydney in order to plant a church. Dale & Sheila came in 1979 to work with the Macquarie congregation. The Powells and Kent & Nancy arrived in 1983 to start the congregation in Campbelltown.

We estimate that (with our children) we have collectively lived over two hundred years in Australia. Each of our families has at least one child who was born here. Our children were a vital part of the planting of the church in Campbelltown. They gave us the opportunity to meet a lot of people through their school and recreational activities who we would never have met otherwise. Through the years, they were also very involved in inviting their friends to 'Friends Day' and other activities of the church.

Kent wrote a weekly article for a local paper. Other people had told him that was not a very productive way to make contacts. Not one single person came during the first six months. In the next six months over one hundred people visited at one time or another! We learnt that consistency was the key to helping make the initial contact. Many people read Kent's articles and did nothing about it. Several people said they had articles that they particularly enjoyed placed on their fridge door for months before they made the first call or made the first visit.

Now we fast forward to 2013. We quote Frank Cunningham's final comments on the congregation's 30th anniversary:

'SouthWest Church of Christ celebrating 30 years of ministry for Christ. Thirty years of proclaiming that Jesus is Lord. Thirty years of sharing the Good News that there is hope in Jesus Christ for a better life. Thirty years of praising, of worshipping, of singing. Thirty years of fellowshipping (and eating). Thirty years of Bible study and youth ministry. Thirty years of serving, reaching out, giving, feeding and helping. Thirty years of preaching (some of you may think it's been longer), teaching, baptising and sharing in the Lord's Supper. Thirty years of inviting others to church and inviting them to give their lives to Jesus. Thirty years of making a difference in Campbelltown for Christ.



We have people here today who planted this church; others have been with us since the very beginning. Others have come along and have been a part of SouthWest for years and others like Emma have just been added to the Lord's church. We have people who love Jesus, and are excited to help bring others to knowledge of him. We have people of compassion who don't hesitate to help someone who have a need. We have a history of people who were

once a part of us, but have taken what they learnt here to help grow ministries in other churches, such as Andrew Burns.

We have testimonies of people who tell how we as a church have been there for them in their hour of need. We may not have anything to show in the way of material things for the past 30 years, but in terms of lives touched and changed by the power of Jesus Christ, we have so much to show. We have been blessed in so many ways. Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins. God raised him up from the dead. God accepted Jesus's death as payment for our sins. God has kept this church around for 30 years to share that Good News.

So, today I thank each of you for all you have contributed to SouthWest church throughout the past 30 years. Our visitors like the Kevin Brown family and the Stephen Randall family who have supported, encouraged and prayed for us these past 30 years. Our H.I.M. workers and A.I.M workers who have contributed to this work. Our host families this weekend, the SouthWest family as a whole. And we thank God that he brought together the mission team of faithful men and women who planted a church that was built on the Scriptures and the message of Good News found in Jesus Christ – here in Campbelltown. SouthWest's foundation is Jesus Christ, the Son of God.' ■

'Those who build with the Lord shall not build in vain.'
(Psalm 127:1)

*Dale Hartman and his wife Sheila were part of the mission team which helped start the Campbelltown (now SouthWest) congregation. Dale is now a minister and elder with the Eastside Church of Christ in Midwest City, Oklahoma.
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Feature

God's plan for marriage

The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, saying to Him, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?' And He answered and said to them, 'Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' (Matthew 19:3-5, NKJV).

Many Bible students approach questions about marriage by mining the Scriptures for passages relevant to their particular concern. In the text above, the Pharisees model this approach by singling out Deuteronomy 24:1-4 in isolation from the bigger biblical picture of marriage. Prominent among the nuggets usually excavated today are New Testament regulations regarding household relationships (eg. Ephesians 5:22-6:9; Colossians 3:18-4:1; Titus 2:1-10; and 1 Peter 2:18-3:7). Then there are those texts addressing marital challenges and failure (eg. Matthew 19:3-12; 1 Corinthians 7:1-40).

But Jesus' response to the Pharisees' narrow concern about grounds for divorce suggests that we need to begin with the broader foundational issue of God's design and purpose in marriage. A theology of biblical marriage can then provide the framework for exploring and understanding specific issues relating to marriage.

As Jesus points out, the Scriptures declare that marriage derives from human gender (ie. maleness and femaleness). By God's design, men and women are wired differently – both physically and meta-physically. Towards the climax of his creative work, God declares his intention to create humankind in his own image and proceeds to make them male and female (Genesis 1:26-27). This suggests it took both maleness and femaleness to adequately reflect the image of God and to fulfil his purposes for humankind as the Creator's representatives and stewards (ie. priests) over the rest of his creation (ie. his temple).

Thus, human gender is more than simply a physical necessity for procreation. Something spiritually profound occurs when a man and a woman detach from their family of origin to become joined as 'one flesh' (Genesis 2:21-25). This is evidenced by the mystery of the marital one flesh union described in Ephesians 5:28-33 as a type of the union between Christ and his body, the church – and by inference, the mystery of the unity of the Godhead itself (John 17:20-26).

Clearly, a man and a woman becoming one flesh comprises more than just sexual intercourse. The text, 'And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed' (Genesis 2:25), seems to expand the notion of becoming one flesh to suggest a psycho-social relationship so harmonious, so transparent and so accepting as to be without pretence, shame, blame or manipulation (note how things change in this regard between Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 once sin enters the picture).

Yes, there are exceptions to the rule: Paul implies that both marriage (the norm) and celibacy (the exception) is a gift from God (1 Corinthians 7:6-7). Yet, it seems generally true that 'it is not good that the man [male] should be alone'

and so '[God made] him a [female] helper fit for him' (Genesis 2:18; cf. 1 Corinthians 7:2-5). The resulting covenant of marriage which comprehends in a very direct way the social, physical and psycho-spiritual dimensions of human experience and need is therefore a complementary relationship.

The husband's and wife's sameness (both humans of equal worth derived from their *imago dei* or image of God) and their difference (male and female with all the diversity that entails) simultaneously combine to produce an interdependent and a synergistic relationship that could be seen as a signpost pointing to the Creator himself. In other words, marriage and the church mirror the mystery of the trinity: the loving community of the One that is the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And, as Jesus himself noted, this union of a man and a woman forms a life-long bond or covenant not to be treated lightly (Matthew 19:6; cf. Malachi 2:13-16; Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

The essential nature of holy matrimony described above flows from the biblical theology of creation. The Bible's equally important theology of covenant allows us to appreciate the big picture of marriage more fully and richly. It is significant that both God and Jesus frequently use the metaphor of marriage (ie. groom and bride, husband and wife) to describe their covenant relationship first with Israel (eg. Hosea 2:16-19; Isaiah 62:1-5), and later with the church (eg. Matthew 9:15; 22:1-14; Ephesians 5: 32; Revelation 19:7). Using God's covenant relationship revealed in Scripture as our model, I suggest the following is also foundational to biblical marriage.

Firstly, the beginning point of marriage is covenant commitment, the heart of which is unconditional love. Unconditional love is expressed most fully through grace (unmerited favour), which often involves self-sacrifice on the part of the one dispensing grace (eg. longsuffering and forgiveness).

Secondly, out of the security which grace brings to the relationship flows empowerment and intimacy. Empowerment is love (*agape* – being willing and doing what is best for the other) in action. To truly *agape* another is to enable them to flourish in realising their potential for righteousness. In this sense, I think Gary Thomas is right to contend that God designed marriage to make us holy more than to make us happy.¹

Thirdly, I believe authority in marriage (and the church) is a controversial issue largely because the secular view of power is almost always assumed. The secular view is that power or authority is a commodity in limited supply: something to compete and strive for and hold on to – the one with the power is the other's superior. The biblical view is that power or authority is exercised and replenished through sharing and serving – paradoxically, the one with the power is the other's servant. Godly exercise of power, in other words, is about giving it away (think of the incarnation, think of the Cross; cf. Matthew 20:24-28).

¹ Gary Thomas, *Sacred Marriage: What if God designed marriage to make us holy more than to make us happy* (Zondervan, 2000).



Letter from Malaysia

by Kok Bin Ong



I write from Seremban, a mid-sized town about one hour's drive south from Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia. However, we have a new administrative capital, Putrajaya, a stone's throw from Kuala Lumpur. Like Canberra, Putrajaya is purpose-built to house federal administrative offices: from the Prime Minister's office to various other ministries, civil departments and the courts of justice. The legislative Parliament House, however, remains in Kuala Lumpur.

Like Australia, Malaysia was a colony of the British Empire and shares the colours of blue, red and white of the Union Jack. We have yellow too, which signifies royalty. Nine out of the thirteen states of Malaysia have royal families. It is from the heads (eight *sultans* and one *raja*) of these nine royal families that the king of the country is elected once every five years. Thus, Malaysia has a monarchical parliamentary system with Islam as its official religion. The people are nonetheless free to practise other religions of their choice. However, ethnic Malays (unlike Malaysians who are from other ethnic groups, such as Chinese or Indians) by birth and by constitutional definition must practise Islam.

Churches of Christ in Malaysia have a history of about fifty years since the arrival of the first American missionaries in the late 1950s and early 1960s. There are about twenty local congregations spread throughout the western side of West Malaysia with a couple or so in East Malaysia. The oldest, though not the first, is the congregation presently meeting in Sentul, Kuala Lumpur. The largest congregation in terms of Sunday attendance meets in Klang, about 40km from Kuala Lumpur, with reported attendances well over 150. Most of the other congregations have 50-80 in attendance with the smaller ones recording 20 or fewer on any given Sunday.

I work with the congregation in Seremban. It is a relatively healthy church with an active membership of about 70. Though functioning as a fulltime minister of the church, I serve mainly with the English-speaking congregation. There are two others who preach for the other two language groups: Mailvaganam for the Tamil group and Richard Lim for the Mandarin group. On occasion, the three language groups will worship together. When this happens, the sermon will be delivered in English and translated into Tamil and Mandarin. An *agape* feast will typically follow.

The Seremban church comprises mainly adults who are in their fifties. There is also a strong group of young adults and youths who are vibrant and enthusiastic. These younger members love to sing and this gives an extra dimension to the praise worship of the church. The only set-back is that Seremban does not have tertiary institutions to meet the higher educational needs of the young. So, after finishing their secondary schooling, they usually have to go elsewhere to further their studies. Moreover, there are not enough good-paying jobs to attract them back to Seremban once they have completed their studies. Thus, over the years, we have seen quite a number of our members relocate away from Seremban. This is an unfortunate trend for us as we may end up seeing most of our present crop of young adults and youths relocating to the bigger cities in time to come.

For some years now, the Seremban church has had a modest mission programme. Since 2008, we have made annual mission trips to the island of Nias, off Sumatra in

Indonesia. This is where former American missionary, Dennis Cady, has done a lot of work in establishing churches in Gunung Sitoli and elsewhere on the island. For the last two years, we have made medical mission trips to Nias. This September, four from the Seremban church will join a larger group for another medical mission trip to the island.

We are also helping the church in Penang, a city about 350km north of us. On a few Sundays each year I travel to Penang and preach and teach there. In June this year, a group of some 20 young people from Seremban made the trip with me and we had a wonderful 'Singspiration' time there.

For more information on the church in Seremban, browse our website at www.cocsrban.com – and we will, of course, welcome you if you visit us. ■

Kok Bin Ong is a fulltime minister with the Seremban Church of Christ in Seremban, Malaysia, a city of more than half a million people. Kok Bin and his wife, Esther, have faithfully served the congregation for many years. kokbin@gmail.com



HARDING SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

2014 Hogan-Cate Asian Missions Sabbatical

Harding School of Theology invites applications for the 2014 Hogan-Cate Asian Missions Sabbatical. The sabbatical is made possible by the Hogan-Cate Endowed Asian Missions Fund established at Harding University in honour of missionaries to Asia, Gordon & Jane Hogan and Steve & Jean Cate.

The sabbatical recipient will be an outstanding missionary, church worker or ministry leader based in an *acappella* Church of Christ in Asia (this covers East and North Asia, South East Asia, South Asia, Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific). The sabbatical period is 3-5 months commencing from August 2014.

Whilst based largely at HST in Memphis, Tennessee, the sabbatical recipient will also spend time at the main campus of Harding University in Searcy, Arkansas. Funds may be used to cover airfare, food and accommodation, HST tuition fees (audit or credit), visiting churches and ministries and participation in the Harding University Bible Lectureship for spiritual renewal and to promote missions in Asia.

An information sheet and application form are available from www.hst.edu and applications should be emailed to dean@hst.edu on or before Monday, 2 December 2013.

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News MSOBS Lectureship, Sydney

The Macquarie Church of Christ in North Ryde, NSW, hosted the annual Macquarie School of Biblical Studies Lectureship on 10-14 July 2013. This year the theme was 'Treasures in Clay Jars', taken from 2 Corinthians 4:7. Over the five days of lectures about 200 Christians from 21 Australian congregations and four overseas congregations participated. This year we were blessed to have lessons from the four couples who started the SouthWest (formerly Campbelltown) Church of Christ in Campbelltown, NSW, 30 years ago. Other speakers included Brett, Dale and Bryce Christensen from Victoria; Frank Cunningham, Jonathan Frank and Eric Hamilton from SouthWest; and Roberto Quintanilla from Kurrajong. The Saturday afternoon program involved classes for ladies, men and youth.

On the Saturday night there were activities for the young people, and they spent the night at the church building. In the past we have had child minding so that the adults could attend the lessons. However, this year we decided to teach



the children so we had a mini VBS on at the same time. This was based on the same theme and the children were involved in making clay pots, building cardboard boats and following Paul's missionary journeys.

Overall, the week was a wonderful spiritual feast, as well as being a great opportunity to have fellowship with and encourage each other. In the words of Brett Christensen: 'Every year it's a time of spiritual strengthening and encouragement for my whole family, and others have told me that it's the same for them.' ■

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Church Leadership Forum, Brisbane

Organised by Klesis Institute and ACCET (Australian Churches of Christ Evangelistic Trust), this forum presented two workshops to over 60 participants during 24-27 July 2013. Participants came from Queensland, NSW, Victoria, Tasmania and New Zealand. The workshops focused on helping Christians grow deeper in their relationship with God as well as navigating through change and conflict in churches.

Earl Lavender from Lipscomb University, USA, presented the sessions on spiritual deepening. Earl's underlying premise is that a church will grow no deeper in its relationship with God than that of its leaders. The sessions took us through the story of God recorded in the Bible. Earl provided practical skills for developing a richer relationship with God and understanding our lives in light of the story God has been showing the world since time began.

Following these sessions, Steve Joiner, also from Lipscomb, considered potential areas of conflict which can embroil churches. Citing biblical principles, Steve helped present strategies and attitudes through which God can bring about resolution to conflicts and crises.

The two presentations dovetailed beautifully with each other. Our ability to deal with church conflicts in a godly manner is influenced by our relationship with God and our understanding of each other as people who have a role in the purposes of God. Our sincere thanks go to Earl and Steve, Klesis, The Point Church and the Holland Park Church of Christ for the love, time and effort which everyone contributed to facilitate this time of reflection and refreshment. ■

Christine Payne, Belmore Road Church of Christ, Melbourne. paynecp@me.com



Food for Thought *Same-sex Marriage*

God, in his Word, repeatedly warns us that homosexuality is sinful (Genesis 19:1-11; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Judges 19:16-26; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:8-11). However, there are some who take a revisionist view of these passages, suggesting that the Bible does not condemn homosexuality in general.¹

It is argued, for example, that the story of Sodom in Genesis 19:1-11 does not mention homosexuality. Instead, the word 'know' (Genesis 19:5, NKJV) is claimed to indicate that the men of Sodom were demanding to merely become acquainted with the visitors in a most inhospitable manner. This ignores various points: the word 'known' is used three verses later in a sexual way; Lot offers his daughters as an alternative to the men's demands, (obviously not simply for the purpose of acquaintance); Lot describes their behaviour as wicked (not merely discourteous – 19:7); and the behaviour of the men of Sodom is later described as 'fornication and going after strange flesh' (Jude 7).

A similar revisionist view of Romans 1:26-27 argues that this passage only condemns non-consensual homosexual relations and homosexual acts committed by heterosexuals. But the Holy Spirit, through Paul, states that men 'were consumed with

Continued page 6

passion for one another'. This is consensual on both sides. And what of the references to 'natural relations'? Some claim that Paul is speaking of men and women who were heterosexual by nature but who perversely engage in homosexual acts. This passage, they say, is not speaking of those who are naturally homosexual. But this ignores the fundamental boundaries of human sexuality as established by God (Genesis 2:18-24 cf. 1 Corinthians 7:1-9). God so designed us in order that close, mutually supportive emotional and sexual companionship is to be provided by a man and woman committed in marriage. These are the natural relations between humans which homosexuality distorts.

Throughout the Western world we are now witnessing a strong push for the acceptance of homosexuality and same-sex marriage. It has been argued that such acceptance is supported by the majority of Australians. Politicians such as Kevin Rudd and Barry O'Farrell have publicly declared sympathetic views, and the Greens as a party affirm their support. Television has increasingly portrayed same-sex relationships in popular shows and public sympathy is aroused by popular homosexual and lesbian media personalities.

My understanding is that the Australian Constitution affirms marriage to be the union of a man and woman. In a personal letter dated 6 May 2013, the NSW Premier, Barry O'Farrell, states his own understanding that it is not constitutionally possible for the NSW Parliament to legislate in regard to 'marriage equality' (ie. for same-sex couples).² At the time of writing, the NSW Legislative Council Standing Committee is inquiring into the issue and is due to report to the NSW Parliament in late July 2013.³ But even if the Australian Constitution is presently an obstacle, it can be altered by a referendum.

It is worth considering whether additional social engineering may be playing a role in this matter, thereby having a strong influence upon our children and youth from their youngest years. Many young children now attend preschool and are vulnerable to government edicts which must be observed within those facilities. In a Certificate III course on childcare being conducted recently at a TAFE institution in NSW, students were told not to display pictures of heterosexual couples. These are regarded as a *cliché* (even though such couples are a predominant feature of our society). Pictures of same-sex couples, however, were deemed acceptable. Hence, the promotion of same-sex marriage can begin at the earliest stages of education.

In addition, a funded program called 'Proud Schools' is being given a trial in twelve NSW high schools. The program opposes homophobia. Whilst Christians should certainly not support verbal or physical violence towards homosexuals, such a program does tend to promote greater acceptance of homosexuality.

Logically, if governments legislate for same-sex marriage, what is to prevent official sanction of polygamy (the practice of having more than one husband or wife simultaneously) or polyandry (the practice where a woman has two or more husbands simultaneously)? If one is acceptable, why not the others?

Furthermore, it appears that some homosexuals are not merely seeking to replicate heterosexual marriage. There is a

movement in Australia and elsewhere known as 'polyamory'. The word means 'many loves' and advocates of polyamory support legally-recognised non-monogamous relationships involving a 'panoply of sexual groupings and gender variations'.

In the US, the 1972 Gay Rights Platform drawn up by the National Coalition of Gay Organizations called for, among other things, the 'repeal of all legislative provisions that restrict the sex or number of persons entering into a marriage unit; and the extension of legal benefits to all couples who cohabit, regardless of sex or numbers.'⁴ In an Australian counselling study book, *Relationship Counselling and Conflict Resolution*, Bob Barret and Colleen Logan are quoted as stating, 'a more recent trend in the gay male community is for a couple to seek a third person who becomes an equal part of their household ...'⁵ They also say, 'Probably by now you have learned that there are few patterns that define gay and lesbian relationships.' Not all homosexuals are seeking merely two-person relationships.

On this and many other issues of social morality, Christians need to take a stand. Unbiblical pluralism and tolerance are already established in some parts of the church and we need to wake up. We need to study, preach and teach God's Word in its fullness.

We also need to show, especially to our young people, the social relevance of God's teachings. There is a wealth of medical and other data showing that God's morality is beneficial. God does not set his standards on a mere whim.

Our young people are being influenced from every direction by secular attitudes and we need to develop effective, informed ways of countering this. We could also make an effort to write informed letters to our politicians expressing why the approval of same-sex marriage is socially harmful. Will Christians stay silent, leaving the homosexual lobby to promote its cause unopposed?

Same-sex marriage is justified on the grounds that 'two people, who love each other, whatever their gender, should be free to marry.' But it's not that simple. People often commit adultery because of 'love'. People cohabit out of 'love'. People divorce and marry someone else because they have found a new 'love'. 'Love' does not make wrong right.

Despite claims to the contrary, homosexuality has not been shown to be genetic.⁶ In regard to emotional and sexual fulfilment, as well as many other issues, God has prescribed what is spiritually, physically, emotionally and socially beneficial. We should uphold our Creator's plan. ■

Endnotes

- 1 For a thoughtful response to these revisionist views, see the commentary on Romans 1 & 2 in Colin Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Pillar New Testament Commentary) (Eerdmans, 2012).
- 2 Personal letter from Barry O'Farrell to the writer, dated 6 May 2013.
- 3 *Ibid.*
- 4 Quoted in F. LaGard Smith, *Sodom's Second Coming* (Harvest House Publishers, 1993) p 16.
- 5 Bob Barret & Colleen Logan, *Counselling Gay Men and Lesbians: A Practice Primer* (Cengage Learning, 2001), as quoted in the Australian Institute of Professional Counsellors study book, *Relationship Counselling and Conflict Resolution* (AIPC) p 236.
- 6 See: Anthony Giddens, *Sociology* (Polity Press, 2006) p 452; and Brad Harrub et al, "'This Is The Way God Made Me" - A Scientific Examination of Homosexuality and the "Gay Gene"', *Reason & Revelation*, August 2004 (Apologetics Press) p 73-79.

Feature - God's plan for marriage

Fourthly, intimacy brings us full circle back to the essential 'one flesh' nature of biblical marriage. Whenever there is covenant faithfulness and unconditional love and grace in a marriage, there is an environment where mutual empowerment, authentic openness, honesty and acceptance can occur. Truly, perfect love does cast out fear (cf. 1 John 4:16-21).

Thus, marriage according to God's plan is the intentional establishment of a covenant between a man and a woman that is characterised by commitment, faithfulness, unconditional love and grace. The ensuing 'one flesh' union facilitates human intimacy and encourages both wife and husband to grow to reflect more fully the image – and therefore the glory – of God.

Earlier, we saw that the Pharisees were interested in what God would allow in order to validate a biblical divorce. We can now see that the Bible has a lot more to say about marriage than that. Had they understood and humbly sought to honour God's 'big picture' design and purpose for marriage, they may not have been so preoccupied with trying to find loopholes in God's arrangements. ■

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Interview - Richard & Sylvia Wells

What have been the emotional challenges for Wei-Chen and Yung-Shin?

It's difficult to imagine how much they must lose to gain a permanent family. They had already lost a birth family but they subsequently lost a foster family also. They then came to another place where everyone talked funny, looked unfamiliar, ate funny food and even the smells were different. They have had a lot of grief and anger to process and so much to learn. It can be very different for each child depending on their previous experiences, such as: whether they've been loved so that they have the unconscious security of knowing that they are lovable; whether they've been well prepared for the changes; and their resilience in temperament.

How has the family coped?

We made this choice – we prayed about it and saw God opening the doors that needed to open for it all to happen. Some things came easily. Having some training also helped as we had attachment plans in place. But we knew that there would be 'unknowns' in the process. Still, there have been surprises and being able to lean on God and each other has been essential to making it work.

Our two oldest children no longer live at home but Grace does. It's been wonderful seeing the relationships that the boys have forged with her. They absolutely adore her and she loves them too (although perhaps not so much if they've wrecked something in her room that they weren't meant to touch). She's our favourite baby-sitter too!

Is there any advice you would offer to parents considering overseas adoption?

Read, read, read and talk, talk, talk. I think you need to believe that this is what you are meant to be doing. Trust in God to make you accomplish what he has planned. Consider the worst scenario but plan on being successful in your preparation. As much as you can, build a great support team for when you come home and let them know what you need. In Australia, each state has its own laws and each adopting country has its own regulations so there is no one path. But I would definitely want to be praying through the process and each decision you make along the way. ■

*Richard and Sylvia Wells are members of the Lindisfarne congregation in Hobart, Tasmania. They were interviewed by Jenny Ancell.
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InterSections

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Interview

Richard & Sylvia Wells

Richard and Sylvia Wells are active members of the Lindisfarne congregation in Hobart, Tasmania. Married for 25 years, they have five children: Zachary (24), Gemma (23), Grace (20), Wei-Chen (6) and Yung-Shin (5). Richard works as a builder and Sylvia is a full-time mum, works with the family business and is studying social work part-time. Together they talk about their own family experiences, including their journey of adopting two young boys from Taiwan.



Where did you meet as a couple?

Easy questions first! We met at Blue Sky Bible camp near Sydney in 1985/86.

Can you tell us about any memorable experience raising your children?

We've twice travelled around Australia with our older children – once when they were all pre-schoolers and again when they were teenagers. This is a great uniting activity to do as a family and furnishes plenty of memories. On our first trip, we were an hour north of Katherine in the Northern Territory when we blew not one but two tyres on the camper. Since we only had one spare tyre we had to leave the camper behind and drive to Katherine. We were pulled over by a carload of locals who told us that we shouldn't leave the camper there as it would be gone when we returned. We felt fairly safe – the last thing that went into the camper and would need to be the first thing out for any would-be-thief was the nappy bucket – surely it wouldn't be worth it! When we got back, it was still there.

All we need now is another trip with the little boys. The boys are at the age where they come out with funny things from time to time. We were playing 'I spy' recently and Yung-Shin – who is still learning his alphabet – said, 'I spy, my eye something white and happy' (ice-cream).

Are there any spiritual values or traditions which have been important to you in raising a family?

We've always tried to encourage the children (and ourselves) to keep our eyes on Jesus. People will disappoint but Jesus never does (Hebrews 12:2). There's no such thing as a perfect parent, excluding God of course. We endeavour to be a good example, repent and make restitution when we muck up. It's important to encourage the children's faith by reading the Bible together, singing and praying as a group at home. Also we ought to teach our children to love our neighbour and be seen doing this ourselves.

How did your interest develop in overseas adoption?

We wanted more children but it just didn't happen. Having had an adopted sibling myself, adoption wasn't a strange concept. I guess we became aware that there were many children who needed families and we felt we might be able to offer that to one or two children. Due to Australia's strict immigration policies, however, the most vulnerable and needy are the ones almost impossible to adopt.

What have been some of the blessings and hurdles in the adoption process?

Having our two precious boys join our family!

Here in Tasmania we were really blessed by the foresight of a wonderful training program that the Adoption Department had in place. That training was eye-opening and sent us on a discovery of information that was challenging but wholly necessary for families considering adoption. The adoption process entails enormous amounts of paperwork and close scrutiny of family values and relationships, finances and history – which are all rather daunting.

At times one feels at the mercy of someone's impression of you. But for us it was certainly a process bathed in prayer and we were blessed to meet and work with a couple of awesome social workers and a psychologist in the process. Waiting for your child can be tough – especially once you are allocated a child and yet the process must still take its course. In our case, there were court cases still to follow and with one of our little guys a battle with immigration over a really minor health issue.

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