



Equipping the Generations: Children: A Blessed Necessity for Christian Marriages

DAVID SCHROCK



David Schrock
pastors
Calvary
Baptist
Church in
Seymour,
Indiana. He is

the husband of Wendy and the father of Titus and Silas. Additionally, he is the book review editor for the *Journal of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, as well as CBMW's book review channel. He has contributed many articles and reviews for The Gospel Coalition, Credo Magazine, and PureHope Ministries. He blogs at ViaEmmaus.wordpress.com.

Last month, *Time* ran a cover story on “*The Childfree Life*.” It raised the question: Are children necessary for having a full and meaningful life? This month, Emily Timbol has picked up that question and stirred the pot again.

In her article, “*The Fruitful Callings of Childless By Choice*,” she makes the case that she and her husband are best able to glorify God by choosing not to have children. Supporting her thesis with a series of personal anecdotes, appeals to feelings, and a smattering of references to the Bible and theology, she suggests an alternative way to glorify God in marriage. She writes,

Skipping over a procreative opportunity isn't a rejection of God's purpose for me. When I think of what I was created for, what my purpose on this earth is, I don't think of babies....My purpose is not determined by my ability or desire to reproduce. It is determined the same

way as everyone else's: by gifts, passions, talents, and skills that God has given to use for his glory.

For Timbol, glorifying God is not restricted to baby making and therefore children are not necessary for a fruitful marriage. Her article is in step with the spirit of the age, but I want to ask, do her experiences, feelings, and purported Christian liberty really find support in Scripture? Does it really glorify God to intentionally forsake children? I will argue that Scripture clearly calls believers to pursue children in marriage.

THE GLORY OF GOD IS FAMILIAL, NOT FREE-WHEELING

When God created the world, he made it for his glory. Scripture repeatedly tells us that God created and redeemed the world for his glory (see Ps 19:1; Isa 43:6-7; Eph 1:6, 12, 14). Yet, the pinnacle of creation is not a thing. Humanity is in fact called to be the glory of God (see 1 Cor 11:7).

In Genesis 1, when God gave his first couple the command to be fruitful and multiply, he did not give them a command to procreate as an end in itself. Rather, procreation was the means by which God's glory would cover the earth. Psalm 8 tells us that God crowned mankind with glory. Thus, the command to procreate was a command to cover the earth with God's glorious image and likeness.

The fall put a stop to this plan, but when we read Numbers 14:20 and Habakkuk 2:14, we are reminded that what man corrupted, God would put to rights: The earth will be covered with the glory of God (i.e., redeemed humanity) as the waters cover the sea.

When we think of ‘glory,’ therefore, we must not imagine a world glowing like a Christmas tree. No, the glory that will cover the earth is intensely personal. Christ, who is the very radiance of the glory of God (Heb 1:3), will through his death and resurrection justify, sanctify, and glorify a people who will forever cover the earth with his glory. Any abstract discussion of God’s glory fails to understand the Christ-centered and anthropological nature of God’s glory.

In this light, we see the darkness of Timbol’s free-wheeling approach to glory. She misunderstands how humanity glorifies God. She is right that we can glorify God in ways other than procreation, but she is wrong to suggest that able couples can bypass child bearing *in the name of glorifying God*.

THE GOSPEL RESCUES US FROM BARRENNESS AND SEALS US IN THE FAMILY OF GOD

In the Old Testament, barrenness is a curse, children a blessing. Hannah weeps because she does not have children; Sarah laughs when at 99 she feels the kick of Isaac in her womb. In the law, barrenness is a punishment for covenant-breaking. In the Psalms, a full quiver is God’s gift to families.

Now, some will say, as Timbol does, that the modern woman can find blessing in things other than children, that she has freedom to pursue her calling with or without papoose. Tragically, such an argument leaves behind the timeless wisdom of God’s word and the blessings found therein.

The blessedness of children is not an agrarian boon; it is the nature of the kingdom of God. New Testament salvation is regularly depicted with familial metaphors. When Christian families won’t—*not can’t*—have children, they are not taking some alternative path to godliness; they are living out of step with God’s purpose in the universe—the creation of God’s family.

The message of the gospel trades on this fact: In

Christ, women will not be barren and men will not be eunuchs. Read Isaiah 53 and 54. The Suffering Servant died to make sure that Sarah would no longer be childless and Abraham would have to enlarge his tents. Though, we often neglect Isaiah 54, the message is clear: Barrenness, however you dress it up, stands at odds with the gospel. Gospel-minded Christians will pursue the increase of children, not the freedom to forego them.

CHOOSING TO BE CHILDLESS UNDERCUTS THE GREAT COMMISSION

Timbol’s whole article stands on the mistaken notion that we can glorify God however we choose. The problem is that the Bible is not silent about how God wants to be glorified. First Corinthians 6:19-20 says, “You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.” Consequently, a choose-your-own-path-to-fulfillment mocks God’s wisdom and glory. Paul understood this; he knew that his glory and joy was not his earthly gifts, but the children he was laboring to deliver into the kingdom of God (see Gal 4:19; 1 Thess 2:20).

So it seems that the Bible is not indifferent in its affirmation for Christian marriages to “be fruitful and multiply.” For those who have been brought into the family of God, they have the blessed responsibility to bear, raise, and disciple the children that God has given them. Yes, Matthew 28:19-20 calls Christians to reach beyond their families, but never at the expense of having a family.

In truth, the Great Commission must begin with our own families. In Christ, be fruitful and multiply takes on greater significance—we are to make disciples of those outside our families and we are to have children whom we can disciple. Refusing to have children for the sake of personal giftedness is not a display godliness. It is a refusal to participate in God’s plan of creating image-bearers who worship him.

THE HOLY CITY WILL BE OVERRUN WITH CHILDREN

In the end, Emily Timbol’s argument doesn’t find support in the Bible. In the Bible, the women of faith pursue child-bearing (1 Tim 2:15), and godly men live

with an eye towards their offspring. The gospel itself promises an eternal kingdom alive with the sons and daughters of God.

If we are persuaded by the wisdom of this age, such a family-friendly kingdom may sound strange or unappealing. But make no mistake, the kingdom of God looks like a busy cul-de-sac filled with playful children, not an intimate table for two. As Zechariah 8:5 puts it, “the streets of [Zion] shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets.”

The choice to refuse children is by no means a mark of Christian liberty; it is a living parable of an empty eternity. It is a choice that exchanges God’s glory (children made in his image) for something else—namely, those things we can make with our hands. Such an exchange will never bring glory to God. It didn’t at Mount Horeb and it will not now.

In the face of arguments for ‘fruitful childlessness,’ God’s wisdom still holds true: “Children are a blessing from the Lord.”