Core Seminars – Marriage

Week 10

# The Blessings of Children

# The Joy & Privilege of Procreation & Parenting

**Introduction**

Does our world think of children as a curse? One might think so. *Abortion* continues to riddle our society, with approximately 42 million abortions worldwide every year, which show us how little much of our society thinks of children. *Reproduction rate* in countries like Japan show that their birth rate is so low the population is decreasing, not increasing. Or we run into *groups* like the British Society for non-parents (deliberate childlessness) or websites like childfree by choice.com. The director for the society said, “I have never wanted to be a father. I have never wanted that sort of responsibility. It is the fact that child-rearing goes on every bloody day for so long…I just do not want to devote myself in this way to children.” He’s right about the level of responsibility, yet you see a fundamental selfishness in his life.

Or let me give you a real life scenario. Take Jonathan for example. He and his wife were married for six months, and his wife just called informing him that she was pregnant. A part of him was delighted. A part of his was panicking. How were they going to survive financially? Will Sarah have to quit her job or can she keep working? They were hoping to take a European vacation next summer—don’t know if that is possible anymore? He’s never served in children’s ministry so he doesn’t know the first thing about children. What does he need to know to be a decent parent? One might think by the way he worried that he feared the burden that children might be on his happy-go-luck-care-free life.

What do you think? Are children a curse or a blessing? As Christians, how are we to think about children and marriage? What does the Bible have to say about married couples having children? That’s what we would like to consider today.

**What Does the Bible Say about Having Children in Marriage?**

We start by thinking about what the Bible has to stay about having children in marriage. Let’s consider four things.

**Marriage is for Making Babies**

First, marriage is for making babies. We’ve talked about the fact that the main point of marriage is your marriage is to be picture/reflection of the relationship of Christ and his bride, the church. But another reason for marriage is having children; making babies. In the natural course of marriage, if everything works as expecting, husbands and wives will have babies.

Look at Genesis 1:28, Scripture tells us, “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.”

A part of the divine blessing in the creation account is procreating. God gave man and woman the ability to reproduce. If you look throughout the book of Genesis, you’ll find that idea of divine blessing and procreation are closely tied together (9:1, 7; 17:20; 28:3; 35:11; 48:4). Because procreation is a part of God’s blessing,itimplies that having children a good thing; it is a kindness of God that he allows us to have children.

In Gen 1:28, image-bearers (men and women) are called upon by God to fill the earth and subdue it; and to rule over the creation. One way we fulfill this responsibility to “rule” and “subdue” the earth is by having children. This is not some weird sci-fi movie where there is a master plot to overtake the planet. No, this is God’s plan, in creation, to help men and women fulfill their responsibility to be God’s caretakers in the garden of Eden and beyond.

Notice: This seems to be God’s clear intention in creation—that man and woman would have children in order to subdue the earth. So this is the first place you’ll run into a problem if you choose deliberate childless-ness. Don’t argue with me; if you don’t want children, take your argument up with God. As the great Creator, God gave man and woman the ability to recreate.

**Marriage is for Making Worshippers**

Second, marriage is for making worshippers. By giving man and woman the ability to have children, God wants to do more than just fill the earth with warm bodies. God wants worshippers.

Husbands and wives have a responsibility in producing disciples of Christ. We can’t save our children (only God can), but we can point them to the truth. God gives couples children *so that* truth can be passed on to the next generation.

“*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.* ***Impress them on your children.*** *Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.”* Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Later in Duet 31, he goes on to say, “Do this so that your children who have not known these instructions will hear them and will learn to fear the Lord your God.” Parents are commanded to communicate the truths of God to our children so that their kids will one day fear the Lord.

What are the consequences if Christian parents decide to not have children (and leave it to the pagans) or if Christian parents are irresponsible about teaching truth to their children? Joshua, nearing the end of his life and having seen the Lord’s promises fulfilled charges Israel with this:

*“Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” Joshua 24:14-15*

What happens?

*“After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals. They forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers ….”* Judges 2:10-12

They neither knew the Lord nor what he had done for Israel. Do you see how tragic this is? One generation knew God and loved him. The very next generation turned their back on the God of their fathers. We, as Christian parents, are charged with the responsibilities of teaching truth to our kids. We are one of the primary means by which God uses to communicate truth to the next generation.

A few years ago, I heard a pastor mention that primary way Christianity grows is through parenting. Most Christians who you know probably came to faith because their parents were faithful in teaching their kids. While it is true that children can be taught truth in a variety of places (at church, in Sunday school, through a good Christian school, etc.), we recognize through texts of Scripture like Deut 6 that God assigns the primary responsibility for discipleship of children to parents; not the church.

John Piper points out that this has huge implications for infertile children. As hard as it is to struggle with not getting pregnant, and considering the possibility of never having biological children of your own, realize that the point of having kids is to produce worshipers of God. So whether the children a biological or adopted, the goal is to produce more worshippers.

For those of you who have considered adoption, realize that if this is true (i.e., marriage is for making worshippers) than that means adoption is no longer a plan B which you use if you are infertile. That makes adoption a plan A – a chance for anyone to use our resources to bring a child into a family who desires to point that child to gospel of Jesus Christ. Adoption is not for everyone; not every family can or should adopt. But adoption is certainly something we should all at least consider and pray about, especially since the theme of adoption is common in the Bible (Romans 8:23; Gal 3:23-25; Eph 1:5).

**Children are a Heritage, Reward and Blessing**

Third, the bible describes children as a heritage, reward and a blessing. Let’s turn to Psalm 127. Solomon writes, “Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him.  Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one’s youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them.  They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate.”(Ps 127:3-5).

Children are described as a “heritage” and a “reward”. *Heritage* gives this idea of something that is passed on from one generation to the next. As you have children, your life, your values, you annoying habits, you hopes and dreams, you likes and dislikes, and much, much more is passed on the next generation. I’ve often said to my wife that her job is much more important than mine. She gets enormous amount of time every week to disciple our children and shape and influence their tiny hearts. Few of us in this room are ever going to reach such fame such that we will be remembered in future generations. Even most U. S. Congressman are forgotten within a generation or two. For most of us, our greatest realm of influence, especially in the years beyond our death, will be through our children. So I tell my wife, “Your investment into our children will bear more fruit in the years to come; much more than anything I will ever do at work…” That’s our heritage (our legacy)….it will be our children and the impact our kids will have on this world. Will it be a redemptive, God-glorifying heritage, or something much less?

The other word used here in Psalm 127 to describe children is *reward*. God gives children as a good gift to parents.

What about word picture we see in vs. 4-5? Children are compared to arrows in the hand of a warrior. And again you see the word blessing in reference to children—it is a blessing to have a quiver full of children. To have children when you are still young (and not when you are old) means you will have someone to contend for you at disputes that occur at the gate. “The gate” is not the fence around your yard. It is the city gate; the place where court is held and disputes are settled in the community. Children are a means of protection for the parents and the parent’s property and disputes at the city gate. Those who didn’t wait to have children until they were old (cf. Gen 37:3) would have someone to speak up on them when they were aging and their enemy is trying to shame at the city gate. So the word picture here signifies children as a blessing of protection for ailing and elderly parents. In Solomon’s day, social security and medicare came in the form of children who take care of you when you were old. The same is true in our day in many senses…most of the folks in this room don’t have aging parents who need more full-time care. The interesting thing about most of our life cycles is that we are born dependent on our parents as babies. We grow to be independent and self-sufficient. But there will come a day for most of us when our parents will be feeble and unable to take of themselves…..so whether it is the choices you make for their fulltime care, or to you actually doing the full-time care, your parents will one day become fully dependent on you to care for their needs. As my father used to say, “I had children so that one day I’d have someone to take care of me when I’m old.” Walter Kaiser: “Children are the best retirement plan going because they are living assets.”

Don’t be stingy with how many kids you have. The bible says to have a quiver full of them. And don’t wait to have all of your assets and career goals lined up, Solomon encourages us to have children while we are still young.

**Children are Sought After and Celebrated**

Finally, (we mentioned last week) the Bible is full of examples of children as sought after and celebrated. When Esau questions Jacob about his family, “Jacob answered, ‘They are the children God has graciously given your servant.’” (Genesis 33:5b) Children are consistently celebrated in scripture. As such, marriage should include children.

[PAUSE FOR QUESTIONS]

**Deliberately Choosing Barrenness**

Early in our marriage, we waited to have children. Around the third year of our marriage, we got pregnant with Zac. A few months after he was born, Sarah said to me, “Why did we wait?” We adore our kids. We find so much joy in our parenting that we wondered if we waited too long.

One of my favorite parts of the day is when I arrive home and from across the house I can hear my two-year-old daughter screaming, “Daaaaddddy!” She runs from wherever she is and wraps her arms around my legs and she looks up at me with those beautiful eyes and adorable smile. Priceless. *Absolutely* priceless. In parenting, there are so many sources of unspeakable joy, it just doesn’t make sense why anyone would choose deliberate barrenness.

I’m not talking about infertility; rather, I am addressing those couples that have consciously decided to forgo having children either for an extended period of time or indefinitely. There is no category for such behavior in the Bible. Why would you want to forgo a blessing from God? Why do you believe the command in Genesis does not apply to your situation? I would challenge you to examine the Scriptures and consider how to submit your will to God’s in this area.

**Birth Control**

Of course, this naturally leads to the question of birth control.

What is birth control? It is any means to stop pregnancy.

While the Bible does not address the issue of birth control explicitly, it does address our hearts and our wills in birth control as in all other matters of life. It is quite clear from Scripture that we shall not murder. Thus, abortion and infanticide are clearly sin. Likewise, devices which prevent the implantation of a fertilized egg such as morning after pills and IUDs are prohibited. Beyond such devices (where using birth control is sinful), your decision to use birth control comes down to a question of motivation and attitudes.

So let’s think in terms of practical examples to explore some of the motivations and attitudes that can revolve around birth control use. What you’ll find below are simple attempts at ungodly and godly examples.

Ungodly example: Bob and Jane have very prosperous careers in DC, and basically they think, “*Kids are a hassle and our careers are going great.”* In fact, Jane has a concern about overpopulation. She says, *“We can go off the pill later…right now we want to enjoy the money, time, leisure, etc.*.”

What do you think? I would argue that this is a sinful and rebellious attitude. They are deliberately choosing to be childless because of their selfishness. Essentially children will get in the way of their careers and their fun, so they don’t want any. Children are a major blessing from God, and such attitudes act as if that is not the case.

Godly example: How about David and Donna, “*In thinking long-term about our overall ministry, it seems wise at this stage to hold off for a specified period of time in order to prepare.”* Or Sam and Elizabeth, *“We are deliberately delaying children for a couple years in order to pay off debt, so my wife can stay home fulltime.”* Or how about Michael and Sarah,*“ God has given us six kids, and they're a delight...but we are thinking of using birth control because it's getting harder and harder to provide them with the care God requires - we're having trouble feeding them, and tuition costs (or home school costs) aren't going to get any lower.”* Or, lasting, what about Jim & Barabara, *“God has graciously given us two children but due to significant complications in pregnancy, we feel it is not wise to severely risk my wife’s help by having more children.”*

Thereasonwhy these folks are choosing to use birth control is because they are trying to preserve other godly principles. The examples reflect a thankful attitude for kids, but a variety of reason why not to have kids at this present moment.

What's the bottom line? Whether or not birth control is right depends largely on motivations. A Christian couple using birth control should not necessarily assume they're in the right, but should examine their use of birth control in light of the clear biblical teaching that children are a gift from God and that one purpose of marriage is childbearing. Our elders have not categorically banned birth control. Like many other things, most birth control in and of itself is not sinful, but it can be sinful if it is used to perpetuate selfish desires.

[TAKE FINAL QUESTIONS]

**References:**

* The outline for points 1 & 2 are from Piper. The content of the points basically from me, expect the “warm bodies” idea.
* British Society for Non-parents (plus the quote) – Christopher Ash’s *Married for God*.
* First part of point 2 comes from Schmucker’s *Communicating Truth to Your Children*