

Raising up New Generations for God

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The history of humankind starts with an important commission, to multiply and fill the earth:

GE 1:28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.

Interestingly, a history of the Church also starts with a similar command, to go and increase in numbers:

*MT 28:18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] Therefore **go and make disciples of all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] **and teaching them** to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Emphasis here and below are mine)*

*Ac 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, **and to the ends of the earth.**"*

God not only commands us to multiply and to fill the earth, but He also gives us the authority to do so and the power to achieve this task under His guidance. Yet, bringing up a child for God is a difficult and ongoing process, full of responsibilities and unselfish sacrifice. Drawing people to God and helping them to be a part of His body *that grows and builds itself up in love* (Eph 4:16) is also a long process with its own problems and rewards.

In the following, we will look at some important aspects of raising up children and will draw parallels between the 'natural' realm and the 'spiritual' one. We will also look at some examples

from the Bible. God has chosen to reveal in His Word true stories of real people. We can easily identify with Biblical families, their successes and failures, and learn from their faith and perseverance. Examples show us how important it is that children are hoped for and prayed for, given birth to and seen as a blessing, and raised up and trained up properly in loving and caring families. The same applies to 'spiritual children', as they are witnessed to, brought to God, cared for and guided to become mature members of the Church.

The first thing to realize is that we are all children of God. It is not only the greatest and most fantastic privilege and the source of our joy. It also means that as He brings us to life and continues in our upbringing and training, he teaches us how to fulfill our duty as parents and guardians. This is the key element of our commission, without which our life and its activities become aimless and confused (Ecc 1:2-4).

*IJN 3:1 How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called **children of God!** And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. [2] Dear friends, now **we are children of God**, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*

In the family of God, He is our Father. Human families also need parents. God did not choose to create the whole mankind in one single act – instead He created a man and a woman and entrusted them with the commission to fill and subdue the earth. They need to work together - as one flesh (Ge 2:23-24). Just as families cannot grow, love, care for members, and follow God's way without devoted parents, so the Church cannot grow without spiritual helpers, *as each part does its work* (Eph 4:16). Each one of us has his own call. There are those who are called to a ministry of bearing and training children, those who minister to other people's children and those who work with adult children of God (Mt 19:12).

*1 TH 2:11 For you know that we dealt with each of you **as a father deals with his own***

children, [12] encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

1CO 4:14 I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children.

*[15] Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus **I became your father** through the gospel. [16] Therefore I urge you to imitate me.*

Children are a gift from God (Ps 127:4), yet this gift does not always come easily. Both the Bible and the everyday experience show that our faith in this realm is often tested by long periods of waiting upon the God. Sarah and Abraham waited for many years (Rom 4:18-22), so long that they nearly lost their confidence, as did Elizabeth and Zechariah (Lk 1:5-7). Rebecca and Lea kept praying for babies over many years, and God rewarded them with 12 sons (Gen 30:6, 17, 20, 22). My favourite family story comes from 1Sam 1:10-12. It is one very few examples of a caring family life in a difficult period of Israel's history *when everyone did as he saw fit* (Jdg 21:25). This makes it even more relevant for our times when there is so much devaluation of traditional family and moral values (2 Ti 4:3-4).

The family of Elkana portrayed in this chapter was not entirely a happy one – there was a lot of animosity between his two wives. Yet, this imperfection makes the story even more realistic and appealing to our often-troubled life. In the opening scenes, we meet Hannah, a barren yet much-loved wife of Elkana, pouring out her heart to God in the sanctuary at Shiloh (1 Sa 1:10-12).

*ISA 1:15 "Not so, my lord," Hannah replied, "I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; **I was pouring out my soul to the LORD.** (...) [17] Eli answered, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him." (...) [20] So in the course of time **Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son.** She named him Samuel, saying, "Because I asked the LORD for him."*

It comes as no surprise to see that the greatest increase in the numbers of new believers in

the first-century Church also came in the midst of prayers:

*AC 2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and **to prayer.** (...). [44] All the believers were together and had everything in common. [45] Selling their possessions and goods, **they gave to anyone as he had need.** [46] Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, [47] praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. **And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.***

Every time a baby is born, there is a rejoicing in the heart of his mother and his family. There is even more rejoicing in Christian homes, as each new baby means a new helper, a new future member of the Church, and a new witness able and willing to take the Gospel to the ends of the Earth. Similarly, a new birth of somebody who turns away from sins is also greeted by great rejoicing in Heaven (Lk 15:7; Jn 3:1-9).

Prayers do not stop at birth, they must continue throughout the whole life of a new child and then adult. Just as Manoah prayed to the Lord to give him wisdom to bring up Samson (Jdg 13:8), so Job (Job 1:5) continued to pray for his children when they were older. Paul, who considered his children those whom he helped to become Christians, also continued to pray for them.

*COL 1:9 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, **we have not stopped praying for you** and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. [10] And we **pray** this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,*

The prayer is not the only requirement for a successful growth of children. They need lots of love, cuddle and care. They need to be well fed with

a food appropriate for their age and requirements. They need to be clothed and protected in a physical and emotional realm. This care must not stop at any time.

*ISA 1:23 "Do what seems best to you," Elkanah her husband told her. "Stay here until you have weaned him; only may the LORD make good his word." So **the woman stayed at home and nursed her son until she had weaned him.***

*ISA 2:18 But Samuel was ministering before the LORD--a boy wearing a linen ephod. [19] **Each year his mother made him a little robe** and took it to him when she went up with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice. (...) [26] And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the LORD and with men.*

Adult Christians also have physical and emotional needs – they need love and an occasional cuddle too! We have already seen in Acts 2:44-46 (see also Ac 6:1-4) that the Church must also be concerned with the well-being of her members in every possible way. It is best done through the families but if there is a need, the whole Church must be involved. They need both the physical food and the spiritual food as well. Paul in his instructions to churches was taking care of both – and like a loving father he always remembered to add a personal touch to his letters.

*1Ti 5:4 But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of **all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family** and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God. (...) [8] **If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith** and is worse than an unbeliever.*

Above all, however, the children need to be educated and trained in respect, self-control, perseverance, submission, honesty and courtesy. They need constant attention and a continuous long-lasting training. Such training requires time, effort and sacrifice. Yet, in God's eyes it is a matter of an utmost importance. When Israel was on a verge of

leaving Egypt, God gave Moses some instructions on how to prepare for the night of trial when His angel was killing the first-born. But even more than about the preparations, freedom, the end of suffering, the journey ahead and the destination, He talked about children and about education. It looks like the primary meaning of the Passover was to instruct future generations in the ways of the Lord!

*EX 12:24 "Obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants. [25] When you enter the land that the LORD will give you as he promised, observe this ceremony. [26] And **when your children ask you,** 'What does this ceremony mean to you?' [27] **then tell them,** 'It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.' "*

The Bible places the ultimate responsibility for children's education with parents. It is they who must teach, instruct, rebuke and punish bad, as well as reward good behavior. They need to protect their children from bad influences and bad company and only in a controlled way expose them to the outside world. The education by teaching and example must be an everyday, every-minute exercise. We cannot lightly delegate this responsibility to others or absolve ourselves from it. Eventually, God as well as other people will judge us according to the way we trained our children.

*Dt 6:6 These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. [7] **Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.** 1CO 15:33 Do not be misled: "**Bad company corrupts good character**".*

*PR 13:24 He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to **discipline** him.*

*PR 29:15 The rod of **correction** imparts wisdom, but a child left to himself disgraces his mother.*

*EPH 6:4 Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, **bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.***

PR 22:6 Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.

PR 10:1 The proverbs of Solomon: A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish son grief to his mother.

The last two quotations are especially interesting. They were written by Solomon who was one of the wisest people ever (1 Ki 4:29-33): *Men of all nations came to listen to Solomon's wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom.* (1 Ki 4:34). Solomon's wisdom came from God (1 Ki 3:7-9), yet he himself credits his own father, David, with a proper upbringing (see also Pr 1:7).

Pr 4: 3 When I was a boy in my father's house, still tender, and an only child of my mother, [4] he taught me and said, "Lay hold of my words with all your heart; keep my commands and you will live. [5] Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or swerve from them. (...)."

Solomon learned a good lesson from his father, yet failed to pass it on to his son, Rehoboam. When Rehoboam succeeded him as a king, he was challenged by Israelites who asked him to relieve them from their burden (1 Ki 12:13-14). He had many wise words of his own father that he could learn from and use in the time of trial. Yet, Rehoboam did not follow his father's guidance. *Rejecting the advice given him by the elders, he followed the advice of the young men* (1 Ki 12:13-14). These 'young' men, who had grown up with him and were serving him, were in fact his own age. According to 1 Ki 14:21 he was forty-one when he became the king. The Bible calls them 'young' using a word meaning 'young boys' or even 'children' – they were still children in their behavior and knowledge (1 Co 3:1-3, 14:20). He followed the advice that contradicted his father's teaching that,

A wise man fears the LORD and shuns evil, but a fool is hotheaded and reckless (Pr 14:16).

And,

It is to a man's honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel (Pr 20:3).

The result was a reckless action leading to strife, quarrel, war and split between Israel and Judah.

Why did Solomon fail in bringing up a godly wise son? Was it because he forgot his children while selfishly pursuing his career or pleasures? It was certainly not the lack of wisdom, nor the lack of material conveniences that lead to his failure. Time, devotion and strict following of God's ways are the required characteristics. Paul with his busy missionary schedule could not really take care of his own children – and had none of his own. Yet he always found time and effort to preach and admonish his 'spiritual' children – his letters are full of personal greetings and concern. He also could rely on other people's children, like Timothy, who had been raised up by godly mother and grandmother and given an excellent upbringing and learning.

2TI 1:3 I thank God, whom I serve, as my forefathers did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. [4] Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. [5] I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. (...) [14] But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, [15] and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

How can we learn about the ways of being best parents and guardians of God's children? God has not left us without guidance. In fact, He gave us the best possible manual of child upbringing – the holy Scriptures. He also provided us with the best possible example of a relationship between a father and his son – by giving us His Son, Jesus Christ.

In our everyday struggle and rejoicing it is easy to lose the feeling of importance of what we are

doing, to feel that we are undervalued and that our work is not recognized, valued and rewarded. Then we need to keep in mind rich rewards for those who faithfully keep raising up and training new generations:

PS 127:3 Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a **reward** from him. [4] Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. [5] Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them.

*1 Th 2:19 For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? [20] Indeed, **you are our glory and joy.***

*1CO 15:58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that **your labor in the Lord is not in vain.***

However, we also need to see our work in the right perspective. Neither a big and well-fed, well-clothed and well-behaved family, nor a big church where everybody is feeling well, is the goal in itself.

‘We are called to be soldiers in the army of the living God. Raising up young, new recruits of our children is an exciting sideline. Children raised up seeing God in action, saving souls and changing lives, are seeing something real, something eternal. The missionary family does not see their family as

the “purpose”. The family is a blessing along the way. The children do not grow up thinking they are the end. Going into all the world preaching the gospel is the purpose of the Christian life. (...) Children actively involved in a family that is serving God become servants of God.’ (**To Train up a Child**, by Michael and Debi Pearl)

As people of God are raised up in godly families and given proper upbringing, they can subsequently assume responsibilities as parents in their own families and overseers in the Church, raising up new generations for God and thus fulfilling His double commission in this dark hour of the world’s history.

*2TI 1:2 To Timothy **my dear son** (...) 4:1 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, **I give you this charge: [2] Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction. [3] For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. [4] They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. [5] But you, **keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.*****