

Disciples of Jesus Christ • Dedicated to the Great Commission • Desiring God's Glory

Kids, Jesus Loves Thee

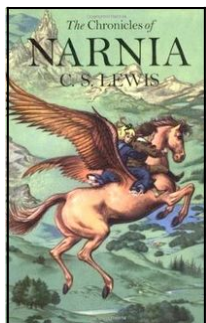
For years I have said in a kidding manner that parents are handicapped when raising children because there are no blueprints for new parents. Blueprints are written instructions. You know, the kind of instructions that no man will look at when putting something together. In reality the blueprints for raising children are written in the Bible.

In the book of Genesis, we read of the story of creation of man and woman. The gospel of Mark tells us about Holy matrimony, "But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife." (Mark 10:6-7) Now look at Genesis 1:28, "And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth...'" This is one command that we definitely obeyed. There are about 8 billion people living on earth today. God knew all of them while they were forming in the womb. I love the message in the song Jesus Loves the Little Children. "Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world, red and yellow, black and white, they're all precious in his sight." Now look at Psalm 127:3, "Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward." God has told us to unite and

have children. Now, what should we do?

As parents we should follow God's blueprint. "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old, he will not depart from it." (Proverbs 22:6) This verse not only gives us instructions but it also provides assurance. That assurance should help us deal with any fears that we might have concerning our children's future. Training up a child requires prayer, instruction, discipline and leading by example. I have always been convicted to some degree by the question asked in Matthew 7:9, "Which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone?" Investing in our children's spiritual health is a tremendous responsibility. Notice what Jesus says about children in Matthew 19:13-14, "Children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, but Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.'" We need to teach our children that Jesus loves them and He gave His life for them. Once they are in His hand no one can pluck them out. Heaven is waiting for them.

(Continued on Page 2...)



To claim that The Chronicles of Narnia by C.S. Lewis is one of the greatest works of children's fiction would put me in good company. Only ten years ago I couldn't have shared that opinion because I never read the Narnia stories as a child.

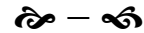
As an avid reader, I have always been delighted by opportunities to read wonderful books aloud to children. When I

taught in public schools I insisted that reading aloud would be a crucial piece of my daily classroom schedule, even when it wasn't in vogue. I shared chapter books and picture books alike with my third grade class and of course with kindergarten students. It was always my favorite part of the day, and theirs too. As a parent I still find reading aloud to be a great joy. Everyone calms when books are shared and we're enjoying stories together.

When scanning book lists The Chronicles of Narnia often appeared with high praise. In my limited knowledge of the series, I dismissed it for the fantastical

Children of God

In this issue we focus on children: **The blessing from God that children are, how we can learn from children, and what Jesus said about children.**



"The soul is healed by being with children."
- Fyodor Dostoevsky

"Men are never manlier than when they are tender with their children - whether holding a baby in their arms, loving their grade-schooler, or hugging their teenager or adult children."
- R. Kent Hughes

"When I was ten, I read fairy tales in secret and would have been ashamed if I had been found doing so. Now that I am fifty, I read them openly. When I became a man I put away childish things, including the fear of childishness and the desire to be very grown up."
- C. S. Lewis

"God wants a child's heart and a grownup's head."
- C. S. Lewis

"Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. For he who is least among you all is the one who is great."
- Jesus, Luke 9:48 ESV

"Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."

- Jesus, Luke 18:16-17 ESV

elements like talking animals in an other worldly setting. But after multiple rave reviews I began to read Narnia aloud with Moriah years ago. She was quickly taken in, more surprisingly I was as well. There were many days that reading portions of Narnia aloud brought tears to my eyes.

In writing The Chronicles of Narnia, Lewis tells a story that can be absolutely entrancing on a surface level. As a storyteller he captivates his readers with intrigue and tremendous imagination. Children who read Narnia without any knowledge of its Christian themes will still find much to enjoy. (Continued on Page 2...)

Kids, Jesus Loves Thee

(Continued from Page 1)

In the book of James God gives specific instructions concerning the fatherless and orphans, "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans..." (James 1:27) I am convinced that the word visit in this context has a very deep meaning. The word visit implies action. It speaks to adopting a child, being a foster parent, and protecting children from abuse of any kind. It speaks to the giving of our time and our money to those less fortunate. God loves children. He wants us to see their needs and provide for them.

Psalm 127:3-5 says, "Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them!" God has blessed Judy and I with a quiver full of Christian children and grandchildren. He also has provided Christian spouses for each of our children. We thank God daily for the blessings he has bestowed upon us. When our children were born, we were very aware that God had entrusted us to not only raise our children physically but also spiritually. In his word God established the blueprint for raising children and we asked for his guidance as we tried to follow that blueprint. Their salvation was our highest priority. We prayed often. God led us in many ways. He led us with his Holy Spirit, his Word, his church and by the example of other Christians. We strived to seek out and support the interests, talents and thoughts of each child. We encouraged them to go to a Christian college and are so grateful that they had that opportunity. We made mistakes along the way and sometimes we even gave them stones instead of bread. Hopefully they were small stones. "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth." (III John 1:4) That joy puts a song in my heart. Kids "Jesus loves thee this we know, for the Bible tells us so."

- Pat Dunn

Narnia Review *(Continued from Page 1)*

For adults reading Narnia aloud, or even for their own pleasure, the depth of Lewis' story is often breathtaking. The Biblical themes Lewis includes in the midst of his story are stunning. Lewis had great aims in writing Narnia as he did. He once explained his intentions in this way: "Why did one find it so hard to feel as one was told one ought to feel about God or about the sufferings of Christ? I thought the chief reason was that one was told one ought to. [...] But supposing

Becoming Like a Child

To be honest, before I was a father I was pretty uncertain about small children. They struck me as snotty and silly; full of germs and not appreciative of the deeper things of life. To spend time with a small child was to increase one's chances of getting sick, and forfeit any chance of stimulating conversation. This is rough, but it really was my perspective.

Being a father changes everything. From the moment Moriah was born followed by Caleb's and David's arrivals, my perspective has never been the same. To begin with, the sheer joy they have brought to me is beyond anything I expected. Small children radiate life. In Matthew 21 we read of the blind and lame coming to the temple to see Jesus. Jesus healed them and in verse 15 we read that the children who saw Jesus do this shouted joyfully, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" These little children had been rightly taught, concerning the works the coming Messiah would perform, and upon seeing Jesus perform those works they spontaneously, and on their own, rejoiced.

Children delight in being delighted. Some of my sweetest memories with my children are of tickling them and getting them to laugh and laugh. Often they ask me to keep tickling them. Adults are rarely like this, tickling or no tickling. Matthew records in his gospel that the chief priests and scribes were indignant at what the children were saying of Jesus, and demanded that Jesus make them stop. In response Jesus quoted Psalm 8:2 to the priests and scribes: "Out of the

mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise." Think of it. The priests and scribes whose noses were not running, whose shirts did not have drool on them, and who had spent years in deep study, missed what those little ones grasped.

There is a beautiful simplicity in a child's faith in God. I pray God grants me such faith, and you as well. A child is not skeptical or cynical. The young Jewish children at the temple that day took God's Word at face value, and when they saw His Word being fulfilled before their eyes they rejoiced. Yet, many adults, particularly the smartest ones, missed it, missed Jesus. May we not miss Jesus. In Matthew 18:3 Jesus says, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

Before fatherhood, being like a child was the last thing I desired. I was like Jesus' first disciples. I saw them as a nuisance. In Matthew 19:13 we read that people were bringing their children to Jesus so that he would lay his hands on them and pray over them. The disciples rebuked these parents. Why? The Bible does not say, but piecing together the disciples' attitude elsewhere in the gospel it seems that they considered children below the dignity of Jesus. Jesus simply responds to them saying in Matthew 19:14, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven." Oh, that we would become like children.

- Pastor Matt Peery

that by casting all these things into an imaginary world, stripping them of their stained glass and Sunday School associations, one could make them for the first time appear in their real potency?"

There is no better season than winter to start reading aloud with your family. Encourage your kids to snuggle close, or to keep their hands quietly occupied with Legos, drawing, or a craft as they listen. Read in the evenings to wind down, or on Saturday morning while everyone relaxes. Pick up [The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe](#) and enter the world of Narnia. The first few chapters are setting you up

for the wonder that awaits, persevere through the British conversations of the past, and follow Lucy into the wardrobe with Edmund, Peter, and Susan. If reading aloud feels intimidating, listen to the Narnia series on audio book, either online for purchase or through the local library on CD. Turn it on as you drive to and from school, and experience the story together. Remember as you read with your children that C. S. Lewis is also known to have said, "a children's story which is enjoyed only by children is a bad children's story."

- Laura Peery

A Father to Ten Children

WARNING: What follows is sad, leaves you heart-broke and upset. I am going to speak the truth. I'll tell you about sad times and happy times so clear your head and prepare for what awaits you.

I'm writing to inform you that if you open your heart to God and let him work, it will be clear what your goal is with adoption. We make that decision on our own and don't give him a chance to use us to do his work.

It was 2001 and Jenny was pregnant with Hyson, she worked as a teacher's assistant at Mark Twain for a group of kids that came from terrible homes. Christmas of 2000 Jenny asked for money so she could buy these kids clothes. When they had accidents, Jenny would put on them the clothes she bought for them. Boys would come in wearing girls clothes, filthy clothes, clothes that didn't fit. Jenny had a heart for these kids, she asked me to come in one day to meet them, so I did. I sat down, on the floor against the wall to watch, within 5 minutes every kid was as close as possible to me. I had them on my legs, between my legs, beside me, on my shoulder. That evening Jenny told me that made their day, they literally don't have a father in their life that will sit with them. Around this time Jenny mentioned the word "adopt" and my answer was NO. In May of 2001, Jenny started having contractions, way too early for Hyson as he was due in August. Off to St. Louis she went, contractions were stopped, 2 weeks later she was released but had to live within 10 minutes of the hospital as Rolla couldn't care for Hyson if he was born early. She was there, I was in Rolla working only seeing her on the weekends. Around the middle of July she got to come home. Jenny ended up having a c-section with Hyson and everything was great. Camilla was born in 2004, Sam was born in 2005, two more c-sections and it was mentioned to us that after 3 the risk goes up for future pregnancies.

Around 2008 Jenny brings up adoption again, my reply "Nope". Jenny said, "Well I'll just keep praying", and I said, "you do that because that is what it's going to take". Now I later found out she had been praying since 2000 to change my thought on adoption. Folks we had 3 kids, driving a minivan, adoption wasn't on my radar. As the

days went by guess what started to creep in on my mind, yes, adoption! Man, I ran from that, and ran and ran. One day we received, in the mail, a little paper from the Missouri Baptist Children's Home and the kids they take care of. On the front of this paper was one of the most beautiful little girls, I showed Jenny and said, "do whatever we need to do to adopt this girl". That took Jenny about 2 hours, we signed up for 10 weeks of class, home visits, etc. We were an officially licensed foster family and that little beautiful girl was already placed in a home. Now Jenny drove a 12 passenger van, sure, here we go.

Now let me rabbit trail to the Bible and see what scripture has to say, shall we?

James 1:27, "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world".

Matthew 18:5, "Whoever receives one such child in my name received me."

Isaiah 1:17, "Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause".

Ephesians 1:5, "He predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will."

Acts 7:21, "And when he was exposed, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own."

Psalms 127:3-5, "Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of the warrior are the children of one's youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate."

Now perhaps the greatest adoption story is the birth of Jesus, Joseph could have stepped away but chose to stay by Mary's side and raise that boy. Jesus could have been aborted, ended up in the system, raised by a single parent through today's glasses. A recent quote I read, "Joseph is a real and necessary example of parenting a non-biological child for the glory of God." Jesus was adopted then crucified for our adoption. Scripture makes it plainly clear what our role is for orphans and adoption. Time for some questions: Have you visited an orphan? Have you received one such child? Have you brought justice to the

fatherless? Is your quiver full? I know your answers, I had the same ones. I'll pray for you.

We got our license in 2009 and our last adoption was final in 2019, our 10 kids were home. Would you have time for them? I never dreamed I would be a Father of 10 kids, I gave it to the Lord and I am watching him work and it is such a joy. We do have Thanksgiving at every meal, yes it has been hard but as the days go by I thank God for clearing my vision. Brothers and Sisters I wasn't focused on Him, my vision was on me. The first night Atticus, Asher and Aberdeen came home I told Atticus, "You can call me Matt or Dad." His answer, "I'll call you Dad." The boy hadn't known me for an hour.

Some of the biggest obstacles for Jenny and I and the adoption process were Christians. We were told we would ruin Hyson, Camilla and Sam. "Why would you bring that into your house? Those kids have such baggage." I feel sorry for those people and I pray for them. God could ask us the same couldn't he? I am so blessed to be the Father of 10, I wouldn't change one thing. It is absolutely all God, He has provided everything. I don't do it for the "look at me" ribbon but the look at Him. Do Jenny and I have a full quiver, I don't know. If God has another child headed our way, we are ready. We might be the Dirty Baker's Dozen!

So as my Brothers and Sisters I ask as you read this paragraph you pause and look around at what surrounds you, everything you see will be destroyed. The Bible states this in different books, Revelation being one of them, that this Earth and everything on it will be gone. When you lock eyes with someone, you are looking at the physical structure housing the only thing that won't be destroyed and that is the soul inside that structure. Nothing else but that eternal soul. Think about that, we do so much for "stuff" and so little for someone's soul. This next week, just come short of staring at somebody and ask yourself, "Which eternity will that soul go to?" How is the health of your soul? Go back and read the scriptures I gave you and ask yourself that. In Missouri there are over 13,000 kids in foster care, little eternal souls that need the Truth. Oh, but Matt we can't, again I know your answers I said them myself.

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A Father to Ten Children

(Continued from Page 3)

This is fuel for pro-abortion, they could easily say, "Look at all the kids in foster care, we don't need more, abortion is the answer." If one family from every Christian church in Missouri took in a child there would be no child in the system and they would be in a Christian home. You say, well we have the Williams. Wrong, because we have that mentality that someone else will do it. I'm not asking you all to go out and adopt, I'm asking you to open the Bible and read what it says about adoption. Open your hearts to what you can do for the 13,000+ kids in Missouri, you could end up adopting. Look into what it takes, take the classes, look into private adoption, call the delivery floor at the surrounding hospitals. I never will forget a posting Jenny and I came across, it was for twins, they were 19 years old, a boy named Matt and a girl named Amanda (they share the same name as my sister and I). All they wanted was a Mom and Dad to be there for them, they had aged out of the system at 18 and literally had nobody, nowhere to go, nobody to call, nothing. They wanted someone, "Mom how do you cook this", "Dad how do you fix this?" They needed help with life, how to find a job, how to find an apartment, you get the picture. If someone called you about Hyson, who is 19, to help him get on with life, could Jenny and I depend on you to step up? Are we too busy for that? Can we not set one thing aside to help a child, an eternal soul? Do whatever is possible to help, you might find that God has other plans and this isn't for you, but let Him make that decision for you. Don't give Him excuses, give Him the opportunity to use you, please. I have just touched the tip of the iceberg on our adoption travels, if you want to hear it all, give us a shout. I love you all, Spring Creek has given us 100% support through all of our adoptions. Jenny and I truly thank you for that. I ask that you look at us as one family with 10 kids, not 3 biological and 7 adopted, they are our kids coming home in different ways. They'll have plenty of baggage and they sure do not need to be set apart because of that baggage. It wasn't their fault. As followers we have been adopted which can never be taken away. The Church is one family. Let God do His work, follow Him and prepare yourself. We will pray for you, the eternal souls you may reach, the quiver you may fill.

- The Father of 10, Matt Williams

Teaching & Leading Kids at Spring Creek

I have many memories from my time at Spring Creek, although I must admit I don't remember much from the first couple years. When you're always on the bottle and often sleep through church, you tend to forget things. (Just to be clear, I was a baby!) When I think back to some of my earliest memories of my 36 years at Spring Creek, I picture people bobbing for apples at a halloween party in a room behind the kitchen, which is now the nursery. I think about climbing the tree on the south side of the church after service, where the handicap parking spots are now. I can see my dad screwing a microphone jack into the stage stairs, a small pile of sawdust on the step below, as the brand-new sanctuary was almost complete. There are other memories too. Memories like playing with magnets after hearing a lesson from Mary Lewis and my grandma in Children's Church. Listening to James Curtis read from our Sunday School book as I, and several other young boys, followed along. I remember Ed Dunn answering questions from us youth, even though he had been in our shoes just a few years before.

All of these people, and many more, taught me about who God was and what it meant to follow Him. They shared lessons and stories from the Bible, and they genuinely cared about me. As a kid I didn't think too much of it, because that's just the way things were at Spring Creek. When it was Sunday morning, Sunday night, or Wednesday night you went to church, and these people would be there too. It wasn't until I had kids of my own and began teaching a Sunday School class, that I fully appreciated what all these people did for me.

So first, I simply want to say thank you. Thank you to all the teachers, workers, organizers, and helpers at Spring Creek who shared stories from the Bible with me. Thank you for staying up late after your own kids were asleep, so you would be prepared to teach next Sunday. Thank you for learning Biblical concepts so that you could teach them to me. Thank you for your excitement to share God's word when you couldn't wait to teach next Sunday, and thank you for your faithfulness to prepare, show up, and share even when you really didn't feel like it. Thank you for deciding that me learning to prioritize Jesus in my life, was a worthy priority of yours. Thank you, thank you, thank you!

As I reflect on my childhood, I think about what I want my kids to learn from my brothers and sisters at Spring Creek. While teaching my kids about God is ultimately my responsibility as their parent, I hope there are others who are willing to take time to share those lessons with them too. Many of you already have, and for that I say thank you again.

The structured teaching in a classroom setting is important, but beyond that, what I want is people who are real. Not people who are real in a sense that they're proud of their faults, and they're going to tell you whatever they think because that's really them. The world has plenty of those people already. No, I want my kids to see people who, while imperfect, are real in that they are genuinely trying to honor God, obey his Word, and live out their faith in all parts of their life.

That means that when my kids watch you during church, they see you genuinely praising God, and it is obvious through your actions and expressions. They also see you studying the Word and trying to learn when the pastor preaches. When my kids come to your house to play with your kids, they see parenting that is God honoring. When my kids see you in the grocery store on a Tuesday evening, you're the same person you were on Sunday morning. When my kids watch you and your spouse, they get a clearer Biblical understanding of what it means to treat your husband with respect and love your wife as Christ loved the church. When my kids are old enough to begin working, and one of them gets a job at the same place you work, they see a coworker whose actions, language, and attitude are just as God honoring as they were last Sunday.

Because here's the thing. Your faith is personal. Your choices are your responsibility, and you and you alone will have to account for your actions before God. However, while your faith is personal, it's not private. The way you live your life will either encourage the people around you to also seek God, or it will teach them that living for God and trying to follow the Bible really aren't that important. My hope is that you would choose to live a life seeking to serve God above all else, in all things, and when my kids see you, they'll be encouraged to do the same.

Thank you, brothers and sisters, for setting a God honoring example for our kids at Spring Creek.

- Todd Dablemont

Children – Examples for Us

Pastor Matt recently encouraged me to write about something near and dear to my heart – children! It's no secret to most of you that I greatly enjoy the youngsters we are blessed with in our church. What joy they bring to this old soul! I have received many SPECIAL gifts from these young ones, ranging from hugs (not recently, drat this covid!) to drawings, crafts, Easter eggs, rocks and even a small frog! I've also been blessed to have a number of conversations about the baptistry, since I am usually in that vicinity preparing for the service. I've heard it called a bathtub, swimming pool and even a cage! How sweet it is to share with them what it actually is and why we use it. Good stuff, to be sure!

There is something so very real and genuine about children. They are usually painfully honest, not hesitating to comment on whatever's in your nose or how your hair looks or anything else that pops into their minds. I love it! No pretense, no guile, and no mystery as to what they are feeling or thinking. Don't misunderstand me; I'm glad we as adults are a little more sensitive and careful in our speech. That's a necessary skill for a child of God, but we can learn a lot from these youngsters' openness and candid approach.

God's love for us is well documented in His Word, and that love begins in the womb. From day one we are special to Him. David declares in the 139th Psalm, verses 13-16...

"For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb.

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.

My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them."

Every child, from day one in the womb, is a masterpiece of God's creative abilities. "Fearfully and wonderfully made"- sounds pretty amazing, doesn't it? I realize some adults look at children as a nuisance, a bother, weak or needy, but that is certainly not the heart of our Lord. He treasures them. In Psalm 127 we are reminded, "Behold, children are a gift of the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward."

God hears their prayers – AND their praises. In Matthew 21:15-16 we read, "And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed

them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, 'Hosanna to the Son of David!' they were indignant, and they said to him, 'Do you hear what these are saying?' And Jesus said to them, 'Yes; have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise'?"

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus notably rebuked His disciples for turning away those bringing children to Him. His words are clear and profound. "But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.'" (Mark 10:14-15)

In Matthew 18:1-6 we read, "At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, 'Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.'"

Verse 10 adds to this by Jesus declaring: "See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven."

Christ felt children were worthy of His time, love, teaching and healing. They were not something to be ignored or overlooked. Their value to Him is not based on age, wisdom, experience or any other worldly measure. Their value – and ours as well – comes from God via His amazing grace.

Jesus wants each of us to possess a childlike faith; that is, a pure, unassuming, and humble faith. This type of faith allows us to receive God's gift of salvation without self-importance or hypocrisy. It allows us to believe unshakably that God is who He says He is. Like children who rely on their parents' providing for their daily needs, we should humbly depend on our Heavenly Father.

What a wonderful blessing children are! But they are also a huge responsibility. In Deuteronomy 6:5-7 we see God's people tasked with getting their heart right, and then devoting themselves to sharing their faith with the next generation: "You shall love the

Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise."

These words are not just a suggestion, but rather a command to each of us to be focused on sharing and teaching God's word to those younger than ourselves. Proverbs 22:6 reinforces the importance of this, "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it." This "training" is not totally accomplished by just bringing your youngsters to church, Sunday school or VBS. It needs to be reinforced and exemplified in the home. Children need to see their parents living out their faith, trusting in God's providence and actively seeking to serve Him. No sermon ever preached or Sunday school lesson ever taught will have more impact on a child than a parent who consistently, faithfully shows them what being a child of God is really about. Don't say one thing and live another. Children will see right through it, and their spiritual growth will suffer immensely. Their "degree of faith" will be impacted by what they see demonstrated in the home, and they will often exhibit the same casualness to the gospel that they have grown up with. Church attendance, service in the church, giving, dedication to evangelism, humility, generosity, etc. are all aspects of our faith that can be positively or negatively passed on to children. It is sobering to consider the impact we have on them.

I have always felt you could size up an adult pretty quickly by the way they treat children. As adults interact with someone who cannot improve their status or income - and may bring a variety of requests or needs, they reveal some major qualities and attitudes. Some adults just don't feel compelled to spend the time or energy required to relate to these youngsters. Sadly, everyone - young and old - suffers when that occurs. A tremendous blessing and opportunity is lost.

I recently read a comment from John Piper that summed it up pretty well, "One thing to watch for when assessing a person's spiritual fitness for ministry is how he or she relates to children. Put a child in the room and watch. This is what Jesus did to make his point. Children are the litmus paper to expose the presence of pride."

(Continued on Page 7...)

Martin Luther and the Family

Martin Luther (1483-1546), though not alone, was the lynch pin of the protestant Reformation which rediscovered the Gospel of Christ that had been buried by a plethora of unbiblical councils and church dogma. God did a work in Luther and we today still reap the benefits.

As a young person Luther spent his life in fear of God. He knew that he was a sinner, and he deserved God's wrath. This great fear so gripped him during a thunderstorm he thought he might be struck down and go to hell. He called out for divine help, but for someone who was accessible to him being a sinner. He cried, "Save me St. Anne, and I will become a monk."

Why a monk? Simply because, it was believed, that there was no greater way to serve the Lord than to suffer for the Lord at the monastery. It was the same for women who wanted to show their devotion to God. Going to live in a convent was only for the truly dedicated. There, it was reckoned, one would curb their sin through self-discipline and taking vows. This would help to limit sin in their life. If a person was a gossip or foul mouthed, then a vow of silence would stop that sin. Which makes sense, if you never speak then you never back bite, gossip or lie. If a person had a greedy heart, then a vow of poverty would keep it in check. Then, for everyone, there was the vow of celibacy. The best way to not sin sexually was to, like Job, pray for a hedge of protection, make a covenant with your eyes and of course put up very tall walls around your house.

After all, 1 Corinthians 7:32-35 told them that the married person's "interests are divided" and Paul wants to "secure your undivided devotion to the Lord." So, the teaching of the day said that it is better not to marry, and many people attempted a pure and celibate life (and failed). The weaker Christians were to get married so that they could ward off the temptation of lust. Sex was allowed in marriage, of course, but "not to gratify the flesh." It was used for two purposes. One, to help defeat lustful sin. The husband and wife would be together occasionally, even reluctantly, so "you do not burn with passion" (1 Cor 7:9). Secondly, it was used for procreation. How often should a married couple engage in such an act depended on how many children they were to have.

So back to Luther. He was taught that living at the monastery was for those who were the most willing to serve a holy God. Now as you may have guessed none of the vows or no amount of seclusion helped with Luther's fear. Luther realized that it was not the

people outside of the walls that were his problem. His own heart, which he could not escape, was his enemy.

Luther knew that God would be just in punishing him. He had no righteousness compared to God's perfect righteousness. Without God acting, this would have been Luther's lot in life. Pushing away many of God's blessings to try to live holy. Even with confession hours a day he had no peace. Then, as you probably know, God opened Luther's heart as he studied scripture. Seeing that the righteousness that Luther so hated and feared was actually the very thing he needed. Luther realized this righteousness that he was working toward was already his through faith in Christ.

The ripple effect through the centuries of that one discovery is incalculable. But what about Luther? What changed for him? One great change that took place for the 46 year old ex-monk was he got married. Just consider all the peaks and valleys you get to experience in marriage? There are overwhelming times of joy and then bitter tears that break your heart. Neither were part of his life in the monastery. Now he had a wife. His love for her grew over time. He called Katherine his "rib." Just like Adam had his side taken away only to receive it back as Eve. Luther felt like he was finally complete now that he had found his dear "Katie."

Because of the gospel penetrating every aspect of his being, Luther's perspective on life was to live it "unto God" (Coram Deo). Whatever work that was to be done was to be for the glory of God. The pastor giving the Lord's supper was a good work unto the Lord and pleased Him. In the same way, the farmer in the field was doing a good work unto the Lord and it pleases the Him. The Priest was no closer to Christ than the ploughboy. For Luther even the secular works that do not have the appearance of sanctity were worship of God and well pleasing to Him. Luther said, "Works in connection with the household are more desirable than all the works of all the monks and nuns, be they ever so laborious and impressive."

Sometimes theology does not seem to meet us where we are in day to day life. But just imagine the effect it had on people to realize this truth. A housewife and mother who worked her fingers to the bone or the mason trying to earn a living. These thankless activities were not getting in the way of the sacred, on the contrary, they are the works that God had prepared as a means to glorify Him. He sees it and is pleased.

For instance, Luther says in part, "When a father goes ahead and washes

diapers or performs some other menial task for his child, God, with all his angels and creatures, is smiling, not because that father is washing diapers, but because he is doing so in Christian faith."

Luther the husband, naturally became Luther the father. Katherine bore six children. Luther was a serious scholar and a brilliant pastor. He was very caring to the poor and uneducated of his day. He also loved children. He loved his own children and those he adopted. He played games and music with them. He asked the Lord to give him the same childlike faith that he saw in his children.

Even the everyday business of life was an enjoyment. And this ex-monk now pored himself into his children which to him was God's grace upon grace. He was able to bask in the joy of watching his little babies learning about a good God that loves them and has shown His love in Christ. Luther had family devotions, not out of fear that God would judge him, but out of a love that he was freely given. He said, "The marital estate is a gift created by a loving Father who delights to give good gifts to his children. And if that generosity were not full and rich enough, he gives parents the high calling of raising children: little image bearers who are a heritage from God himself."

Well, of course, during the sixteenth century there were many troubles. In particular, death was always close by and Luther was not immune to sorrow. He lost his daughter Elizabeth before she was a year old. He and Katie were both inconsolable. Speaking of this time Luther said, "There is no sweeter union than that in a good marriage. Nor is there any death more bitter than that which separates a married couple. Only the death of children comes close; much of this hurt I have myself experienced."

Then a few years later his other daughter Magdalena, now fourteen, became extremely ill. Luther and Katie once again prayed to the Lord for help. Luther knew that she would be better by far with Christ, but he so loved this gift that God had given him, he did not want to let it go. He said, "In the last thousand years God has given to no bishop such great gifts as he has given to me. I am angry with myself that I am unable to rejoice from my heart and be thankful to God, though I do at times sing a little song and thank God. Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's"

It is easy to see how the Gospel changed Luther. He moved from the fear of the righteous Judge who punishes, to the love of a righteous Father who saves through faith and even gave blessing on blessing.

Children – Examples for Us

(Continued from Page 5)

You might think that the main thing Jesus would do is to say, “Don’t be proud, become like children.” He did say essentially that in Matthew 18:3, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” But he said something else even more striking. When Jesus saw that his disciples were arguing over which of them was the greatest, “He sat down and called the twelve. . . . And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.’” (Mark 9:34-37).

Receiving a child into your arms in the name of Jesus is a way to receive Jesus. And receiving Jesus is a way to receive God. Therefore how we deal with children is a signal of our fellowship with God. Something is deeply amiss in the soul that does not descend (or is it really ascend?) to love and hold a child.”

I certainly can’t add to that.

- Marvin Dablemont

To My Mother

I was your rebellious son,
do you remember? Sometimes
I wonder if you do remember,
so complete has your forgiveness been.

So complete has your forgiveness been
I wonder sometimes if it did not
precede my wrong, and I erred,
safe found, within your love,

prepared ahead of me, the way home,
or my bed at night, so that almost
I should forgive you, who perhaps
foresaw the worst that I might do,

and forgave before I could act,
causing me to smile now, looking back,
to see how paltry was my worst,
compared to your forgiveness of it

already given. And this, then,
is the vision of that Heaven of which
we have heard, where those who love
each other have forgiven each other,

where, for that, the leaves are green,
the light a music in the air,
and all is unentangled,
and all is undismayed.

-Wendell Berry

Adoption: The Sweetest Doctrine

It happens every day in courts across America. A judge utters a few words, pounds his gavel on the desk, and a child receives a new family. This moment is always bittersweet. Adoptions take place because biological parents are either unable, unfit, or unwilling to care for the child they brought into the world. But these events are wonderful, because when the hammer strikes, that child belongs fully to parents committed to love and care for him.

During the past couple decades, I’ve witnessed a growing interest in adoption. It’s often hitched to James 1:27 where we’re told that undefiled religion includes visiting “orphans and widows in their affliction.” It’s good when Christians open up their homes to those in need. But the practice of adoption is grounded in more than one verse; it is rooted in the incomparably sweet doctrine of adoption.

What Is Adoption?

Adoption is the gracious act of God wherein He makes justified sinners His beloved children. The Westminster Confession says to be adopted is to receive God’s name and to have access to God’s throne, His pity, His protection, His provision, His discipline, and His promise to never abandon us.

Most adopted children, after the gavel has been struck, are tempted to question if their new home will last. They wonder if they *really* belong to their family and if this new home really belongs to them. But when it comes to God’s adoption of His people, there can be no doubt or uncertainty. He is forever their Father. It is, after all, the will of God that makes justified sinners His children (John 1:12). God’s will is perfect, and it cannot be broken.

Adoption is rooted in God’s eternal plan and inexhaustible love. Before mountains rose, rivers ran, or birds flew, God “predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ” (Eph. 1:5). His desire to place sinners in His family through the work of His Son precedes even the work of creation. We can only marvel at the kindness of God

who would not call us *merely* His friends (see Isa. 41:8) but also His own sons and daughters. “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are” (1 John 3:1).

The Sweetest Doctrine

Perhaps it is presumptuous to call adoption the “sweetest” doctrine. But theologians throughout the ages have recognized its preeminence. John Dagg called it a “blessing of grace [that] rises higher than justification.”¹ A judge, he said, can acquit you; it takes a father to adopt you. Robert Dabney argued that adoption is “the strongest proof” of our justification.² Robert Webb may have put it best:

When we approach Him in the intensity of worship, we gather up all the sweetness involved in Fatherhood and all the tenderness wrapped up in sonship; when calamities overcome us and troubles come in like a flood, we lift up our cry and stretch out our arms to God as a compassionate Father; when the angel of death climbs in at the window of our homes and bears away the objects of our love, we find our dearest solace in reflecting upon the fatherly heart of God; when we look across the swelling flood, it is our Father’s House on the light-covered hills beyond the stars which cheers us amid the crumbling of the earthly tabernacle.³

And it wasn’t just professional theologians who appreciated this doctrine. The precious reality of adoption sustained Christian slaves in America as they endured the brutality of bondage, and even helped some to risk their lives in search of freedom. They saw God not merely as their sovereign Lord, but as their tender Father. Slaves William and Ellen Craft clung to the doctrine of adoption when they ran away from their masters: “When the time had arrived for us to start, we blew out the lights, knelt down, and prayed to our Heavenly Father mercifully to assist us, as he did his people of old, to escape from cruel bondage; and we shall ever feel that God heard and answered our prayer.”⁴

(Continued on Page 8...)

Adoption: Sweetest...

(Continued from Page 7)

The Bible's Story Line

The Crafts knew what every Christian should know: adoption is at the heart of the story line of the Bible. Adam and Eve embraced God as their holy and heavenly Father. They enjoyed His care and provision. He even walked in their midst (Gen. 3:8). But Adam severed that relationship when he sinned, leading God to cast them out of the garden, away from His presence (Gen. 3:24; Rom. 5:12).

Adoption is at the heart of the story line of the Bible. When Adam's descendants through Abraham wound up slaves in Egypt, something tremendous happened. God didn't just save them from Pharaoh; He called Israel His own son (Ex. 4:23). God was at work, bringing a fallen people near Him. He brought them into the land He had promised to Abraham and pledged, if they would serve Him, that He would once again walk among them—just as He did in Eden (Lev. 26:12).

Sadly, Israel failed. They repeatedly rejected God's law and His love. David knew God was a compassionate Father to those who feared Him, but no one feared Him as they should (Ps. 103:13). What God did next still sends a thrill up the Christian's spine. The perfect, sovereign, just Creator—the eternal Father—sent His only begotten Son, Christ Jesus, into the world. Jesus gave up His life, bearing His Father's wrath as He suffered and died on the cross. Yet by this tragedy, God accomplished the unthinkable — He accomplished atonement for His people. In the application of that atonement, He justifies sinners (Rom. 3:24) and gives them new birth (2 Cor. 5:17). Not only that, but the Father welcomes them into His family (Gal. 3:26; 4:4–7). Is there better news?

We live in a world full of people longing for a home, a place to belong, and a seat at the table. God the Father, through God the Son and by the power of God

the Spirit, does so much more. He gives repentant sinners His very *name* and makes them His heirs (Rom. 8:17).

Is This Doctrine Sweet to You?

This doctrine should be sweet to you for many reasons.

First, *the doctrine of adoption is closely related to the doctrine of assurance*. All who have “received the Spirit of adoption” have God's Spirit testifying within them that they are “children of God” (Rom. 8:15–16). The doctrine of assurance is as wonderful and mysterious as a father's undying love for his prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32). If you struggle with the assurance of your salvation, run to God who adopted you. The blood of Christ did more than justify you—it also made God your Father.

Second, *the doctrine of adoption helps us understand and appreciate the church*. If you've ever traveled abroad and spent time with believers in other countries, you likely rejoiced about all you have in common. Regardless of language and cultural differences, you share the same love of God, view of the world, and hope of a new heaven and earth. Why? Because they are your brothers and sisters. You have a global family.

Not only has God given you a global church, but He calls you into a local church. When Jesus told His disciples that following Him would mean losing everything, He encouraged them with promise of a new family:

Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life (Mark 10:29–30).

The Christian life is hard, but it comes with a home—a local church. This is a family of justified sinners who are now your family. If you struggle with feelings of loneliness, not only can you remember God is your Father, you can also remember that you are part of a local church filled with your spiritual siblings and parents.

Third, *the doctrine of adoption is a motivation to act*. A few years ago, when my wife and I became foster parents, it wasn't out of guilt. We did not think James 1:27 implied that every Christian had to open up his home to an orphan. God simply captivated us with the biblical theology of adoption. He warmed our hearts with the truth that when we were weak and ungodly, Christ died for us, providing us with adoption into the family of God (Rom. 5:6–11). Our own adoption of a little girl in 2015 is nothing but the dimmest reflection of the love God has lavished on us.

Meditate on the doctrine of adoption. The Spirit will make it sweet to you. More than that, He will lead you to act. You may not adopt an orphan, but you will most certainly give of yourself to others, expecting nothing in return. This is the doctrine of adoption at work.

- By Aaron Menikoff

Footnotes:

1. J.L. Dagg. *Manual of Theology* (1857; repr., Harrisonburg, Va.: Gano, 1990), 275. [↵](#)
2. R.L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology* (1871; repr., Edinburgh, Scotland: Banner of Truth, 1985), 627. [↵](#)
3. Cited by J. Theodore Mueller, “Adoption,” in *Basic Christian Doctrines*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), 220–21. [↵](#)
4. Cited by Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The Invisible Institution' in the Antebellum South* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2004), 305. [↵](#)

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