

Introduction

This morning I have the privilege of talking about children. It is an honor to talk about children. Karen and I have had the privilege of having ten children of our own, adopting another girl, and having two other foster children. We are constantly giving thanks for our children. I give thanks for our last two children, and I so appreciate having Chad and Joanna here with us. They are such a blessing and we love spending time with them. We understand that our children are gifts from the Lord. In our text today, Eve conceived and gave birth to Cain. Then she said, "I have gotten a manchild with the help of the Lord." The King James reads, "I have gotten a man from the Lord." She clearly recognized and understood that children are a gift from the Lord.

(Genesis 4:1) "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 KJV) "And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD."

The world's view of children is very different. They do not see children as a gift from God. I cannot tell you how many comments that I have had about our children. I have had employers, business associates, reporters, and strangers all make comments about the number of children that we have. I hear things like,

"How do you do it? I'd go crazy with all those kids. They'd drive me up a wall."

"Are you a Catholic? (NO) Are you a Mormon? (NO) Then, you must be a really dumb Protestant?"

It is not just the world that has had poor attitudes towards children. I have had pastors and deacons make very inappropriate remarks about how many children we have and what we should do to fix the problem. The attitude of many churches towards children is very negative. One church in Orlando, FL would not allow any children under the age of thirteen in the morning services. They wanted to be Seeker Friendly and not have any noises, discomforts or disturbances that would distract the Yuppies they were trying to attract. Children were thought of as distractions and disturbances.

What I see in Scripture is a very different view of children participating in church. Psalm 96 says, "*Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory of His name; bring an offering and come into His courts. Worship the Lord in holy attire; tremble before Him, all the earth.*"¹ Who was to ascribe to the Lord glory and strength? Families. Who was to ascribe to the Lord the glory of His name? Families. Who was to bring their offerings? Families. What was to come into His courts? Families. Who was to worship in holy attire? Families.

In the New Testament the word household is commonly used. The term refers to all the inhabitants of the house. It would include the grandparents, parents, children, and servants. It included everyone in the house. I want to give just a few examples of households.

¹ Psalm 96:7-9

In Acts 10, Peter gets a vision to eat unclean food. At the same time a centurion by the name of Cornelius gets a vision and is told to send for Peter who is in Joppa and staying with a tanner named Simon. So Cornelius sends for Peter and Peter does not hesitate to go with the Gentiles because of the vision he had of eating unclean meats. As Peter was sharing the gospel with them the Holy Spirit fell on them, just as He had at Pentecost. In Acts 11, some of the Jewish believers took issue with Peter because he had gone to the Gentiles. Peter shares with them about the vision he had, and how Cornelius had received the following word from the angel, *"he will speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household."*² Then, Peter told them that the Holy Spirit fell upon them. Who was saved? Who did the Holy Spirit fall upon? It was Cornelius' household. It was his wife, children, and other family members. The children got saved and filled with the Holy Spirit along with the adults. The gospel message and the empowering of the Holy Spirit was not limited to adults; it was for the whole household.

In Acts 16, we have two examples of households getting saved. In Thyatira, there was a woman named Lydia. She was a worshiper of God and the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul. Luke records that she and her household were baptized.³

The second example is the jailer. Paul and Silas were thrown into jail because of preaching the gospel. Around midnight they were worshipping and an earthquake opened up all the doors and all the prisoner chains were unfastened. The jailer was about to take his life and Paul stops him. Then, the jailer asked Paul, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"⁴ Look what Paul tells him.

(Acts 16:31-34) "They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your **household**." {32} And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his **house**. {33} And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his **household**. {34} And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole **household**."

Notice that the gospel was not just for adults. The gospel message was for families. The gospel message was for everyone in the house. Church is not for those who are thirteen and above. Households need to worship together. Households need to hear the gospel. Households need to receive the empowering of the Holy Spirit.

The disciples had some attitudes about children that needed to be adjusted. In Mark 10:13-15, people were bringing their children to Jesus so that He could touch them and bless them. Jesus' disciples were rebuking the parents for bringing their children to Jesus. Mark records that Jesus was *aganakteo*. The New American says he was indignant. The King James said that He was very much displeased. The Greek word means to grieve much. The attitude of the disciples grieved the heart of God. The attitude of the world and some in the church grieves the heart of God. Listen to what Jesus tells them. "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all."⁵ The kingdom of God belongs to children!

² Acts 11:14

³ Acts 16:14-15

⁴ Acts 16:30

⁵ Mark 10:13-15

The world does not see children as gifts from God. They see them as rug rats, brats, kids, terrors, and a host of dishonoring names. They do not have a Biblical worldview towards children. So, it is a privilege to share about this verse this morning. And about all the comments, I have had the privilege of sharing a very different attitude about children with millions of people around the world. CNN did a special on our family. ESPN did two TV specials on our family. ABC and NBC did specials on our family. The Golf Channel ran a special on our family that ran for two years. Sports Illustrated ran a three-page spread on our family. Golf Magazine ran a special on our family. Newspapers from around the world featured stories on our family. At one point I said to Karen if they were writing about my golf instead of our family we would be wealthy. All of the comments about our children were springboards to share the gospel and God's principles with the world. We thank God for the opportunities that He provided.

The world is starving for examples of godly families. The world is longing to see how children and families are supposed to look like. That is why the media was so interested in doing stories about our family. Unfortunately, they want nice families without following the owner's manual for advice on how to raise them.

Adam and Eve understood that children came from the Lord. I think the King James is a better translation of this verse. The New American Standard version has "with the help" of the Lord, and that phrase is in italics because it is not in the original text. They understood that children were from the Lord. The Scriptures clearly teach that it is the Lord who opens and closes wombs. Adam and Eve recognized that everything that they had was from the Lord. They understood that their crops, their livestock, and their children were from the Lord. The Scriptures teach us that "from Him and through Him and to Him are all things."

(Romans 11:36) "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen."

This morning I want to use our text as a launch pad to look at these precious gifts from God. We will look at four truths about children. They are gifts. They are blessings. They are part of God's plan, and they are created with specific callings.

God's View On Children

1. Children Are Gifts
2. Children Are Blessings
3. Children Are Part of God's Plans and Purposes
4. Children Are Created by God with Specific Callings

1. Children Are Gifts from the Lord (Ps 127:3)

Psalm 127:3 says, "Behold, children are a gift from the Lord. The fruit of the womb is a reward." Children are a gift. We know that every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow."⁶ Children are a good and perfect gift from the Father. Sometimes we like to tell God what gifts we will accept from Him and what we won't accept. Children are a gift and I do not believe we should insult God by telling Him we don't want His gifts to us. His gifts are meant to bless us, and He would not give us a gift that was inappropriate or bad. His gifts are good and perfect.

⁶ James 1:17

If someone offered us ten thousand dollars as a gift, would we turn them down? If someone offered us a million dollar gift, would we turn it down? No, we readily accept these gifts. But, if God offered us a child as a gift, are we as quick to receive the gift with joy? If God wants to continue giving us more gifts, do we tell Him to keep His gifts for Himself, we don't want them. Karen and I never felt that we had the right to tell God which gifts we would accept from Him and which gifts we would refuse. We believe that our God is a good God and gives good gifts to His children.

In Luke 11, Jesus taught the disciples about praying for the Holy Spirit. He uses the example of a child asking his father for a couple of things. First, a son asks his father for a fish. The father is not going to give him a snake instead of a fish. Second, a son asks his father for an egg. The father is not going to give him a scorpion. Then, Jesus said, *"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him."*⁷ The passage is teaching us not to be fearful or afraid about asking for the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a good gift. In the same way, our Father is not going to give us bad gifts. He gives good gifts, and children are good gifts from the Lord.

One last thought about gifts. Giving is an act of love. God gives to us out of His great love. In John 3:16, "God so loved the world that He gave..." Children are gifts that are an expression of love to us. Our children are expressions of love to us from God. Children are created in and out of love. Children are given in love and are to be loved.

2. Children Are Blessings from the Lord

When I give a gift to someone, it is meant to bless the other person. One year, I was given a company truck. I went to the Honda dealer and traded in the truck I had been driving and bought Karen a new Honda Pilot. If you ask Karen how much I love her, she will tell you "Honda Much." That gift was given in love, and it was meant to bless Karen. Notice in Psalm 127:5 that God says that a man whose quiver is full of children is blessed. "How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them."

(Psalms 127:3-5) "Behold, children are a gift of the LORD; the fruit of the womb is a reward. {4} Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. {5} How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them; they shall not be ashamed, when they speak with their enemies in the gate."

Children are gifts that are meant to bless and honor us. Gifts are given on special occasions to bless and honor someone. Birthdays, special occasions like graduation, weddings, Christmas, etc are times when people give gifts. They are meant to honor and bless people. In the same way, our children are meant to bless and honor us.

I want to take a look at Psalm 128 for a few minutes. In that Psalm God tells us how He wants to bless those that fear the Lord. I am one that prays for a fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and I want God's wisdom. I believe that having a holy and reverent fear of the Lord is very important. A few years ago I put together a men's conference and the theme of the conference was the fear of the Lord. So, having a fear of the Lord is very much a desire of mine. And the blessing that God promises for those who fear Him are children.

⁷ Luke 11:11-13

(Psalm 128:1-6) “How blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in His ways. {2} When you shall eat of the fruit of your hands, you will be happy and it will be well with you. {3} Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine within your house, your children like olive plants around your table. {4} Behold, for thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD. {5} The LORD bless you from Zion, and may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life. {6} Indeed, may you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel!

In this Psalm, those who fear the Lord will be blessed with provision. They will eat of the fruit of their hands, be happy, and it will be well for them. In verse three, our wife will be like a fruitful vine and our children like olive plants around our table. Olive trees are very fruitful and productive. Then, the Psalmist reiterates that this is how those who fear the Lord will be blessed. Finally, in verse six, he says, “may you see your children’s children.” Part of the blessing of a man who fears the Lord is to see his children’s children. Children are a blessing and seeing your children’s children is still another blessing.

The world does not see children as blessings. God sees children as blessings, and we need to have the same attitude about children. If pastors, friends, and others knew that children were blessings, they would not be offering me advice about how to fix the problem. Children are not a problem; they are a blessing from God. Having children like olive plants around my table was a blessing from God. Again, Karen and I did not feel like we had the right to tell God how He could or could not bless us. We think that God is a good God and He knows how to give good gifts, and how to bless someone appropriately.

3. Children Are Part of God's Plans and Purposes

In Genesis 1-2 we saw that God blessed the animals and all of His creation. In Genesis 1:11, He told the plants and trees to bear fruit. In verse 22, God blesses the fish, sea creatures, sea monsters, the birds, and every living creature that moves, and said, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” God’s blessing was fruitfulness. Then, in Genesis 1:27-28, God created male and female and blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth...” God’s plan was for us to have children and fill the earth. Children are a vital part of God’s plans and purposes.

I have had many people talk to me about the world being overpopulated. Some countries, like China, had in place limitations on the number of children you could have. Some organizations talk about how the earth is getting too crowded. But the truth of the matter is that it is a false belief. Let’s take a look at the numbers and then what Scripture has to say about populating the earth. The world population at the end of 2017 is seven point six billion people (7,600,000,000). The total square miles of land area in the world is 52,500,000. That means that the population density is just under 145 people per square mile. Let’s take another look. If we take all 7.6 billion people in the world and bring them to Jacksonville, Florida, we could have everyone stand up comfortably and use only half of the square footage in the city limits.

The square miles in the State of New Mexico is 121,697. There are 77,886,080 acres of land in NM. This last week I was looking at senior living communities for my parents. The size for most of the apartments ranges from 250 square feet to 650 square feet. If we took an average size of 450 square feet, you could give every person in the world an apartment in the state of New Mexico. New Mexico’s land is 0.23% of the world’s land area. So, you would have 99.8% of the world’s land for food and other things. The truth is that the world is not overpopulated.

Filling the earth is only part of God's plan for children. We saw earlier that Cornelius' household was filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit empowers us to do God's work on earth. I was injured in 1984 at the Baltimore Open. I took a job managing a golf club in 1985 and did that for seven years. The primary reason that I took the job was to get training in evangelism and other areas of ministry. Then, I went back onto the PGA Tour. Before I did, I trained our children in evangelism. They practiced sharing their testimonies. They role played and practiced sharing the gospel using the bridge illustration. When I went back onto the tour, I had an evangelistic army with me. Our family made a huge impact to the other golfers, the PGA Tour staff, the galleries, and to people around the world through the media. God used our children, and he wants to use children everywhere. There is an excellent book called, "*Kids In Combat*" that shares more about this topic. Someone borrowed my copy and I no longer have it, but it is an excellent read.

In Psalm 127:4-5, we find that children are "*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.*" Arrows are weapons. Are children are weapons that can be used to defeat the enemy. These arrows must be trained and prepared. In Psalm 78 we find that the nation of Israel did not prepare the heart of the next generation. Therefore, they turned back in the day of battle. We have to prepare our children, the next generation. I believe the family is the primary training place, but the church also has an important role. In addition to life skills, we have to teach our children to worship, to pray, to study, and other ministry skills. We have to prepare their hearts. How a church chooses to do this is up to them. Personally, I believe we have to be careful about turning our churches into recreational or entertainment centers for children. Our churches should be equipping centers for households, which includes children. Churches need to determine the best way of training and equipping the children in that church for the work of ministry.

(Psalm 78:8-9) "And not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation that did not prepare its heart and whose spirit was not faithful to God. {9} The sons of Ephraim were archers equipped with bows, yet they turned back in the day of battle."

I want to talk about Samuel for just a minute. His mother was Hannah. We find in 1 Samuel 1:5 that "the Lord had closed her womb." After she had cried out to the Lord for a son, the Lord opened her womb and she had Samuel. The name Samuel comes from two words: shem + el. Shem means name and el means God. She named him Samuel because she had asked God for him. (1 Samuel 1:20) After Hannah had weaned Samuel, they took him to the temple and dedicated him to the Lord. In 1 Samuel 1:28 we find that Samuel "worshiped the Lord there." He was just a boy, but he was a worshiper of God.

Elkanah and Hannah left Samuel with Eli to serve the Lord. In 1 Samuel 2:11 we read, "*Then Elkanah went to his home at Ramah. But the boy ministered to the LORD before Eli the priest.*" Samuel was worshiping the Lord and ministering to the Lord and the people as a boy. In 1 Samuel 2:26 we find that "the boy Samuel was growing in stature and in favor both with the Lord and with men." As Samuel faithfully served, God was raising him up for even bigger plans and purposes.

In 1 Samuel 3, Samuel learns to hear the voice of God. Children need to learn to hear from God. Their lives will be forever changed when they learn to hear from God. Then, God gives Samuel a prophetic word for Eli and the nation of Israel. This is not an adult; this is the boy Samuel that God is using to prophesy to the entire nation of Israel. Children are included in God's plans.

4. Children Are Created with Specific Callings

Children have specific callings. Little Samuel was a prophet to the nation of Israel. He had a specific calling. God has specific plans, purposes, and callings for every one of us. We need to help our children find those purposes. In our text today, Eve gave birth to another son, Abel. We read that Abel was a keeper of flocks and Cain was a tiller of the ground. Abel and Cain had different personalities. They had different interests. Each of them were uniquely created.

(Genesis 4:2) “Again, she gave birth to his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.”

I want to look at another prophet for just a minute. In Jeremiah 1:5 the Lord tells him, “*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.*” God knew who He was going to make before He made Jeremiah. God had a plan and purpose for Jeremiah before he was even formed in the womb. Not only did He have a plan, He had a specific calling for him. God consecrated him and appointed him to be a prophet to the nations before he was even born.

My mother tells me that when I was about four years old, I was sitting at the bar of the kitchen in our home in Houston, Texas and the Lord spoke to her about me. He told her that I was going to be a pastor and would be greatly used by the Lord. Personally, I do not remember this. I was a much older man when my mother told me this story. But, God had a calling on my life before I was born. Like Jeremiah, he consecrated and appointed me before I was even born.

In Psalm 139:13-16, God says that He forms our inward parts. He weaves us together in our mother's womb. We are fearfully and wonderfully made. When we are being made in secret, God's eyes are on our unformed substance. Before we are even born, He writes in His book the days that were ordained for us. God's hand is on our lives before we are even born. God even numbers the hairs on our head. God knows us extremely well, and He creates us with specific calls to fulfill.

(Psalm 139:13-16) “For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. {14} I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well. {15} My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth; {16} 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.”

(Matthew 10:30) “But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.”

It is not just Jeremiah and Bill that God has a calling on. God has a calling for every one of you. It is important for us to discover our calling so that we can be obedient to that calling. Towards the end of Paul's life, he wrote, that he had fought the good fight and finished the course. He could not have finished his course if he had not discovered what that course was. We have to help our children find the course that they are to follow and prepare them to fight the good fight.

(2 Timothy 4:6-7) “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. {7} I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith;”

I want to finish with one last Scripture. The Apostle Paul had a calling on his life, but he was not walking in that calling. Paul's father was a Pharisee, and Paul was trained as a Pharisee. He trained under Gamaliel, one of the most respected Pharisees. God was going to use all of this training and preparation for His purposes. Paul was going to write thirteen letters of the New Testament, so his excellent education and training was going to be used. But Paul did not know the Lord. In Acts 9, he was on his way to Damascus to persecute the church, and he encountered the Lord. Later on in life, he was sharing his testimony with King Agrippa. I want to read from Acts 26:13-18.

(Acts 26:13-18) "at midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me. {14} "And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' {15} "And I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. {16} 'But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; {17} rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, {18} to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.'

Paul did not know the Lord and he was kicking against the goads. Goads are poles or rods that have a sharp ending on them. They are used to prod cattle to go, or to go a certain direction. God had a specific calling and purpose for Paul's life, but Paul did not know it. Like Samuel, Paul had to come into a relationship with God before he could know and follow God's calling.

Conclusion

As we come to a close today, God wants you to know that children are a special gift from the Lord. Eve understood that her children were gifts from the Lord. Hannah understood that Samuel was from the Lord. Children are not a random accident, but a gift from the Lord. Children are also a blessing from the Lord. We need to see children as a blessing to our families and our churches. In addition to being a blessing, we are to bless our children. Jesus took time to bless the children, and we should regularly bless the children.

Finally, God has plans, purposes, and specific callings on our children, and on all of us. For us to fulfill that calling, we have to know Jesus. We have to have an encounter with God like Samuel and Paul. Then, we have to be trained and equipped in that calling. There is a time of preparation for all of us. Finally, we have to be faithful to that calling.

Perhaps this morning you do not know the Lord. God has been tugging on your heart and you have a desire to know Him. If that is the case, we would like to pray for you. Perhaps you know the Lord but you are not sure about the calling on your life. We will be happy to pray for you, and to ask God to reveal His plans and purposes for your life. Finally, there may be some of you who know the Lord, know His calling, but need encouragement to keep pressing onward. I would like to pray 1 Corinthians 15:58 for you this morning. *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord."*