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Christians
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Genesis 9:1 So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth." (NKJV)

When Noah left the ark, God blessed Noah and his sons and said, “*Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.*” Thousands of years after the time of Noah, having children is still a blessing from God; but in our modern culture, our attitudes toward children have changed. The number of births per 1000 women has steadily declined throughout the past century (see graph below). Although we see a few families today with more than two children, it seems the social norm and goal is just two children. Even among many Christians, the ideal is one boy and one girl.

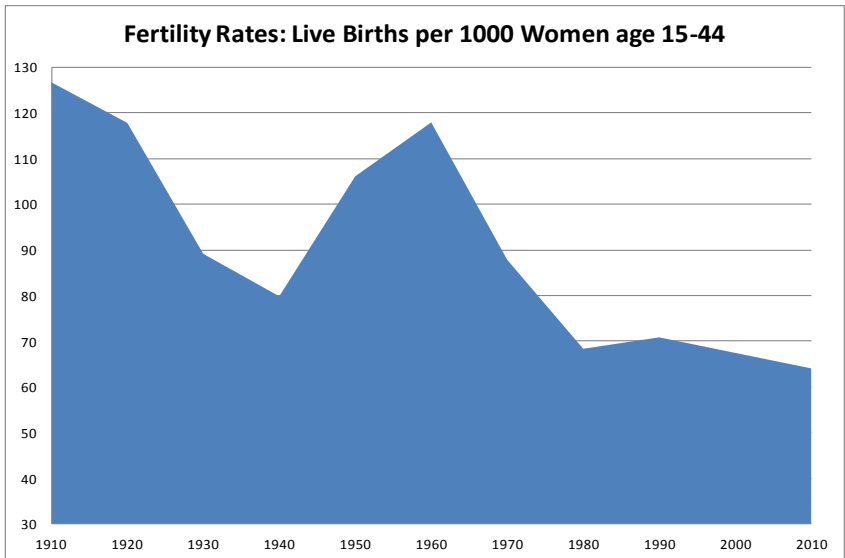


Figure 1. Data from <http://www.mdch.state.mi.us/pha/osr/nativity/tab1.3.asp>

In 1800 the average American woman had 7 children. In 1957 the average was close to 3.7. Today the average is about 2 children¹. Clearly something has changed. A number of factors likely weigh into the decrease of family size: changing from rural to suburban living, expensive cost of modern living, working mothers, etc. But I believe by far, the largest factor is choice. We don't want as many children. Medical technology has given us a choice. We have easier ways to prevent conception, starting with the introduction of modern barrier based birth control and expanding with the use of the Pill in 1960s. Figure 1 shows a drop in births due to the Great Depression. We also see a large drop beginning in 1960 with the introduction of the Pill. Before modern birth control and especially before the Pill, birth control was hard. Clearly, God designed the human body so that birth control is not easy. The fact that God made birth control hard should give us pause. God could have easily designed our bodies so that birth control would be effortless for married couples, just part of the design of our body. Why did He make birth control hard for most of humanity's existence? Just what does God want of us? What does the Word of God say? Let us start with Psalms 127:3-5

Psalms 127:3-5 Behold, children are a heritage from 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) Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; They shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with their enemies in the gate. (NKJV)



Figure 2 - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Wenceslas_Hollar_-_Quivers_and_hunting_horns.jpg

Psalm 127:3-5 gives us insight into how we should regard children. Children are a heritage from God. Children are a reward. Verse 5 says “*Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them.*” A quiver is an arrow storage container. (see the image on page 3)

The figure of speech in Psalm 127:5 is that our attitude toward children should be like our attitude toward our having enough arrows for battle: The more the better! That is not a common attitude toward children today. A quiver “full” of arrows would not be one or two arrows, yet God also doesn’t say how ‘full’ a full quiver is. In like manner, God doesn’t specify exactly how many children we must have, but He does tell us what attitude we should have toward children: the more the better. Do you have the same attitude toward children that God has?

Next: *Psalms 128:1-4 A Song of Ascents. Blessed is every one who fears the LORD, who walks in His ways. (2) When you eat the labor of your hands, you shall be happy, and it shall be well with you. (3) Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the very heart of your house, your children like olive plants all around your table. (4) Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD.*(NKJV)

The figure of speech in Psalms 128:3 is that the blessed man is the one who has children “all around” his table. It is hard to have children “all around” your table with only one or two children. Again, the verse gives us insight into how we should regard children. God considers children a blessing. Do you?

Blessings in disguise

Having children can be hard work and expensive. Children are time consuming and take away free time that could otherwise be used on entertainment and recreation. Sometimes God’s blessings come to us in disguise. Consider this:

- Having children was God’s idea and He calls children a blessing.
- Having children helps us to learn the kind of love God has for us.
- Having children allows us to see the innocence, love, and trust of a child.

- Having children allows us to see and learn firsthand about rebellion, punishment and mercy.
- Having children is a way that God helps adults to mature and develop patience, resulting in a more godly character.
- Having children reminds us of our own childhood failures and causes to appreciate our own parents.
- Having children allows us to create a freewill being that can change the world. David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Moses, Abraham, and Isaac, all had parents who gave them the opportunity to change the world.
- Having children shows us God's perspective on our behavior.

Having children is an opportunity for God to work

King David was the youngest of 8 sons. If David's father and mother had decided to have fewer children, seemingly there would have been no King David in that family. God rejected the first 7 sons from being king. Why did God wait for the 8th son, for David? I don't know. In a similar manner, Joseph was the 11th son. What is clear is that whether the 1st or 8th or 11th, each child is a blessing and an opportunity for God to work in our lives.

The same is true of living in dangerous and difficult times. Esther was born into dangerous times, both of her parents dead, she had no siblings, but her parents gave Esther the opportunity to save the Jews. Moses is another case of bringing a child into a very dangerous world. God is in charge, He can use the worst of situations to His advantage. We can't know the future or how God can use our lives, so we should not presume that we "know" that the world is too dangerous for a child. All we know is that children are an opportunity to do good in this sin torn world, and God is in charge.

Not everyone in the Bible had many children

It doesn't take much Bible study to realize that some couples in the Bible did not have many children. If some important Bible characters only had one or two kids, why can't we just do the same? Let us consider some of the examples.

Examples of those with few children:

- Zacharias and Elizabeth: One child, John the Baptist. (Luke 1)
- Isaac and Rebekkah: Two children, Jacob and Esau. (Genesis 25)
- Elimelech and Naomi: Two children, Mahlon and Chilion. (Ruth)

- Salmon and Rahab: Apparently one child, Boaz. (Ruth)
- Noah and unnamed wife: Apparently three children, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. (Genesis 9:18)

Examples of those with many children:

- Joseph and Mary, at least six children (James, Joseph, Judas, Simon, plus unnamed “sisters”). (Mark 6:3)
- Jacob and Leah: seven children: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, and a daughter, Dinah. (Genesis 35:23, 34:1)
- Elkanah and Hannah: Samuel, plus 3 sons and 2 daughters (unnamed). (1 Sam 2:21)
- Jessie and unnamed wife had 8 sons, King David was the 8th. (1 Sam 16:10)
- Obed-edom and unnamed wife had 8 sons, 1 Chron 26:4-5, and it was written “God blessed him” in regard to the number of his children.

The reason that some had few and some had many is not always given. In a few cases we are told a couple was temporarily barren, but in most cases we don’t know the reason for the number of their children. But does it matter? God has told us how we should view children. The key question is: does my attitude toward children match God’s attitude? Any time our attitudes on an issue do not match God’s attitude, we should be very concerned. Our thoughts and attitudes should be aimed toward conformance with God’s. This isn’t always easy, but to become like God is what our goal should be.

The wrong reasons to limit the number of children

For many women, a career is the reason they want fewer children². However, married women are called by God to be homemakers. The American Heritage dictionary of the English Language, 4th edition, defines a Homemaker as “One who manages a household, especially as one’s main daily activity.” We see a similar idea in 1 Tim 5:14: young women who are widows are told to marry, have children, and “manage the house”. Yet, in our modern culture having children and being a homemaker are considered hindrances to a career. Consider Titus 2:1-8

Titus 2:1-8 But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: (2) that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; (3) the older women likewise, that they be

reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things-- (4) that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, (5) to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed. (6) Likewise, exhort the young men to be sober-minded, (7) in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, (8) sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you. (NKJV)

God knows what young men and women need to hear in order to make the most of their Christian life. In verse 4-5, young women are called to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, *homemakers*, good, and obedient to their own husbands.

In the USA, close to 64% of young women work while having children under 6 years old. Almost 57% of working mothers have children under one year of age³. I am sure that some of those moms must work to help pay the bills. But some of that 64% of women just want to work, and don't want to be homemakers. The dual career couple misses out on the blessing of a homemaker in their family, and they may also miss out on the blessings that come from having God's attitude toward children.

Don't get me wrong. I realize there are tough situations and illness that sometimes require married women work or that might limit the number of children. I was raised in such a situation. My dad was paralyzed when I was nine years old and he never worked again. I understand that these things happen; however, for this tract, I would like to keep the focus on what we should be striving towards. I don't want us to miss that God wants young women to aspire to be homemakers. That is His career calling for women. Children are part of the calling of a homemaker (reread Titus 2:1-8), and a career is not. We need to make sure we don't miss our calling because we sought the wrong things in life! Remember we will stand before God and give an account for our life (Hebrews 4:13). Will that account be marred by the wrong priorities and striving for the wrong things?

Must we have as many children as possible?

We have established that God considers children to be a blessing. Does that mean it would be a sin not have as many children as we possibly could? Must we have as many children as we physically can? First, God is good at math; He knows how many children we can afford. He also knows our heart, including the reasons for everything we do. There is no fooling God if our attitudes are wrong. So what is the answer?

There is a parallel to another free will choice we have: our financial offering to the Lord. Here is the parallel: we are to give to the Lord according to our ability, generously, and from the heart (1st Cor 16:1-2, 2nd Cor 9:6-12). We clearly are not required to give all we have and live in poverty, but we must give a portion. First Cor 16:2 says "lay something aside," it doesn't say lay everything or even most aside; and that "portion" should be generous. In a like manner, from Titus 2:4, 1 Tim 5:14, Ps 127:1-5, and Ps 128:1-4 it is clear that, in general, married couples are to seek children, and we know that God considers children to be a blessing. We know that our attitude should be that children are a blessing and that more is better, as is true of our monetary offering too. It is a blessing to give, and generosity is better than stinginess. Just like we have a choice in how much we call "generous" in our offering and what is according to our ability, we have a choice in what a "quiver full" means and how many we can afford and what our health can sustain. Be honest in how many children you can have as you are honest in how much you give to the Lord.

We must be able provide for our children

"1 Timothy 5:8 But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." (NKJV)

Without a doubt parents are commanded to provide for their children, and providing takes financial commitment. Does this mean that we must buy our kids cars at age 16, pay for their car insurance, and give them every luxury and electronic toy? No. Kids turn out just fine if they have to buy their own car, pay for their own car insurance, and have to get a job in high school if they want to buy designer clothing. I had to buy all those things for myself, including paying for college, and I think I was better off because of it. Kids can do well with very little; in fact, Christians are encouraged to be content

with as little as food and clothing, 1st Tim 6:8. Many large families with modest income do quite well and have successful children who become successful adults.

While it is clear that we must provide for our children, having the wrong financial priorities will likely limit the number of children we have. For many it is more important to have new cars, boats, huge TVs, fancy houses, expensive cell phones, expensive vacations, rather than more children. In other words, the luxury things of this world are more important than children. Who is right: the world who says these luxuries are important, or God who tells us that children are a blessing? (Mark 4:19, 1 John 2:15)

Birth Control and the Pill

This whole issue of the Pill came into my life while in a preacher training program. My mother had taught me in vague terms that using the Pill for birth control was wrong. I hadn't thought much about it or really looked into the Pro-Life aspects of the Pill. I was just a single guy, and I didn't need to worry about it! However being in a preacher training program seems to bring out all kinds of questions from people. The question of birth control came up in a conversation with a married friend, and having just the little information I had in my mind, I said that I needed to study more, but I understood that in some cases the Pill causes abortions. The person in the conversation was sure that the Pill prevented an egg from being released 100% of the time, and that taking the Pill never would kill a fertilized egg. Well, they were incorrect. That is not what the science behind the Pill says. Even with diligent and perfect use, eggs are sometimes released for unknown reasons. The Pill will in fact kill a fertilized egg a small percentage of the time, because of the inhospitable conditions created in the womb, a side effect from taking the Pill. (See the article below). That conversation was an eye opener for me. I have had more discussions with others since that time. I realized that many Christians, perhaps even the majority of the young married couples are taking the Pill in ignorance.

For many people, taking the Pill has nothing to do with health problems. It has simply become a convenient way to prevent or delay pregnancy. It is easy to think of the Pill simply as a wonder drug that prevents pregnancy;

however, we need to consider how it works! The world doesn't care. Satan doesn't want people to think about such issues, he would much rather have people be ignorant and sin.

One additional thought: it seems like some will try to shield their behavior under the veil of "it's just not all that clear in the Bible." I have also had religious people tell me that it was ok to kill a fertilized egg as a means of birth control since the fertilized egg is so "small". They are wrong - risking killing a baby because one wants the convenience of the Pill form of birth control is a sin. It's not that confusing.

If you are taking the Pill, please investigate this issue further. A small percentage of the time, a fertilized egg (a baby) will die because of the inhospitable conditions created from taking the Pill. I have other articles for reference if needed, including a peer reviewed medical journal article, simply ask. With the Pill, we are risking aborting children. We are talking about ending the life of a child for convenience. I don't want to stand before God having killed someone for my convenience. Do you?

For further reading on the Pill, please read: <http://www.epm.org/static/uploads/downloads/bcpill.pdf> (Please send me an email, rlsollars@aol.com if you want additional resources to study)

A closing word of caution on judging:

In regard to family size, we do not know all the reasons that a couple might have a small family. In some cases, people are motivated by the wrong reasons: selfishness, the desire for a career, worldliness, wrong priorities, etc. In other cases: health problems, older marriages, multiple miscarriages, genetic problems, mental problems, accidents, and other such issues might cause a couple to not have many children. As we have seen in the Bible, there are faithful families with few or no children. We should not presume to know why a couple has few kids, but at the same time we must not refuse to preach on the topic because it might hurt someone's feelings or because there might be exceptions. Children matter! Satan does great damage to our society and the church by ungodly attitudes about the family! Consider that a little over 50 years ago couples had close to 4 children, now we have half

that! I believe having fewer children is large part of the reason why many churches are shrinking and older today!

Conclusion:

God says a "quiver full" (PS 127:5), whereas most in the modern world say "one" or "two." The question each person needs to ask is, "Do I have the same attitude about children that God does?"

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