



2019 Q2 Family Seasons - Lesson 8

Season of Parenting

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SABBATH

How many parents do we have here in class this morning? Well, I know there is nothing you parents love more than getting advice and guidance from folks who are NOT parents...right? Please just know that I am super sensitive to that fact, and will be deferring frequently today to all you parents out there for the real, real deal.

In Bible times, and historically...babies and children have been kind of a big thing...and were associated with wealth and power and royalty, and even being blessed by God. Many of these women pled..poured out their hearts to God begging for a child - remember Hannah weeping before the tabernacle or Rachel thinking of death as a preferred alternative to barrenness. We talked a little about these miracle birth stories last week, and about how the stories chosen to be recorded in the Bible serve as a historical record for sure, but can also serve to reveal a larger realities or as object lessons. There are 7 examples of barren women who were healed and gave birth and each one of those children are all types of Christ. So...real people, real history, but their stories also serve as object lessons of Christ:

1. Sarah – Isaac – Mount Moriah symbolic of Jesus to be sacrificed
2. Rebekah – Jacob – who became Israel the father of the nation built upon twelve sons, Jesus the cornerstone of the church built upon twelve apostles
3. Rachel – Joseph – who sold into slavery, became ruler to free the people; Jesus went into the slavery of sin in order to free us from it\
4. Monoah's wife – Samson – blessed with strength to deliver Israel from bondage of oppressors and rule over them, Jesus has the strength to deliver us from sin and rule the universe
5. Hannah – Samuel – who became High Priest, Jesus is our High Priest
6. Shunammite woman – child died and resurrected, of course Jesus died and rose again
7. Elizabeth – John the Baptist – who was greatest of the prophets, and Jesus was the greatest of all prophets

Did God miraculously get these barren women pregnant? No, the miracle performed was one of physical healing, like healing blindness, or deafness, but in these cases God healed or restored their ability to reproduce. The women still had natural relations with their husbands that got them pregnant - God did not get them pregnant. Mary was different. In her case no miracle was performed to heal a physical defect or malady that prevented her from conceiving. In her case, God did instill a pregnancy in her, a true miracle birth.

Do you find it odd – that God chose Abraham to be the family through which the Messiah would come, and the first three generations – Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel are all barren, and all require a miracle healing to conceive?

What are the odds...random chance? Or is there a great controversy going on?



Was Satan afoot trying to obstruct God's plan by causing health problems?

We don't have any inspired word that this is what happened, but does it make you wonder?

So Biblically and historically - babies and children super important...what about now, say in this country...what do you think?

Seems like not nearly as much. A 2018 study from the CDC, the birth rate fell for nearly every group of women of reproductive age in the U.S. in 2017, reflecting a sharp drop that saw the fewest newborns since 1987. The general fertility rate sank to a record low of 60.2 births per 1,000 women between the ages of 15 and 44 — a 3 percent drop from 2016. The results put the U.S. further away from a viable replacement rate, which is the standard for a generation being able to replicate its numbers. Women between the ages of 40 and 44 were the only age group to see a higher birth rate in 2017...up 2% from 2016. Indeed, more and more women are choosing to delay marriage and children. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the average age for a woman's first marriage is now over 27—the highest it's been since the agency began keeping track. A 2018 poll from Morning Consult and the New York Times found that most Americans planned to have fewer children than their parents. Almost a quarter of the respondents without kids said they didn't want any, and another 34 percent still weren't sure.

What are some factors that might be contributing to these changing stats and trends?

- Economic concerns - recession, stagnant wages, student loan debt, credit card debt, childcare expenses, loss of second income
- Even though a lot of the economic indicators have improved, people are still not feeling super optimistic about the future.
- Increasing rates of infertility - both male and female...we will talk a bit more about this in Sunday's lesson

So why do you think children were part of God's plan?

Was there a purpose for the establishment of the human family?

What was happening in the universe - what was the cosmic context of creation?

Did children serve a purpose other than increasing the population?

What is the minimum number of participants required for perfect, other-centered love?

The minimum number for genuine other-centered love to exist and function is three—not two. In a relationship of two there can be narcissistic reinforcement—I have seen this in marriages where things were fine until the first child was born and the husband becomes jealous and hostile he no longer commands the supreme attention and affection of the wife.



So was the human family designed as an object lesson...was it designed to illustrate a greater truth? A larger reality?

Perhaps provide us with some insight into the unity and intimacy of the trinity...some understanding of the Godhead and how He governs the universe?

Is this why he created us **IN HIS IMAGE** and gave us the very God-like trait of coming together in love and giving of ourselves to create new beings in our image?

EGW saw it this way:

“There are three living persons of the heavenly trio; in the name of these three great powers--the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit--those who receive Christ by living faith are baptized, and these powers will cooperate with the obedient subjects of heaven in their efforts to live the new life in Christ. Evangelism, p. 615.

Here’s another quote that gives us some inspired insight, talking about A Child's Influence on Enoch—

“After the birth of his first son, Enoch reached a higher experience; he was drawn into a closer relationship with God. He realized more fully his own obligations and responsibility as a son of God. And as he saw the child's love for its father, its simple trust in his protection; as he felt the deep, yearning tenderness of his own heart for that first-born son, he learned a precious lesson of the wonderful love of God to men in the gift of His Son, and the confidence which the children of God may repose in their heavenly Father. – Adventist Home, 160

Can the parents in the room confirm this? Did having children change your perspective or give you some insights into larger realities or cosmic concepts?

Some of you know Stephanie Land, Dr. Jennings’ daughter-in-law and the mother of his grandchildren Lennox and Dexter... She was kind enough to share with me some of the material she had prepared, and had this profound insight.

“Parenting is a huge lesson in self-sacrifice and I think that’s one of the reasons it’s such a gift from God. We see love in a whole new light when it comes to our children, right? Especially when it comes to understanding God in the Old Testament.

Story after story, we see the CHILDREN of Israel rebelling against their Heavenly parent, God. And like any loving parent, God simply wants the BEST for His children. After all, doesn’t He know best?

Last summer, my daughter, Lennox, had a very tiny tick imbedded on the side of her neck. An important side note, a few months prior, we found a large, grown tick on her scalp, hidden by her hair. By the time we noticed it, it had dug deep into her scalp and the removal of the tick



caused her pain, as a small chunk of her skin came up with the tick. So, to be fair, Lennox had a reason to fear the pain that removing a tick can sometimes cause. However, Michael and I tried and tried to explain to her that this tick was much smaller, and it wouldn't be painful like before. She didn't believe us. And she wouldn't let us get anywhere near her neck. Several times, Lennox would say ok, that she would let us get the tick, but as soon as our fingers got close to her neck, she'd wince away. She would not stay still enough for us to successfully remove the tick. No matter how much we tried to reason with Lennox, her fear took over. Her fear kept her from trusting us. Her six-year-old mind didn't understand that a tick NEEDED to be removed. She didn't understand that the longer the tick stayed in her skin, the greater the risk of catching a tick-borne disease. She didn't understand, that if she wasn't perfectly still, allowing us to carefully remove the entire tick, the head could get stuck inside and cause a possible infection. She didn't understand the laws governing her health and that her parents were simply trying to bring her back into harmony with those laws of health.

Are you starting to see the correlation between this story and the children of Israel? We spent hours trying to reason with Lennox...trying to get her to cooperate and obey. The fight was exhausting and draining. Lennox's inability to TRUST us was heartbreaking.

When reason didn't work, we threatened. We told her that if we didn't get the tick off, we would have to leave the fun activity we were doing. We tried bribery. We tried a stern tone. None of it worked. We tried to hold her down with force. But her constant flailing around proved to be a challenge also. She cried. I cried. It was an all-around challenging experience. But at the same time, all I could think about was "Is this how God feels when we don't trust Him?" Do we believe that God knows best? Do we understand that God wants us to obey because His laws are the basis for life and He wants to free us from the dangerous, unhealthy oppression of the law of sin and death.

Michael and I knew better than our 6 year old. God knew better than the children of Israel. Michael and I wanted to protect Lennox from possible disease or infection. God wanted to protect the children of Israel from destructive practices that took them farther away from harmony with His design for life. God knows better.

The question is, do we trust Him...or will we allow fear to take over? Fear inhibits our ability to trust. Even though Lennox usually trusts us, her fear of pain completely dominated her ability to trust us in this situation."

Remember last week, we talked about some core principles that result in healthy families...and this one was key: **Willingness to tolerate the pain** that a loved one will experience as they make choices on their own—i.e. not being overly protective or overly rescuing when mistakes are made, or applying appropriate discipline to educate and teach, or offering healing interventions when necessary that might also be painful.

Love will risk being misunderstood, even hated, in order to do what is right.



Healthy parents are willing to allow their children to be mad at them in order to do what is best for the children...and doesn't this basically describe the entire Old Testament? How about it parents...how difficult is it to allow some natural consequences of poor decisions...or to know when and when not to rescue or intervene?

SUNDAY

Childless Parenting

Infertility is more common than most people think, and I'm guessing most of us here knows someone who is or has struggled with infertility.

Today, as many as one in seven couples trying to have a baby will experience infertility. In fact, recent studies show that after a year of trying, 15 percent of couples are unable to conceive a child. And, after two years, 10 percent of couples had still not achieved a successful pregnancy. That's dramatically different than it was 20 or 30 years ago. What's more, infertility is expected to increase in the future. By 2025, almost 10 million couples will encounter problems in having a baby.

What are some possible reasons for this? Well women are waiting later in life to get married and have children, which will inherently result in higher infertility - for couples who are under 30 and generally healthy, 20 to 37 percent are able to conceive in the first three months of trying. After age 30, a woman's chances of getting pregnant start dropping quickly with each year. We have also learned in this class about entropy, and about epigenetics...these are the instructions that sit on top of genes and tell them how they should be expressed...and about the ~1000 or so genetic and epigenetic mutations experienced by each successive generation. Plus, many of our lifestyle choices - growing rates of obesity and environmental pollution are also likely contributing to the growing infertility problems. Some of these effects are particularly concerning because they can accumulate over generations. Normally, acquired traits—like, say, a sperm count lowered by obesity—aren't passed down from father to son...but some chemicals, including phthalates and BPA, can change the way genes are expressed without altering the underlying genetic code, and that change is inheritable. Your father passes along his low sperm count to you, and your sperm count goes even lower after you're exposed to endocrine disruptors. That's part of the reason there's been no leveling off even after 40 years of declining sperm counts—the baseline keeps dropping.

So, over 50% of folks want fewer children than their parents had...25% of those with no children don't want any...34% more weren't sure...increasing infertility rates...all of which has a whole bunch of societal and political and financial ramifications for the future - and all of which is thankfully beyond the scope of this class. But there are a bunch of precious people out there who want nothing more than to be parents and are struggling with infertility, and miscarriages, and shots, and surgeries, and all sorts of heartbreaks and disappointments and emotional roller coasters and my heart goes out to them. The lesson also mentions those amazing folks who choose to adopt children as a way of becoming parents. How many think you have to give birth in order to be a parent?



MONDAY

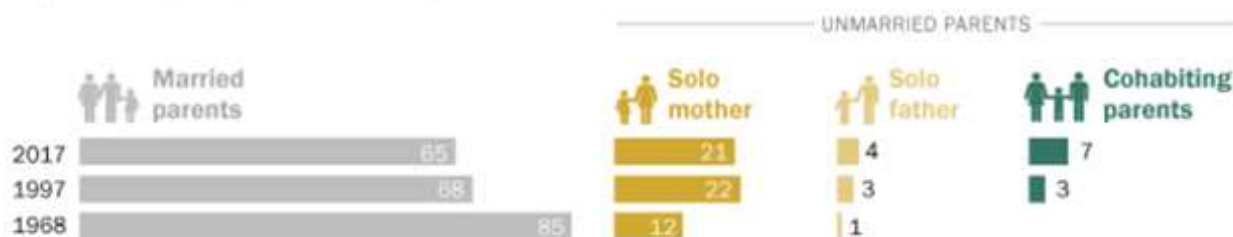
Single Parenting

I have nothing but mad respect for the single parents out there - it has to be one of these most challenging roles to be in, on almost every level - logistically, physically, emotionally, financially, and spiritually.

Current single-parent stats: The share of U.S. children living with an unmarried parent has more than doubled since 1968, jumping from 13% to 32% in 2017. That trend has been accompanied by a drop in the share of children living with two married parents, down from 85% in 1968 to 65%. All told, 24 million U.S. children younger than 18 are living with an unmarried parent. Most (15 million) are living with a solo mother. In comparison, 5 million live with cohabiting parents and 3 million live with a solo father.

About one-in-five children are living with a solo mom

% of children younger than 18 living with ...



Note: Children who are not living with any parents are not shown. Data regarding cohabitation available since 1997 only.
Source: Pew Research Center analysis of Current Population Survey March Supplement (IPUMS).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

I love the last paragraph in Monday's lesson: "We as a church have the responsibility to help single parents. James wrote, "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble" (James 1:27, NKJV).

One could add, in principle, "and single parents in their trouble, too." The help we can offer does not have to be just financial. We could allow them to have some respite by taking their children for a little while so they can do other chores, rest, pray, and study God's Word. We can serve as mentors to their children or help repair things around the house. We can be God's hands in numerous ways to help support single parents.

Without passing judgment as to how they came to their situation, what specific things can you do to encourage and help single parents?" (I wonder why they included that first phrase?)

I consider this a similar situation to those among us struggling with loneliness and alone-ness - we certainly need to be more aware and sensitive to those needs, but we are also not mind-readers. I find most folks are generous and more than willing to help if they know there is a need, so if you are



struggling please reach out and let someone know that you need help cus lots of us would love the opportunity of giving and helping.

TUESDAY

The Joy and Responsibility of Parenting

The lesson describes the process of making your favorite dish - you follow a recipe, you add all the required ingredients, you follow all the instructions, and most of the time you get the desired results.

Then it says, “parenting is not like cooking”...why?

What are parents and educators responsible for? For their conduct in parenting and educating! Are parents and educators responsible for outcomes?

What is probably the most well-known, popular, commonly used (and perhaps mis-used) Bible text about parenting/child-rearing? Yes...of course, it’s Proverbs 22:6 - in traditional translations, it reads: train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

Now we have discussed other possible translations and interpretations in this class, but what really surprised me is that the teachers quarterly delved into some of these other options in depth. It says:

“Proverbs 22:6 is a rare verse possessing just the right amount of translational ambiguity and theological consequence to produce either existential hope or psychological trauma—or both. It is an exegetically juicy bit of Old Testament wisdom literature whose potential English translations can be virtual opposites of each other. Studying this verse can serve as a microcosm for the challenge, thrill, and surprise that make deeper Bible study all worth it. No matter how one translates this text, it does not mean that every wayward child is the direct result of bad parenting. So, this verse should be taken as a general principle about how experiences in earlier years can have long-term consequences.”

The Hebrew in this text reads only “according to his way”, but it has traditionally been interpreted as “in the way he should go”. There is also some disagreement on the Hebrew word “na’ar”, which has traditionally been translated as “child”...but may instead refer to an unmarried young adult, which means the text would involve adolescents/teenagers rather than toddlers...and would read “Train an adolescent in his own way, and when he is old he will not depart from it.”

The text is now understood as a promise, not that good parenting guarantees good results, but that lax parenting that caters to the teenagers’ undisciplined “way” will have long-term deleterious results.

Which seems like the more accurate in regard to actual outcome promises? The second!

When God raised Lucifer and Adam, there were no mistakes – He did everything perfectly – then if the first translation were true, then God would be responsible for failing to parent Lucifer and Adam correctly, but this is not the case. It is a proverb, telling us that if we fail to do any job, let the child be



in charge of it's rearing, it will grow up self-centered, self-indulged, narcissistic and will not depart from it. However, the traditional interpretation can be used to teach a general principle, that good outcomes are enhanced by good investments, but such good investments do not guarantee good outcomes.

WEDNESDAY

Parenting as Disciple-Making

What does disciple-making mean? What is the definition of disciple?

A disciple is a student, a pupil, a learner...so discipling or disciple-making means to teach, instruct, train, and...from the root word, discipline.

Remember another one of last week's keys to family unity? Freedom—balancing our actions with the principle or law of liberty...not destroying the individuality of children and not dominating or controlling an adult.

Within this principle of freedom, love sets boundaries and limits freedom of those who do not have the ability to understand or the maturity to make decisions for themselves until they are old enough or competent enough or mature enough to be trusted to make their own decisions.

- So, in love, parents will limit the freedoms of children to protect them, but parenting them to the point that one day they are set completely free to govern themselves.
- Such limitations on freedom are not violations of love, but the actions of love to protect those who cannot protect themselves

And this profound quote from last week: **“The training of children must be conducted on a different principle from that which governs the training of irrational animals.** The brute has only to be accustomed to submit to its master, **but the child must be taught to control himself. The will must be trained to obey the dictates of reason and conscience.** A child may be so disciplined as to have, like the beast, no will of its own, his individuality being lost in that of his teacher. **Such training is unwise, and its effect disastrous.** Children thus educated will be deficient in firmness and decision. They are not taught to act from principle; the reasoning powers are not strengthened by exercise. **So far as possible, every child should be trained to self-reliance.** By calling into exercise the various faculties, he will learn where he is strongest, and in what he is deficient. A wise instructor will give special attention to the development of the weaker traits, that the child may form a well-balanced, harmonious character.” {CG 39.2}

Where else in the bible do we read about self control? It is the final fruit of the spirit!

Do we have a very good chance of discipling or teaching our children the fruits of the spirit...without being imbued with them ourselves?



These qualities cannot flow out from us if the Holy Spirit has not filled us with them to begin with! Such a weighty, sobering (and at times terrifying) responsibility for parents...and really nothing should get us on our knees quicker. Based on what we know about the design law of worship - the fact that we become like the God we admire, esteem, worship...and if we are going to be teachers, instructors, disciple-makers...does it matter the kind of God we are worshipping and the kind of God we are becoming like? And if we are making students, learners, and followers of our children...does it matter the kind of God they are being taught to follow?

THURSDAY

Fighting for Your Prodigal Child

My only experience on this topic is from the child's perspective, but I am getting a glimpse of what that fight must have looked like by watching my close friends pray over, and labor for, and burden for their own children.

We meet regularly and pray circles around our children and now grandchildren...but as we've discussed here today, sometimes we don't even know what to pray for. We know God will not violate the law of liberty or their free will...and honestly, we wouldn't want Him to...so we pray for the Holy Spirit to do His work in their lives - convict them of any wrongdoing and destructive behavior...soften their hearts, even if they are questioning and searching and rebelling, keep revealing truth to them, in love...remove the lies and distortions so they can see clearly and make accurate and informed decisions. We pray for their protection - physical, mental, and spiritual - while they are searching and questioning and making those decisions. We pray that substances and destructive behaviors would lose their appeal and become miserable and distasteful.

My other recommendation is to learn how God's law(s) work and how they function in reality. Worship Him who *made* the heavens and the earth - Whose laws are the protocols upon which life and reality operate.

By worshipping a God like this...and thereby becoming like Him - this God is attractive, this God is magnetic, when we lift Him up, He draws all to Himself.

Do. Not. Stop. Praying. And trust God with the outcomes.