
Foundations for Families – Family context

3 Scriptural Principles - children: aims – salvation; ‘completeness’

Reading – Luke 2:42-52 *Keywords* – listening; asking; understanding; obedience; wisdom; stature

Children - a heritage of the Lord

‘Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them.’ (Psalm 127:3-5)

These verses amplify verse 1 that refers to the ‘house’. There is no doubt that the Psalmist regards children, where having children is possible, as a vital element in a household. Other translations suggest that children are a gift of God. In the sense that if we place ourselves in God’s hands everything we have is given by God, children are certainly a gift. It is vital for us to be grateful for God’s gift and show our appreciation by the time and effort we put into helping in the development of the household.

While we rejoice over the gift of our children, let us be thoughtful for those who are unable to have children. In many cases they would dearly love to have them, but, for reasons over which they have no control, they may be childless. This may mean that sometimes a couple will have a burden they find hard to accept. Even though they pray for help, God’s answer, for His best reasons, may be ‘no’. Parents with children need to be sensitive to those without. And in many ways, we can embrace those without children into our own families, part of the great blessing of extended families.

Something to think about

- In what ways can we show our consideration of couples without children in helping them to be part of our own family?

Jesus – ‘my Father’s house’

‘Why were you searching for me?’ he asked. ‘Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?’ (Luke 2:49)

Some translations use the word ‘house’ here. Others use the word ‘business’. Actually, there is no word in the Greek at all. What is clear from the context is that Jesus was found in the ‘House’ of God – the Temple. It is obvious from the context that he was trying to learn as much about his Father (divine parent) as possible.

Jesus’ concept of priorities

‘So He said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come everlasting life.'" (Luke 18:29-30)

This seems pretty tough. Does Jesus mean that we should leave our families? Haven’t we already seen a number of passages that show the importance of families? The hard words here indicate that our priorities in life must always be those associated with placing God and His Kingdom first in our lives. In most circumstances, this will involve being with our families. Notice that there is an implied vital importance about families in these verses. The fact is that He mentions, virtually as a last resort, that, if necessary, we give up the most important aspect of our lives to place God first.

What aims do you have for your children?

Given that children are a ‘heritage from the Lord’, what aims do we have for them? It would seem clear that our aim would be to bring them up in the ‘training and instruction of the Lord’ (Ephesians 6:4). If our own aim is to serve God and to look forward to the time when the earth will be filled with His glory (Numbers 14:21), isn’t it reasonable for us to want the same for our children? To help them achieve this do we not need to provide instruction and training for them?

Sometimes, this notion of instruction and training seems to be at odds with current educational principles where children are encouraged to discover aspects of life rather than be taught. The two elements are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Parents can guide children’s discovery. Certainly, in education, it has been shown that children who discover for themselves are more likely retain memory and more meaningfulness of their discovery if they have discovered for themselves.

Something to think about

- In what practical ways can we both instruct our children, and help them to discover, essential aspects of living?

What is completeness?

We often hear of the idea in discussions on education that children should become ‘complete’ people. While this sounds good, everyone does not necessarily agree on what completeness is.

Think of all the single words you can think of that, in total, would add up to the grown up child being complete. You’ve probably come up with a very long list. When you examine it in relation to yourself, you may find that the aim for your children might be just a little high, unless you are perfection yourself!

How can we help our children become complete? The Scriptures give us some guidance. Paul in his letter to the Galatians outlined the Fruit of the Spirit, that is, those qualities of character that are demonstrated by a person whose life has been influenced by God through His Spirit.

‘But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.’ (Galatians 5:22-23)

Something to think about

- How do we practically help in the development of the fruit of the Spirit that are so important in forming the complete child?

The ultimate goal?

Paul wrote to the younger Timothy. He made it clear that learning the Scriptures was the key element for gaining salvation – eternal life.

‘... and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.’ (2 Timothy 3:15)

Should not helping our children ‘be wise for salvation’ be an important goal for us as parents?

In between ...

This can be hard. It is important that we have general aims for how we would like our children develop, but in between, and in the finer detail, our dilemmas can increase. We need to try to forge a relationship between what is ideal in the broad sense and how we reach that ideal through everyday decision making.

Something to think about

- At home – what TV do we allow children to watch? What books to read?
- At school – in what activities do we encourage them to become involved?
- Do we have specific ambitions for what vocation our children may follow, or do we let them choose for themselves?

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