

Children & Birth Control

1. The need for a balanced, biblical view vs. many contrary perspectives in the world *and* in the church:

- “Having children is selfish. Should you bring more people into the world just to make yourself feel fulfilled?”
- “Having children is foolish. Children consume your resources and limit your choices. Your life will be negatively affected, both personally and professionally.”
- “Having children is dangerous. The world has limited resources, and unchecked population growth will exceed the capacities of the planet to sustain life comfortably. This will lead ultimately to conflict, deprivation, and ecological disaster.”
- “The Bible says children are a blessing. Therefore we should have as many as humanly possible – and any use of contraceptives is contrary to the Bible. To use contraceptives in any form is to tell God that you don’t want blessings.”
- “We can have children, but don’t want to. It’s not a matter of health, money, or other prohibitive factors. We could support a family, but we’d rather pursuing more satisfying interests.”
- “We want to have children, but cannot. My life and our marriage feel incomplete.”

2. In each of these statements there is something true – but also something something untrue:

- **“Having children is selfish...”**
 - This statement can be true or false, depending on our motives.

“Should you bring more people into the world just to make yourself feel fulfilled?”

 - This statement makes a good point, yet seems to assume that there is only one reason to have kids.
- **“Children consume your resources and limit your choices...”**
 - This statement is absolutely true, but it assumes that limits are intrinsically bad.

“...Your life will be negatively affected, both personally and professionally.”

 - This statement begs the question, “What is the purpose of life?”
- **“The world has limited resources...”**
 - This statement is true for any given day, but ignores the possibility of future discoveries that revolutionize society’s capacity to nurture and sustain life.

“Unchecked population growth will exceed the capacities of the planet to sustain life comfortably.”

 - This statement is unproven, and much depends on how we define ‘comfort.’
- **“The Bible says children are a blessing.”**
 - This statement is true, but needs to be qualified with the other things that Scripture also says to us and shows us about children.

“To use contraceptives in any form is to tell God that you don’t want blessings.”

 - This statement is dangerously simplistic, and ignores many legitimate factors that may affect decisions about the timing and size of a family.
- **“We could have children, but don’t want to... We’d rather pursue more satisfying interests.”**
 - This statement is admirable for its honesty, but needs to be examined in its attitude.
- **“We want to have children, but cannot. My life and our marriage feel incomplete.”**
 - This statement is raw in its honesty, and those who have struggled to conceive – or experienced the pain of miscarriage or loss of child – can resonate. Yet it contains an assumption that needs to be challenged gently.

3. **The Christian motive for having children is not self-fulfillment, but the glory of God:**
 - This is to be the chief motive for everything believers do (Rom. 14:7-8, 1 Cor. 10:31, Col. 3:17)!
 - To pursue children for the purpose of self-fulfillment is a species of idolatry: “Idolatry is trusting in created things rather than the Creator for our hope and happiness, significance and security.”¹
 - This means that those who criticize having children as ‘selfish’ have a point – it is entirely possible.
 - Nevertheless, it is also possible to pursue a family to the glory of God – to desire, conceive, bear, and raise children not to *feel* good or to *look* good, but simply because it is good!

4. **God-honoring pursuit of family is possible because family is one of the God-given purposes of marriage:**
 - We see this in the creation of marriage: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it...’” (Gen. 1:27-28)
 - We see it reiterated in God’s rebuke to men of Judah who were unfaithful to their wives: “the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth.” (Mal. 2:14-15)
 - We see its goal in the New Testament – to increase and spread the enjoyment and praise of God: “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” (Eph. 6:4); “After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’” (Rev. 7:9-10)

5. **God-honoring pursuit of children requires wise decisions about the timing and size of our families:**

“Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one’s youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.” (Ps. 127:3-5)

 - Some quote these words as constituting a ban on all use of any forms of contraceptive. This is an error:
 - The word translated as ‘fills’ here carries the sense of “fill to capacity” (a quiver can only hold so many arrows). The same Hebrew word/tense is often used in the sense of filling a container (Gen. 44:1, 1 Ki. 18:35), or “filling the hand” (a reference to ordination or sacrifices). It is used for fulfilling a period of time (Gen. 29:27-28), a promise (1 Ki. 8:24), or a mouth (Ps. 81:10)! But it always carries the sense of *expansion to capacity*, not unlimited expansion.
 - The responsibility for filling the quiver is assigned to “the man who fills.” We are to be active, not passive, about the timing and size of our families.
 - There are several significant factors that may play into decisions to limit the timing and size of families.
 - *Physical capacity:* how many children can we physically feed, clothe, and shelter (1 Tim. 5:8)? are there any medical issues that might make having children unwise?
 - *Emotional capacity:* for how many children do we have the requisite “head space” (1 Pet. 3:7)?
 - *Spiritual capacity:* how many souls can we raise in the fear and love of the Lord (Prov. 17:25)?
 - Important: Different families will come to different answers on these important questions!
 - Such considerations *never* justify abortion, for life begins at conception (Ps. 51:5, 139:13-15).
 - However they *do* permit judicious use of *non*-abortifacient means of preventing conception. David married Abigail and Ahinoam while on the run from Saul (1 Sam. 25:42-43), yet neither is said to have born him a son until after he is dwelling as king in Hebron (2 Sam. 3:2-3).
 - Sum: Scripture permits the use of means to *prevent* conception, but never to *terminate* conception.

¹ *The New City Catechism*, Question 17. Available online at: <http://newcitycatechism.com/>.

6. Those considering foregoing children entirely to pursue “more satisfying interests” should consider:

- Children are a blessing!
 - “Children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one’s youth.” (Ps. 127:3-4)
 - “Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD.” (Ps. 128:3-4)
- Yes, children bring limitations and require sacrifice – but so does everything worth doing in life!
 - Learning a new skill,
 - Choosing a career,
 - Getting married!
 - “Freedom, then, is not the absence of limitations and constraints but it is finding the right ones, those that fit our nature and liberate us.”²
- Children are wonderful aids to our sanctification! Both in their sins and in their smiles, they show us what we are like to God our Father – and the whole process of learning to live for them (rather than just for ourselves) is part of the progressive, sanctifying liberation from the root sin of self-centeredness.
- Children are among the most satisfying of all God’s gifts in this life – and one of the few gifts we know will endure into the life to come! What is more valuable: souls with whom you can have eternal relationships, or more stuff? What better investment could you make than investing in increasing the number of Christians in this world (“Dutch evangelism”) and the number of citizens in the new creation (“adding more people to the party”)? Having children allows us to imitate God’s own creative, “spreading goodness,” (Richard Sibbes). What could be more satisfying?
- Caveat: nowhere does Scripture *require* that every married couple produce children. The commandment to “be fruitful and multiply” was given to mankind as a *whole*, not to every man or woman individually. Our Lord Jesus spoke of those who would forego marriage “for the sake of the kingdom of heaven,” (Mat. 19:12). Marriage being the only biblical context, it cannot be that all people are required to reproduce.
- Yet those who choose to forego children altogether ought to have *God-centered* rather than *self-centered* reasons. “And he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised,” (2 Cor. 5:15; cf. Rom. 14:7-8, etc.).

7. Inability to have children, or loss of children, does *not* mean that either a person or a marriage is incomplete. Our fullness comes not from the size of our family, but from our place in God’s family.

- Childlessness, miscarriage, or loss of a child after birth can create deep feelings of incompleteness. Scripture records the frustration of Rachel (Gen. 30:1), the tears of Hannah (1 Sam. 1:6-7), and David’s devastation at the prospect of losing his newborn son (2 Sam. 12:16).
- Believers who suffer in this way need to be reminded *not* to assume that God is punishing them. Jesus was punished for all of our sins, and we bear them no more (Col. 2:13-14). Luke’s Gospel, in recording the long childlessness of Zechariah and Elizabeth, tells us “they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord,” (Lk. 1:6).
- All suffering comes to us from the loving hand of our Lord Jesus. Though his purposes may be inscrutable, his promises are not. Those who suffer under such *providences* from him therefore also have this *promise* from him: “Jesus said, ‘Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.’” (Mk. 10:29-30)

² Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God* (New York: Penguin, Kindle ed.), 49.