

# OpenTheo

## A Vision for Children



### Individual Topics - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg argues that society lacks a vision for children, including among Christians. He suggests that children are a gift from God and should be valued as such. Gregg believes investing in and raising children to be followers of Christ is crucial for creating a better future and a more godly world. He encourages parents to view their children as world-changers and torchbearers for Christ, part of God's plan to expand his kingdom.

### Transcript

The subject that I'm speaking on tonight is, I call it A Vision for Children. It's a topic I've spoken on quite a few times in the past 15 years. Many years ago, I had only one child and I thought perhaps that I was going to keep it at that.

My financial situation has never been very flush and I considered children kind of a big commitment financially. As a traveling minister, I've traveled to many countries and airfare is expensive for a family and so forth. I was married but I didn't have but one child.

I felt like one child was about enough. This was now close to 15 years ago. I once was in a church service where our pastor was speaking.

I was just in the congregation. He was speaking on some topic. I don't remember what it was.

But one of the scriptures he used was in Psalm 127 which may be familiar to many of you. If it is not, I'm going to read it because it's a very short one and it's basically at the core of what I want to say tonight. The Psalm says in Psalm 127, Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it.

Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. Then down in verse 3 it says, Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord. The fruit of the womb is his reward.

Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. 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.

Now, I've read this before. In fact, I've probably heard it many times since my childhood. It's not an uncommon passage.

I'm sure all of you have heard it one time or another. Maybe you have quoted it, especially if like Brian and Betsy, you're having a large family and you have to answer Christian critics about it. Well, it says right here, Blessed is the man who's got his quiver full.

And that should be answer enough, it seems. But it's not for some Christians because like myself, many Christians have not really believed this scripture. And this is what struck me so powerfully this one occasion years ago.

The pastor went on from this passage. I don't know that he made any comments on it. He went on to another scripture.

But I remained at this passage because I felt the Lord was speaking to me and convicting me that I didn't believe that. What it said was that children are a blessing from God and it is desirable to have a lot of them. Now, I thought, well, maybe for most people, for people in the average family, but for a person in a special calling where, you know, itinerant preacher and so forth as I was and am, I'm probably an exception to that.

But I felt like the Lord just told me that I had a different opinion than he did about it. And that I saw myself as a swordsman because I'm a Bible teacher and a preacher. And I know how to use my Bible.

That's the sword of the Spirit. And I always saw myself engaged in war against error and darkness and paganism and so forth. And I had a good sword and I'd learned how to use it well and I thought that was good enough.

But having children was just going to kind of restrict my movement, you know, and make it more difficult for me to really do exploits for the kingdom of God. So I thought. And it was at this time when this scripture became very poignant to me that I felt that the Lord showed me that I was thinking too small.

I could accomplish victories at short range with a sword. Any warrior who fights with a sword can only do so at close range. But one who has arrows can hit enemies at a distance where he'll never set foot.

And the Lord seemed to impress upon me from this scripture that to have a lot of arrows was a good thing. I mean, if I'm interested in waging war against blindness and darkness and error and ignorance and so forth, then to have more weapons would seem desirable. And I saw for the first time that I was thinking like the world thinks about children.

I was not taking God's sovereignty into consideration. I was not valuing things as God valued them. And it became clear to me as time went on, especially as I decided that I was open to and wanted to have more children, that, of course, I had occasion to have to verbalize my views and defend my views to people who had the view that I previously had, that is, that a lot of children are a burden.

And so I put together several years ago a rough talk on this subject, which I gave a few times. And there's quite a few children in the world right now because of this talk, as a matter of fact, from what I've been told. And I don't know the half of it because it's gone out on tape all over the place, too.

But I've had many people tell me that they have two or three children more than they previously planned to because they heard the talk. So brace yourself. The reason I call it a vision for children is because this is something that I had to acquire and that I think people need to acquire, which I think is absent from the general opinion of our society about children.

It's quite obvious that people are all sentimental about children. Liberals want to protect children and they want to educate children. They've got a wonderful vision for your children.

They'd like to make them all into stereotyped, globalist, socialist, you know, robots who all do the same thing and think the same way. And that's basically think and do what they're told. And they are very strong in this vision.

They really want your children because they have a goal. They have a target. They would like to redirect your arrows and hit the target that they have in mind.

And if we do not meet society and the obligations we have of raising a family with at least as strong a vision, I would think considerably more vision for our children than they have, then we will not be able to hold the bow steady on the target that we should have it on. And one thing that you must have, absolutely, if you're going to shoot arrows, is vision. A blind person could never shoot arrows, notwithstanding circus performers who blindfold themselves and say, don't try this at home.

Don't try it at home. You have to have vision for children. You have to have vision for an arrow.

You have to know where the target is, and you have to keep your eye on the target. When I look at my children or anyone's children, I see in a child a person who might turn out to be a great firebrand for God. The people that have changed the world, the people that I've been impressed with, people who have been my mentors, I bear in mind always when I see my children that those people were once children like that, and no one could have guessed what they would turn out to be.

And what they turned out to be was something so wonderful that I'd love for all of my children to turn out to be that way. I don't know what your goals are for your children. Maybe some of you would like to see them be professional people or educated or whatever.

My goal for all my children, if God calls them, I'd love it if they were all missionaries. In fact, I'd love it if they were all martyrs for Jesus. Now that might seem strange to say, but you see, I have the same goal for myself.

I hope since we only get to die once, we might die meaningfully. I'd love to die for Jesus rather than in an accident or just of old age. And my children, I've sought to give them the same vision.

I think they have it. They're going to die sometime. I'd like to aim their lives in such a way that they'd see nothing more honorable than to die for Jesus Christ in his service.

As far as I'm concerned, that's a biblical goal to have for your children. But the world is not going to encourage them in that goal. And their flesh is not going to encourage them in that goal.

And it's going to take some strength and some determination and keeping my eye on the target to make sure I keep them aimed there if I'm hoping at all that they may ever hit that target. Arrows need a target. And children who are like arrows in the hands of a mighty man need a mighty man who's got vision for where he wants them to be shot to.

And the fact that our society has lost a vision for children of any value in general is seen in many of the social ills that we all hear about so many times. I mean, we preach against them all the time. I don't want to bore you with just a recitation of the ills of our society.

We all know what they are. Abortion, divorce, child abuse, child molesting, you know, terrible things on television. These are the kinds of things that we hear bad things about all the time.

And one thing they all have in common is they all reflect that our society doesn't have a vision for children properly. If a man has a vision for his children, he would never divorce his wife, no matter what, because he would have a concern about how that will affect his children. People who get divorces, of course, often do so because they're looking out for themselves.

They're not happy in the marriage, and they numb themselves to how this will affect their children. But the fact that families get divorced for their children involved shows that the... I mean, it may not be the only factor present, but one factor present in divorce clearly is a failure to take into full consideration the effect on the children. And the proliferation of divorce in our society is an evidence that the children are really a last

priority with many families.

And these people don't really have a clue how their kids are going to turn out. They might hope things turn out well for them, but they're not doing much about determining that. And, you know, when people farm their kids out to television for entertainment, or to child care just because they want to live on a two-income lifestyle, I myself could never do that because I've got such a vision for my children.

We want to direct every step of their way, and to farm them out six hours out of the day or to let the television disciple them for any period of time of the day, it just goes against the vision I have for them. And I know that Christians in general have a different vision for their children than the world does, but I suspect that Christians often do not have a vision for children as much as they should. And I think there are some reasons for that, both among worldly people and Christians.

There are some things that inhibit having a proper vision for children. And one is, I think, that many people don't have much of a vision for their own lives. A lot of people don't have a clue why they're even here, or what they're doing.

And life is an endless cycle to many people, and some Christians aren't really much different than that. They don't really have any direction for their life. They're hoping to stay saved until the rapture or something, you know.

But as far as what they're here for, serving the interest of the kingdom of God and spreading the gospel and living for God and making an impact on their society for Jesus Christ isn't really a major part of their thinking about their goal or purpose in living. And if people don't have this vision for their own life, they're certainly not going to have it for their children. And I think that a lack of really personal consecration to pressing hard after the goal of the kingdom of God, seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness in their own lives, of course, is one of the factors that prevents some people from having any such goal for their own children.

Another thing that I think prevents many people from having vision for children is that they don't have much vision for the future. And children, obviously, are an investment in the future. In the present, children are an expense.

Children are an inconvenience at times. Children limit your freedom. There are things about the present with little children that you could imagine your life being more carefree if you didn't have them.

But the purpose of children is for the future. It's to secure the future. And it's a good thing that not everybody thinks like we do, at least in biblical times they didn't.

I think I can't count the number of people, including Christians, who say, well, I don't see why I'd want to bring children into this rotten world. The world's so bad, you know, it's a

terrible place for kids to grow up. I'm just going to do them a favor and not bring them into the world in the first place.

I'm sure they'll thank you for that. But you want to know something? There's a reason the world's a rotten world, and it's for lack of godly people. And you have the opportunity to create people.

Isn't that an incredible thing? That we have been given the honor of creating human beings. With God, of course. We can't just do it at will.

We can't just decide to. My wife and I, it's been three years since we've had a child, and we've been trying the whole time since then, and it just doesn't always happen. God's in the business of deciding when the babies come.

And that's something the Bible teaches, by the way. The Bible talks about God opening the womb, and God closing the womb, and so forth. I think that our theology is weak many times.

Christians, which is why we often don't have much vision for children, because we really suspect that we might get more of them than God intended. And I don't think that's possible. I do think, let me just say this about the sovereignty of God, I do think we can get fewer of them than God intended.

Children are a blessing from God, and it is possible to limit your blessings. I mean, there's lots of blessings God would like to give you, which you can cancel out by different kinds of behavior that weren't in His plan for you. And I believe children are a blessing that people can avoid, at least to some degree.

Not perfectly. Sometimes God's just determined that you're going to have that kid anyway. And I remember one family I knew had five kids, and the father used to say to the children, you were the condom, you were the pill, you were the diaphragm, you were that.

And he tried everything, and God got him kids anyway. And they all got saved, too. Isn't that interesting? All of them are saved and serving God today, although the father never did.

He's dead and never did receive the Lord. But he had no vision for his children, but God had a vision for his children, and even though the father tried to prevent it, God sovereignly brought them into the world, and their names were written in the book of life before the foundation of the world, and his birth control couldn't stop that. But the point is, while I do believe in some cases it is possible to limit the number of children you have, I don't think it's possible to bring more into the world than God is willing to create.

Because while we are participants with God in the creation of children, we're not really

the creators. And, you know, a person, a human person, is a marvelous thing. Ever thought about what it would take, what it would cost, if they could do it, if they could manufacture a robot that did everything a child could do? Now, you've seen, you know, the space shuttle has these mechanical hands and stuff, which are the highest tech stuff around.

You know, American technology has come up with these high-tech, you know, claws and things like that. My hand, which I was born with, and my children, each were born with two of them, and they came free as standard equipment. My hand can do a lot more than the most high-tech robotic hand ever created by the most brilliant scientists in the world.

I mean, I've marveled over this. I can reach my pocket right now and I can tell, I have a key ring in here with several keys, I can pick out the key I want without looking. My hands can feel.

They can tell the difference in texture of a key and the shape of a key head. They haven't invented anything like that yet, technologically, and that's just one of the wonders about me and about my kids and about you and your kids. And, I mean, the eyeball, there's nothing like it, technologically, that man has been able to come up with.

What do you suppose, if man could come up with one of those things, or one of these things, what do you suppose it would cost to get one of those? Well, you couldn't afford it, even for any one of these wonders. You couldn't buy it. You could mortgage your house and you might get, you know, you might be able to go in with a bunch of people and get one, but you get them free with every kid.

And, I mean, the kid is a wonder. It's a marvelous thing. Man can't create those.

God creates those. And when a child comes into our life, we are justified, biblically, in saying, God has created another human being with an eternal destiny. You know, when a child is conceived, from that moment forward, eternity will never be different.

I mean, it will never be the same. It will be different forever. At conception, an eternal being comes into existence.

And forever after, either heaven or hell is going to be fuller than it was before. The texture of eternity is modified with the birth of every child. And who knows, maybe time in history as well, because you never know that the child that is brought into the world might not be a world changer.

You know, it's the failure to have vision for the future of a kid, and for eternity, that prevents people, I think, from really appreciating children in the way that God does, and seeing them as the blessing that God sees them as. I'd like to address just briefly some of the main things, the main arguments against having children, which are basically

brought against us to intimidate us from trusting God about this matter, and from seeing things God's way. I've heard all of them many times, and probably some of you have too, if you have a similar opinion about children as I do, you'll probably get some objections here and there from people.

One of the first things you're going to hear is that the world is overpopulated, and that it's important to curb the production of children. And if you say, well, you know, the Bible says when God made man, he said, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, they'll say, it's full, it's full. You can stop now.

You don't have to do it all yourself, you know. People actually say those things, and some of you have probably heard some of those. Well, I knew that wasn't true for a long time, and just today I was in the library, and I chanced, I don't think there's any chance in it, however, I chanced upon the latest issue of USA Today magazine, January 1995, and it has a cover story on is the earth running out of room? The very thing that people often say is so.

There's four articles in this magazine about this, and I found some interesting stuff. I won't read it all because of the time limit, but let me just show you one thing, or tell you one thing that was stated in here. It says, running out of habitable space may be a physical possibility, but for all practical purposes, it is meaningless.

It's a meaningless concern. If the entire population of the world were placed in the state of Alaska, each individual would receive nearly 3,500 square feet, which they say is about half the size of the average American homestead with front and backyard. Alaska, although the U.S.'s largest state, comprises a mere 1% of the earth's landmass.

Now, you could put all 5 billion people there in the world right now in Alaska and give them each 3,500 square feet. Now some would say, ah, but you couldn't feed them on that. They have to farm.

Okay, well, Alaska's only 1% of the landmass. That leaves 99% of the world's landmass to farm. They say, well, but it's not all arable.

I mean, there's the Sahara Desert, and there's, you know, the frigid, you know, tundra and so forth. You can't farm it all. Right.

But 24% of the landmass of the earth is arable. You can grow crops on it. So on 1% of the world's landmass, you could house everyone on the planet.

And on 24%, you could produce the food. Now I'm not suggesting that we do that. I think we'd be a little crowded in that situation.

But when people say that the world is too full, they simply haven't done their homework. I've flown over the United States coast to coast many times. And some of you have done



that.

Maybe you've driven. It's even more impressive if you drive. Because it takes days to get, you know, from one dense population area to another.

When you go through the Great Plains, you think, why are they talking about this overpopulation? I haven't seen a soul for three hours, you know. I mean, even this country, the most, you know, which is arguably the most fertile part of the world, it's got plenty of room. You know, it's got a lot more room than they give you the impression of.

If you're curious about whether there's overpopulation, or whether there's a problem, let me recommend that you pick up the latest edition of USA Today magazine, because it's got four articles in it. The second one goes through every argument of the zero population growth people that say, oh, there's a population bomb. It's dangerous.

We're running out of resources. It goes through and gives the real statistics and shows there's no problem at all. So people want to know, what do I think about zero population growth? I'm for it, for the pagans.

We've got enough pagans in the world, but we don't. If they want to limit the size of their families, I'm all for it. Evangelizing the pagans that are already there is a big enough project, and, you know, their families are growing faster than ours anyway.

So if they want to do whatever they want to do to stop the blessings from coming to them, I'm not sure they're ready for them anyway. I'm not sure they're good stewards of the blessings they've got. So I'm not against efforts to bring about a zero population growth worldwide.

That's other people's business to worry about that. But I hope Christians don't reach zero population growth, because we need more of those. And I'm going to do whatever I can to see that more are brought into the world, both by the conversion of people who are already here from other people's wombs, and the ones that my wife and I can bring into the world, because we've got a vision for our children having an impact on history and on eternity.

And so we often hear people trying to intimidate us from this viewpoint by claiming the world is overpopulated. It is not, and much is being done to try to prevent it from being even more populated than it is. It certainly could sustain more people than it has.

I'm not afraid that Christians are likely to overpopulate the world. It would be a blessed problem to have. Another objection to having a lot of children is that it's just expensive.

Most people, most Christians are not wealthy, and so they have tight finances, and therefore there's a financial burden that comes with every kid. And from time to time you'll read articles in secular magazines about how costly it is to have kids. I ran across

this one just last week, although it's an older magazine.

It's a Woman's Day magazine, June 7, 1994, last year. There was an article called Costly Kids. According to a recent study, a child born in 1993 to a family that earns more than \$54,000 a year will cost his or her parents approximately \$334,590 by the age of 17.

Well, fortunately, I don't have any children born in 1993, and I don't make over \$54,000 a year, so I guess I'm exempt from that problem. Because if any of my children were going to cost me \$330,000 in their minority, I'd be in big trouble because I haven't made that much in my entire working life. There hasn't been a year of my life I've earned \$20,000, and most years of my life I've earned under \$10,000 a year.

And I've only been, you know, I'm only 41, I've only been out there supporting myself for 24 years or something like that. So, you know, I don't think I've earned \$330,000 in my working life yet. It may be approaching that by now, but I've raised one child of maturity who's 21 years old, and I've got four more at home, and we haven't lacked any good things.

How can they calculate this? Well, another article I read indicated that, well, that's for families that earn \$54,000 a year. If the income is less, then the cost of raising the kid is less. I thought, oh, that's interesting.

What an interesting thing that is. How convenient for the merchants at the stores to reduce the prices of everything if you don't make enough money. You see, what that tells us is this.

As income increases, so do lifestyle expectations increase. And with the increase of expectations, there's more of an affluent spending pattern that develops, and eventually your kids cost you an arm and a leg. But we've never had any trouble providing everything our kids need, and I don't think we've ever made more than \$15,000 a year, as far as I know.

And so I'm not too worried about the expense part. As a matter of fact, I haven't noticed having any less money as a result of having kids than I had before I had kids. And I'm not salaried.

I've never been salaried. For 25 years, I've lived by faith. We don't have a newsletter that we... This magazine we're doing isn't a newsletter to let people know what we're doing.

It's more like a little magazine. But we don't send out a magazine. I mean, a lot of missionary friends I know do.

They send out a newsletter telling them what their needs are and stuff. We decided long ago not to do that. We just wanted to trust God.

And we've never had much extra. But we've never had any too little either. And, you know, when I had no children, I didn't have much extra money.

Now that I've got five children, I still don't have much extra money. But I suspect if I had ten children, I still wouldn't have very much extra money. But I also believe God that I wouldn't have any too little.

There's an old Arab proverb... Oh, by the way, let me tell you something, because that article I quoted from, it broke down what the expenses were. You want to know how you spend \$330,000 on your kid by age 17? Okay, housing expenses. Remember, this is for each child for 17 years.

\$120,500. Now, you have to pay that much for every child? This is what they're suggesting. \$120,000? I didn't pay that for my whole house, and all my children live in it.

And yet for every child I have, I'm supposed to pay an additional \$120,000 for housing? \$300,000? No, no, no, no. \$30,000, excuse me. \$30,000 goes to education and child care.

Well, that's making some assumptions that don't apply to my family. We don't pay much of anything for their education, and we don't pay a dime for child care. So, I mean, that cuts it down quite a bit.

And then entertainment is almost \$200,000. Our entertainment costs a lot less than that. So, you know, don't be intimidated by these magazine articles.

They make it sound like, you know, you have to be a multimillionaire to have three kids. And it isn't so. The cost is not anything like what they suggest, but many of you know it is there.

There is a cost. What many of you may not know, and I hope you do, is that God is able to provide for as many children as he creates in the family. Even the Arabs know that.

There's an old Arab proverb that says, Murmur not that thy family is large. Know that it is for their sakes that God feeds you. I have a quote here from a guy named Joseph Hall.

Actually, it's a little anecdote about his life. He lived back in the 1600s. Actually, he was born in 1574, died 1656.

But he had quite a few children. This anecdote that I read about him, I clipped because I thought it was quite profound. Joseph Hall, upon receiving a great man into his home, introduced him to his numerous children.

Looking upon these children, the nobleman said, These are they that make rich men poor. To which the father replied, Nay, my lord. These are they that make a poor man rich.

For there's not one of these whom we would part with for all of your wealth. I'm a poor man in finances. I'm not complaining.

It's kind of a lifestyle choice I made 25 years ago, and I've never had any regrets about it. And so the world will look at me as poor, but I look at my children and say, I'm so rich. I'm so wealthy.

These children are worth more than worlds. I mean, Jesus said, What profit man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul? One soul is worth more than the whole world. And I've got six in my family, including parents.

But we're all worth it. But my kids, they're a rich blessing from the Lord. I guess if someone says, Well, but it's so expensive to have kids.

I guess the next question is, Well, are they worth it? I mean, which of them would you say aren't worth the money you've put into them? Sure. Parents have to sometimes tighten their belt and bite the bullet a little bit to get through the years where they're raising a lot of kids. Kids might not be able to wear the most current styles of clothing or whatever, but that's only a short time of the life.

And it certainly is worth it to those who have a vision for it. Of course, for people who view their children as just accidents that come down the pike and something to be endured until they're grown and gone, yeah, I would imagine it would be a burden. I imagine they'd be grugged at the time and the money spent on them.

And I have a feeling that a lot of the people who write these magazine articles have a little bit of that attitude, you know, Are they really worth that much? But if you have a vision for children, if you have a vision for eternity and the impact on history and on eternity that kids can have if they're properly raised and taught, then no price is too high to be worth it. Of course, one thing, a third thing that people are intimidated away from having kids about is freedom. When we become Christians, we become indentured to Christ.

We become His servants anyway. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 7, A man who's a slave is Christ's free man, but a man who's a free man is Christ's slave anyway. So what's the difference? You're not here to live for yourself.

You're not your own. You've been bought with a price, the Bible says, 1 Corinthians 6. If you've been bought with a price, you belong to God, and therefore your life is to be spent how it pleases Him, not how it pleases you. Maybe we forget that sometimes, but that's basic.

That's foundational. When you come to Christ, you become His, not yours. And therefore, if He wants to give you a lot of kids, He's determining how much freedom you're going to have to give up.

But that's His business, not yours. If you're surrendered to Him. If you're not surrendered to Him, then I guess you could begrudge some of the loss of freedom.

But, see, I gave up my freedom when I was four years old when I decided to follow Jesus. And therefore, if He wanted me to go to the mission field and endure hardship there, or if He wanted me to go to jail and endure hardship there, like many Christians have had to do, or if He wants me to raise a lot of kids at some great expense and the sacrifice of my freedom until I'm old and decrepit, that's fine too. At least I'll have something to show for it in that case.

And just whatever pleases the Lord is what we're supposed to be here about. And so anyone says, well, you know, you're not going to be free to do your own thing for 30 more years. I'm not free to do my own thing anyway.

That's not what I'm here to do, my own thing. I'm here to do God's thing. I don't have that kind of freedom and I'm not looking for it.

Now, I'll tell you one area, though, that still intimidates me a little bit occasionally, and that is the emotional vulnerability that comes with having children. The possibility that a child could be injured, handicapped, you know, take ill real bad, or worst of all, grow up not to serve God and grow up and die lost. I mean, it's hard to imagine any greater tragedy than to pour your life into a kid for 15, 20, 25 years, and then when they die, they just become fodder for hell.

You know, I mean, that would be the most galling, the most terrible thing I could imagine. And I remember I used to think, well, one way I can avoid that is not to have many kids. Because if I don't ever have them in the world, then I'll never go to hell and I'll never have to grieve over their loss or any tragedies that could ever happen to them.

And that's just, again, not thinking the way God thinks. God could have thought that way, too. He could have thought, well, I'm not going to create any people because some of them might end up in hell.

But he apparently thought people were worth it. And if he thinks they're worth it, and he's willing to give us a role in helping him produce more, then we ought to agree with his values about it. And sure, life is painful.

We forget that because we live in a country where we've been insulated so much against it. We've got enough money, we've got government programs, we've got comforts, we've never seen war on our soil, we've never been persecuted for our faith big time in this country. We've gotten so soft that the very thought of undergoing some kind of a crisis or a tragedy is unbearable to us.

But we have also, because we've never had any great disasters in this country, we have not learned what Christians of other centuries had to learn, and that is where there is

disaster is great grace. That where God sends great trials, he sends great grace, so that great trials can be endured as readily as easy trials, as it were. Because how do you endure your trials that you go through now? I hope by the grace of God, you're not supposed to be going through it in your own flesh.

To avoid doing something productive for God, like raise a child, for the fear that I might suffer some heartache over it later, or that something might happen that would grieve me over it, and that might be a trial to me and a pain to me, is simply being too wimpy. It's just being too out of touch with what life is about. Life is about trials.

Don't think it's strange when you encounter trials, the Bible says. That's part of living. But you know what, if you don't take any risks, if you don't take risks, you won't have any trials, probably, at least not as many.

But if you don't take any risks, you'll not have any successes either. And there are promises of God that if you train up a child the way that he should go, when he's old he won't depart from it. I realize people say, but I know a family who did everything right, and their kids turned out terrible.

I don't know any family who has done everything right, myself included. If my children turned out bad, I'm not going to go saying the Scripture is false. I'm going to say, I didn't raise them up entirely in all ways the way they should go.

I made some mistakes. I can accept that. But the very fact that if I do raise them right, when they're old they won't depart from it, makes me want to spend more time raising them and devote more of my energy.

But that's what my energy is for, is for making disciples. That's what the Great Commission is, make disciples. Teaching them to observe all things I've commanded you.

You can go out and do that with other people's children, but you can do it with your own children. And that's even better, because you can start out where there's nothing that has to be undone. I've been, in the years of my ministry, I've been running discipleship schools, and where I'm training people who are teenagers or older, who someone else raised wrong in many cases, I'm trying to make disciples out of these people, trying to teach them to observe everything Jesus has commanded.

And they, you know, there's a lot of stuff to undo, a lot of wrong thinking and habits and stuff. I'd much rather do what my wife does, stay home and disciple these kids who don't have any of that stuff to undo. Just start from scratch.

It's not entirely from scratch, it's a part of the sin nature. But so are the guys I'm discipling, and theirs has been cultivated, you know. And sure, you do become emotionally vulnerable by bringing children into the world, but so what? You become

emotionally vulnerable by taking a breath and staying alive another day.

Life is not full of joy only. There is one fifth thing that I think intimidates many people about having more children, and that's the fear of criticism. Criticism from grandparents, criticism from neighbors, and, you know, Brian was mentioning that.

However, once again, fear of criticism is not seemly for Christians. Criticism is what we expect when we take an approach different from the world. The world is threatened.

We shouldn't be. They criticize because they're threatened by our not being like them. They don't know how to cope with it.

We don't expect them to be like us, so we're not threatened by them. We expect criticism from them. Jesus said, Blessed are you when men persecute you and speak all manner of evil against you, and woe unto you when all men speak well of you, he said.

Again, we've been so pampered in this society that we've forgotten that Christians aren't supposed to necessarily get only accolades from the world. The world is not supposed to agree with us on every point, and on the way children are raised, and the value of children, the value of a human soul, are just the kinds of issues that unbelievers don't believe, the same we do. So, expect criticism.

Keep a stiff upper lip. Stand firm. Don't be put off by that.

Well, I've got to wind it up here. If I do not want to have a lot of children, it is an evidence, A, that I don't have the same goals God does, or I don't have the same values God does. Both are bad deals.

I want to have the same values and the same goals God does. God values human souls. If he wants to put a bunch of them under your control, under your discipleship, under your training, this is a wonderful stewardship for which you'll be held very strongly accountable.

But it's still a wonderful, glorious thing. His goal is that the earth may be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea, so the Scripture says in three different places. And in order for that to be done, Christians need to be expanding the kingdom of God, expanding the knowledge of God, by infiltrating the world, letting our light shine among men, and so forth.

And we're greatly outnumbered at the moment. And we probably always will be. But we can change that a little bit by adding more Christians to this world.

And that's what we're supposed to do. Do you know why God instituted marriage? It says in Malachi, God made the man and the woman one. He says, and why? Because he sought godly offspring.

That's why God made marriage. It's because he was seeking godly offspring. Is that what he's getting out of your marriage? Is he getting as many as he wants? That's between you and God.

Sometimes people think that I'm down on birth control. I'm not down on it. I just got no use for it.

You know, it's like if I bought a new house and there was this chain hanging from the roof, and I wonder what this is all about. I pulled this chain and I trapped it open and a bag of gold fell out of the floor. And I pulled that again, and another bag of gold fell out of the floor.

And maybe it didn't happen every time, but every once in a while, when I pulled that chain, a bag of gold fell out of the floor. What would you think of my sanity? If I thought, well, I wonder if there's any way to arrange to pull this chain without any more bags of gold coming out. Just for the joy of pulling the chain.

You'd think I was nuts, and I would be. But the reason that you'd think I was nuts is because you know that a bag of gold is a blessing to have. You could use a few of those.

Do you believe children are a blessing? Which would you rather have? Well, I don't think there's anything evil or sinful or wrong about birth control. I don't have any criticism of people who use it. But I would say they have a different value system than I do.

Because I like as many blessings as I can get. Not as few as I can get. I don't want to just have, you know, the traditional one boy, one girl, just sort of like family mascots.

You know, I mean, my vision for children isn't for mascots. It's for world changers. For blazing torches on fire for God.

That's what my vision is for. And you know, the more of those there are, the more light there's going to be around. Well, I'd like to close by making this point.

And that is that in 2 Kings chapter 13, Elisha the prophet lay on his sickbed. Shortly afterwards he died. But he was visited by the king, Joash, who was of course terrified because the prophet was going to die and the nation was in turmoil and they needed a man of God around.

And in order to encourage the king, the prophet said, take your bow and your arrow and shoot out the window. So he shot an arrow out the window. And Elisha put his hands on the king's hands and helped him shoot the arrow.

And he said, that's the arrow of the Lord's deliverance against the Syrians. And then he said to the king, strike the ground. And I understand that means shoot arrows into the ground.



Some understand it just to hit the ground. But he had to do it out the window so I think it was shooting from his voice. He said, strike the ground.

And the Bible says the king did that three times and then stopped. And it says the prophet was angry at him and says, you know, you shouldn't have done it only three times. If you shot five or six arrows at least, you would have totally consumed your enemies, the Syrians.

But now you're only going to have three victories. Each arrow he shot would represent one victory over the enemy. And a few more than the thorns he shot could have accomplished the whole job.

Now I don't know that there's any validity to the point I'm about to make from that story. But I think, I mean, I don't know if the story is trying to teach any lesson like this, but I think there's a parallel there. If every arrow that God gives me in my hand is capable of accomplishing a victory for his kingdom, then I'd want as many as I can get.

And the Bible says, blessed is the man who's got his quiver full. I think any warrior can relate. If you were in a battle and the victory depended on bows and arrows, how many arrows would you want in your quiver? If you were in the thick of the battle.

You'd want as many as you can get. You wouldn't want to put any limits on it. And so I guess the question is whether we believe God's opinion about these things or not.

Now, I realize that what I've shared, you know, some of you probably already agree with that kind of thing. Probably a lot of you don't agree with that. That's okay.

No one has to agree with me. But I believe that what I've shared is biblical. It's what the Bible teaches.

And I would suggest that anyone who has any trouble with it, allow themselves to challenge their own hearts and see does the Bible teach this? And if so, do I agree with the Bible? Because most Christians say they do. But I have found in my own life that the Bible keeps showing me things I hadn't agreed with. And I always thought I agreed with the Bible.

But I keep finding new things that, oops, I didn't know that. I guess I've changed my mind about that too. This might be one of those things for some of you.

And if it is, I trust that God will make it an easy transition for you. Not so much that you need to have a lot of kids. That's between, that's God's business.

Not mine. But that you would have God's vision for the children you do have. And maybe even if you don't have kids, maybe you have grandkids or maybe you are a Sunday school teacher or maybe you have access to kids to have a vision, God's vision for

children.

So that every opportunity you have to have input into the life of a child, you're deliberately aiming that child toward the goal of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.