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## **The Gift of Children**

*“Behold, children are a gift of the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth. How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them; they will not be ashamed when they speak with their enemies in the gate” (Psalm 127:3-5).*

Christians, more than anyone else in the world, need to see children as a blessing. This perspective is going to be different from many in the world who see children as being a burden, a hindrance, or expendable. Yet the Scriptures are clear – children are a gift from the Lord (Psalm 127:3-5).

### **Children are a Blessing**

When David ran into trouble trying to transport the ark in an unauthorized manner, he stored the ark at the house of Obed-edom. Because he kept the ark safely, *“the Lord blessed the family of Obed-edom”* (1 Chronicles 13:14). How did God bless this man? It is possible that He blessed him in many ways, but the Scriptures specify one way in which he was blessed.

*“Obed-edom had sons: Shemaiah the firstborn, Jehozabad the second, Joah the third, Sacar*

*the fourth, Nethanel the fifth, Ammiel the sixth, Issachar the seventh and Peullethai the eighth; God had indeed blessed him” (1 Chronicles 26:4-5).*

This man had eight sons. The Scriptures clearly indicate that these eight sons came as a result of God blessing Obed-edom. We need to recognize children as being such a blessing as well.

Besides being a blessing, children are also an example of God’s enduring providence. In the beginning when the first child was born, Eve acknowledged God in the birth of her son.

*“Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, ‘I have gotten a manchild with the help of the Lord’” (Genesis 4:1).*

Since that time, women have continued to bear children as Eve did – not through some direct miraculous action by God, but through the natural process of childbirth that God providentially gave since the beginning. From now until the end of time, *“women will be preserved through the bearing of children”* (1 Timothy 2:15). This process will not change or be taken away by God.

While we understand that children are gifts from God, we must also realize that not all will be blessed with children. Notice the conversation that is recorded between Jacob and Rachel after Leah gave birth to her fourth son (Genesis 29:31-35):

*“Now when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she became jealous of her sister; and she said to Jacob, ‘Give me children, or else I die.’ Then Jacob’s anger burned against Rachel, and he said, ‘Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?’” (Genesis 30:1-2).*

The fact that Rachel had no children to this point was not her fault, nor was it Jacob’s fault. She had simply not been blessed with children (at least not to this point). There are two lessons we should learn from this. First, those who are childless need to have patience and contentment. They should not become jealous of others as Rachel had become of her sister. Second, we all should have compassion and respect for those who are childless – not as Hannah’s rival who would *“provoke her bitterly to irritate her, because the Lord had closed her womb”* (1 Samuel 1:6). We should practice the “golden rule” and *“treat people the same way [we] want them to treat [us]”* (Matthew 7:12).

In all of this, it is important to remember that children are a blessing. However, no one is guaranteed to have this blessing from the Lord. Therefore, we must recognize children as the *gift* that the word of God describes them to be.

## **Many in the World Have a Contrary View**

Sadly, many do not see children as being a gift from God. Instead, they think of children as being a burden. Certainly there are important responsibilities that come with raising children. Parents must be willing to sacrifice self, money, time, etc. However, the joy that comes by being

blessed with children should outweigh any hardships that come from our sacrifices.

The example of Jesus provides us with a parallel to our study of parenting. The Hebrew writer said, *“Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God”* (Hebrews 12:2). Jesus was willing to sacrifice His life *“for the joy set before Him.”* What was this joy? It was the salvation of man. Or, as the Hebrew writer described it earlier, *“bringing many sons to glory”* (Hebrews 2:10). As Jesus was willing to sacrifice for our sakes, parents ought to sacrifice willingly for the welfare of their children. Yet too many focus on the burden. Let us notice two extreme examples to illustrate this mentality.

*“And the king said to her, ‘What is the matter with you?’ And she answered, ‘This woman said to men, ‘Give your son that we may eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow.’ So we boiled my son and ate him; and I said to her on the next day, ‘Give your son, that we may eat him’; but she has hidden her son”* (2 Kings 6:28-29).

When Samaria was under siege, the people became desperate. This woman made an agreement with another woman to kill and eat her son in order to survive the famine. While we often hear that desperate times call for desperate measures, this is a line that no parent should cross. It indicates that one lacks *“natural affection”* (Romans 1:31, KJV) that all people – even those who have not been taught the word of God – should have. While cannibalism is not common today, the mentality of the mother in this

passage is. She was willing to sacrifice her child for her own welfare. Parenting ought to lead one to do the opposite – sacrifice self for the welfare of the child.

*“They built the high places of Baal that are in the valley of Ben-hinnom to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech, which I had not commanded them nor had it entered My mind that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin” (Jeremiah 32:35).*

These people were guilty of what was almost unthinkable – sacrificing their children as burnt offerings to a false god. It is easy to draw a parallel between this and the practice of abortion (which we will address in a moment), yet I want us to consider the broader application of this text. An idol is not necessarily a graven image like we often see described in the Bible. Instead, an idol is *anything* that rivals or replaces God for our allegiance and devotion. Paul said that *greed* is idolatry (Colossians 3:5). Today, people have made idols of money, their career, a desired lifestyle, etc. Many parents are willing to sacrifice their children for the sake of their idol (pursuing their earthly goals). Children are seen by many as a hindrance or an obstacle to one’s personal fulfillment.

Furthermore, the view of many people that children are not a gift of God is a consequence of evolutionary thought. The Scriptures tell us that man is made in God’s image (Genesis 1:26-27). But if this were not true, then man is no different from the animals. Notice what the wise man wrote:

*“For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same. As one dies so dies the other; indeed, they all have the same breath and there is no advantage for man over beast, for all is vanity. All go to the same place. All came from the dust and all return to the dust. Who knows that the breath of man ascends upward and the breath of the beast descends downward to the earth?”* (Ecclesiastes 3:19-21).

Those who ignore spiritual things and the fact that there is life after death for us will see the fate of men and animals as being the same – both die and return to the dust. However, the wise man noted that *“the breath of man ascends upward”* to God (cf. Ecclesiastes 12:7) and *“the breath of the beast descends downward.”* Man has life after death. Animals do not. But the evolutionist believes that humans are essentially no different from the animals. If man does not have a soul, then a child is soulless, expendable, and unimportant. This is contrary to what the Scriptures teach.

We cannot leave this section without mentioning the plague of abortion. Since the legalization of abortion in this country, tens of millions of babies have been killed in the womb. Why have they been aborted? In many cases, the financial burden seemed too great. In other cases, the parents simply did not want the responsibility of raising a child. Often abortions were performed to save a young mother and/or her family from the embarrassment of an out-of-wedlock birth. Whatever excuse is given, ultimately, the reason why babies are aborted comes down to this: *people do not recognize the great gift that children are.*

Abortion does not just terminate a clump of cells; it kills one who was made in the image of God. Notice the following passages:

*“Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, ‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations’” (Jeremiah 1:4-5).*

*“For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother’s womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth; Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them” (Psalm 139:13-16).*

These passages remind us that the unborn are known by God, formed by God, and that their lives are useful to God. We need to recognize this as well. We must never allow the world to shape our thinking when it comes to children.

## **How to Treat Children as a Gift**

Understanding what the Scriptures teach about children being a gift from God, we need to know *how* to treat children as a gift.

First, we must be thankful for them. Hannah prayed to God that she might be blessed with a child (1 Samuel 1:10-11). The Lord granted her request. *“It came about in due time, after Hannah had conceived, that she gave birth to a son; and she named him Samuel, saying, ‘Because I have asked him of the Lord’”* (1 Samuel 1:20). She then offered a prayer of praise to God, thanking Him for her son (1 Samuel 2:1-2, 5). We are to be thankful to God for all things (1 Thessalonians 5:18) – the blessing of children is no exception. We must not take them for granted or be ungrateful for the gift God has given us.

Second, we must value them. In speaking of God’s judgment against Ephraim, the prophet said, *“Ephraim is stricken, their root is dried up, they will bear no fruit. Even though they bear children, I will slay the precious ones of their womb”* (Hosea 9:16). Though this passage speaks of God’s punishment for disobedience, note that the children were described as *“precious ones.”* These people had rebelled against God, but they still recognized the value of children. Each child is made in the image of God and is therefore valuable and special.

Third, we must deal with them appropriately. We often consider how to be good stewards of the blessings God has given us. In a sense, we are to be good stewards of the children with which God blesses us. We are not to neglect our parental responsibilities but are to *“bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord”* (Ephesians 6:4). This will be discussed more later in the series.

## Conclusion

Our view of children must be shaped by the Bible, not by society. Of course, this is true for everything. Paul said, “*And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind*” (Romans 12:2). Children are a gift from God. While there are responsibilities that come with parenting – and these must be taken seriously – children should not be seen as a burden but as a blessing.

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## Questions for Discussion & Reflection

1. In what way are children a gift from God?
2. What lesson can we learn from Rachel regarding those who are childless?
3. Explain the worldly mentality that sees children as a *burden* rather than as a *gift*.
4. What does Jesus’ example teach us about parenting?

5. Explain why abortion is wrong.

6. How do we treat children as a gift?

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## **The Home in Which Children are Raised**

*“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 God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth...”* (Genesis 1:27-28).

God’s plan from the beginning was for a man and a woman to *“be fruitful and multiply”* (Genesis 1:28). By God’s design, the bringing forth of children would be carried out in *marriage* (Genesis 2:24). Unfortunately, this does not always work out – either through sin or tragedy – then single parents or other caretakers are left to do the best they can for the children. But the Scriptures emphasize marriage and the home. We must as well.

### **God’s Plan for Marriage**

God designed marriage to be between one man and one woman (Genesis 2:24). This was also to be a lifelong relationship. Notice what Jesus said when asked about divorce:

*“And He answered and said, ‘Have you not read that He who created them from 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”? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate”* (Matthew 19:4-6).

While the Pharisees wanted to emphasize the potential reasons for repudiating one’s mate, Jesus emphasized the permanency of marriage. Though He certainly gave an exception – fornication (Matthew 19:9) – He highlighted the rule: *“What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate”* (Matthew 19:6). *“Marriage,”* as God designed it, *“is to be held in honor among all”* (Hebrews 13:4).

In making marriage between a man and a woman, God also gave husbands and wives different roles in that relationship:

- ***The husband is the head of the wife, the wife is the help meet*** – Paul told the Ephesians, *“Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything”* (Ephesians 5:22-24). In the beginning, God gave Adam his wife to be *“a helper suitable for him”* (Genesis 2:18). The husband is the head of the household; the wife submits to him and supports him in his work.
- ***The husband works to provide, the wife focuses on the home*** – After sin entered the world, the Lord addressed Adam and Eve individually,

highlighting the different roles they – and all couples who followed after them – would have in His plan for the home. He spoke to Eve about her responsibility in bearing children (Genesis 3:16) and to Adam about his responsibility to work and provide for his family (Genesis 3:17-19). While men would be working outside of the home, Paul said that women were to be taught to be “*workers at home*” (Titus 2:5). For some people, the question will immediately come to mind: *Does this mean that it is wrong for a woman to work outside the home?* There is no specific prohibition against it. A woman can work outside of the home *if* she can do so without neglecting her God-given responsibilities. But we should not be so quick to defend the concept of working women that we ignore Paul’s instruction as if it were outdated. Priorities must be kept in order. Women are to be “*workers at home*” (Titus 2:5). Those who fail to fulfill their responsibilities in the home are wrong, whether they work outside the home or not.

- ***The husband disciplines, the wife nurtures*** – This is also a point of one’s primary responsibility. In speaking of discipline in the home, the Hebrew writer said, “*Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them...*” (Hebrews 12:9). When Paul wrote to the brethren in Thessalonica and wanted to describe the care he showed them, he used the best example of a compassionate nurturer that he could – a mother. “*But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children*” (1 Thessalonians 2:7). Mothers, by nature, tend to

be more nurturing. Fathers are repeatedly described in God's word as providing corrective discipline.

However, though they have different roles, the husband and wife both work together in raising children. Paul wrote, "*Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but **bring them up** in the discipline and instruction of the Lord*" (Ephesians 6:4). When he gave qualifications regarding the care of certain widows, Paul said, "*If she has **brought up children...***" (1 Timothy 5:10). Raising children is a challenging and important task. Both parents need to be involved!

Furthermore, the Lord's intention is for children to be born to *married* couples. This becomes clear when we consider the Bible's condemnation of fornication.

*"Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge"* (Hebrews 13:4).

God designed us in such a way that children are conceived through sexual relations. This was how the first child was born: "*Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain*" (Genesis 4:1). This is how children have been born since. Sexual relations are only authorized within the confines of marriage. "*For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh*" (Genesis 2:24). Sexual relations outside of marriage are condemned as fornication (1 Corinthians 6:16-18).

Given what the Scriptures teach about fornication and divorce, it is clear that God desires for children to be born to and raised by a mother and father who are married to one another.

## **The World's Different Plans**

When we look at the society in which we live, it is clear that many do not respect God's word. As so many pervert God's plan for marriage, they believe that their preferred alternate arrangements are just as beneficial for raising children. Notice some of the alternative home arrangements that the world has invented:

- **Same-sex "marriage"** – Currently, there is a growing movement advocating for the acceptance and legalization of same-sex "marriage." But regardless of popular opinion or human law, marriage is for man and woman (Matthew 19:4-5). Besides this, homosexuality is clearly condemned in the Bible as sin (Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10). A home which has been established by a same-sex couple is not a suitable environment for the raising of children.
- **Polygamy** – As homosexuality becomes more accepted, the next attack on the divinely-arranged institution of marriage will likely be polygamy. When Jesus quoted from Genesis 2:24, He made it clear that marriage is for *one* man and *one* woman: "*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 19:5). God does not authorized three, four, or more becoming "*one flesh*" – only two.

- **Divorce** – We read in the book of Malachi that God *hates* divorce (Malachi 2:16). Jesus condemned divorce for every cause but one – fornication (Matthew 19:9). Yet people divorce today for any number of reasons. Not only are they disregarding the words of Christ, but those who are parents are also disregarding the welfare of their children. When children are not raised by their mother and father, they suffer for it. Sometimes this is unavoidable because of some tragedy, but too often it occurs unnecessarily because one or both parents decided that their marriage was not to be “*held in honor*” as the Lord said it should be (Hebrews 13:4).
- **Living together unmarried** – This is another common arrangement for households with children. Though both parents may be present, they are not married to one another. Such fornication is plainly condemned (Hebrews 13:4). This type of arrangement only encourages children to disregard God, His word, and His plan for the home as they observe the example of their unmarried parents.

With all of the above being so common in our society, it is often difficult to find those who truly respect God’s plan. As homes are corrupted and destroyed, children suffer as a result.

Besides all of the changes that man has made to the organization of the home, the world also places great emphasis upon sexual activity outside of marriage. This results in the high number of out-of-wedlock births in our society. This is not God’s plan (Hebrews 13:4)!

Even among those households that have children being raised by both their married mother and father, there are those who do not believe that there are distinct roles for men and women (we have already noted the differences). Many are offended at the idea of a husband being the head of the household (Ephesians 5:22-24), while others are offended by the concept of the wife focusing on domestic affairs (Titus 2:4-5) – even among Christians!

Why did God design the home to have a *mother* and a *father* raising children? It is not because of some sort of “affirmative action” style “fairness,” as if two women raising a child is unfair to men who would want to do that as well. No; rather, it is unfair to the *children* for adults to disregard God’s plan for the home. Notice what Paul told the Corinthians:

*“However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman” (1 Corinthians 11:11).*

There is an important principle stated in that verse: Men and women need each other; they complement one another (Genesis 2:18). Children need a mother and a father. God designed men and women to be suited to the roles He gave them. It was not an accident, but purposed by Him.

## **The Parent/Child Relationship**

Finally, what does the Bible teach about the nature of the parent/child relationship?

First, the parents' job is not to be the child's friend. Remember the words of the Hebrew writer: "*We had earthly fathers to discipline us*" (Hebrews 12:9). Such discipline "*for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful*" (Hebrews 12:11). Too many parents neglect discipline because they are afraid that their children will not like them for it. There is certainly nothing wrong with parents wanting to have a good relationship with their children, but parental responsibilities must be met.

Second, the parents' job is not to be the child's enemy. Paul told the brethren in Ephesus: "*Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord*" (Ephesians 6:4). Parents are not to antagonize their children, provoking them to anger. Discipline, when it is dispensed, ought to be for the good of the child and should not be carried out in anger.

Third, the parents' job is simply to be parents. That is what their children need them to be. This important work must not be neglected. As we continue in this series, we will discuss more about how this is to be done.

## **Conclusion**

God created the home in the beginning. By His design, the home is where children are to be raised. While there may be circumstances that arise – either through loss or sin – that result in other arrangements (single parents, other family members as caregivers, etc.), we must not lose sight of God's plan and seek to follow it in bringing up children today.

## **Questions for Discussion & Reflection**

1. According to God's design, children are to be brought forth in what relationship?
2. Who is eligible to marry according to God's marriage law?
3. List some ways that man has tried to change the divine institution of marriage.
4. Explain how the world's changes to marriage have a negative impact upon children.
5. Explain the different roles of the husband and wife.
6. Explain the difference between being a parent, a friend, and an enemy to a child.



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