

Psalm 127:3

June 4, 2023

2 Peter 1:3-9; 1 John 3:1-2

### **Children That Give Life**

It's Easter season and so we celebrate Christ's resurrection every Sunday of the year. He is the resurrection and the life and the supreme Life-giver. Let us never forget that we have been joined to Him when we confess Him as Savior, and so **we have life in Him, and are given power to share life.**

Two weeks ago, I spoke about life giving parents. Then, last week I spoke on life-giving spouses.

**Life giving spouses are like life-giving parents: they glorify God by loving one another as God loved us in Christ.** Today's message is a piece with those two. I thought it fitting that today, as we confirm several young people as members of the church, to say a few words about life giving children.

Life-giving parents steered these young people to this important moment in their lives, because of the great, good news of God's love for us. And they are becoming members of God's family – the church – because they believe it is essential for their continued spiritual health.

### **The Bible and Children**

The Bible says a lot about children because they are precious to us and vital to God's plan for humanity. ***Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him, Psalm 127:3.*** Of course, we want our heritage to be a good one. But what about children who don't turn out right?<sup>1</sup>

In His parable of the lost son Jesus illustrated the great love and forgiveness of our heavenly Father. In the story that son who acted as though he didn't belong in the family, he took advantage of his father, and yet his father welcomed him back with open arms. This is how God sees us ... so kids, if you've done wrong, fess up, and return to your parents. And parents look to God as the example and source of wisdom for being good parents.

**Psalm 79:8 *Do not hold against us the sins of the fathers; may your mercy come quickly to meet us, for we are in desperate need.*** Children are not responsible for the sins of their parents, and kids, you don't have to be like your parents in every way. Isn't that a relief to know? You can choose who you become tomorrow by your actions today. **Look for the good traits in your parents and emulate them.**

Here's the other side of it: ***We have sinned, even as our fathers did; we have done wrong and acted wickedly, Psalm 106:6.*** Every son and daughter of Adam and Eve is born with a sin nature – a propensity for self-centered and sinful behavior – that means our parents, and yes, us. Many of us are experts at sniffing out mistakes, wrongdoing, or inconsistency in others. But **true maturity begins when you can admit your own sin and repent.** Your sins aren't someone

else's fault – not Mom or Dad's fault, not the teacher's fault, not your home life. Each person is accountable for his/her choices, wrong decisions, or foolish behavior, and with God's help we all have the capacity to overcome them.

**Don't be children who take for granted all the goodness of life-giving parents.** God gave my parents a lot of patience. I just wish I hadn't used up so much of it. Freedom is great but also dangerous, if you don't think through your choices and the consequences. ***Intelligent children listen to their parents; foolish children do their own thing, Prov. 13:1.***<sup>2</sup> Before you reject the ways of your parents, consider that their virtues, values, and morality gave you the structure upon which to build a stable life. Before you reject your parents' values, consider what you'll put in their place. Here are some thoughts drawn from the Bible.

### **Mighty Oaks and Graceful Pillars**

***Then our sons in their youth will be like well-nurtured plants, and our daughters will be like pillars carved to adorn a palace, Psalm 144:12.***

1. **Boys to Men:** A well-nurtured oak becomes a mighty tree that dominates the landscape. So shall a good man's character fill the horizon, and others will come to rest under his branches for shade and for safety. Such a man's thoughts are pure, his actions are noble not selfish, his intentions point in the right direction – toward heaven. We pray that well-nurtured boys will grow to honorable manhood with nothing shameful about them, strong, clean, and pure. Three things to nurture such growth:

a. **A Good Education** - is essential for any boy to become a man. If you think education is expensive consider the cost of ignorance. ***Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, Prov. 3:13.*** Boys: be diligent in your studies. Don't be like Ned. Father: "Ned, why are you always at the bottom of the class?" Ned: "It doesn't really matter, dad. We get the same instruction at both ends of the class." Without education, even the greatest intellect will be of no avail. (See Proverbs 4).

b. **Reliability** – requires being true to your word – that means you can be counted on to do what you said you'd do. ***As vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is a sluggard to those who send him, Proverbs 10:26.*** It means doing the right thing even when no one is watching. ***A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold, Prov. 22:1.*** Your reputation in your family, in school or community, is of more value than having all the cool stuff you want. Diligence in your work – whether school or business – makes for a good reputation and brings rewards. ***Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth, Proverbs 10:4.***

c. **Godly Character** - Even at an early age rambunctious boys can learn God's word. Dads take note. Firmly rooted in the good soil of God's Word, their roots will be made strong and deep so they can stand strong in every storm. ***For a man's ways are in full view of the LORD, and he examines all his paths, Prov.***

**5:21.** Father: “When I was a boy, I thought nothing of a ten-mile walk.” Son: “Well, I don’t think so much of it myself.”

Here’s a challenge for boys and young men: **Get your roots down deep into the Word of God.<sup>3</sup> Grow close to the Lord. Find friends who are good examples and who can challenge you spiritually. Stop making excuses. Don’t fritter away your life on video games. The world is looking to you, your friends are looking to you, the church of Jesus needs you right now. Grow now! Stand strong now! Don’t wait for tomorrow. May God give us a generation of young men who will be mighty oaks, with deep roots, standing strong, pointing straight toward heaven.**

**2. Girls to Women:** In Bible times, beautiful palaces contained many large columns that were both decorative and weight bearing. They were carefully placed because the integrity of the entire building depended on them. Godly women grow from daughters who are beautifully, perfectly placed, and strong. Our culture is obsessed with physical appearance – especially for women. Yet true beauty is found in virtue and good character. We pray for girls who will grow into virtuous women. Three things to shape a girl:

a. **Good Education.** A good education prepares our daughters to use their gifts and talents to the fullest. ***Intelligent children make their parents proud; lazy students embarrass their parents, Prov. 15:20.*** Today there are abundant opportunities for our daughters to go as far as they can in their education – what a blessing. Girls, take advantage of the opportunities.

b. **Grace** – is an attitude of the heart and a skill to be learned. It begins in experiencing God’s grace, which makes it possible for her to be gracious with others, acting appropriately in each situation. This is greatly needed in our highly competitive, “Look Out For Number One,” society. ***A kindhearted woman gains respect ... Prov. 11:16.***

c. **Godly Character** - the greatest finish is the grace and power of a godly character. ***Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised, Prov. 31:30.*** She is the pillar of faith others can lean on. As she leans on Jesus, her family can draw strength from her godly example. ***The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down, Prov. 14:1.***

Here’s a challenge for girls and young women in our congregation: immerse yourselves in God’s word – for that is where you find the greatest grace ever shown, and God’s grace will make you a gracious person. **Choose your friends carefully;** stay with those who encourage you to learn, excel, and grow in wisdom. Don’t waste your time over comparisons of fashion and looks, or in gossip. Grow now! Be strong now! Don’t wait for tomorrow. May God give us a generation of young women who are perfectly placed pillars of strength and faith.

## Choices

God has designed us to be free and with this freedom comes choices. **Freedom to make choices means living with the consequences.** That's responsibility! Friends, life isn't fair: you have to work for a living, you're not as good looking as others, you don't have the talents of some, you don't get everything you want, maybe you didn't even get the parents you'd like to have. **Discovering these unpleasant truths is the beginning of wisdom.**<sup>4</sup>

There are two paths you can take in life. The first is paved with the stones of diligence, honesty, integrity, hard work, sacrifice, patience, responsibility, hope. It is often uphill but leads to pleasant places of accomplishment, success, contentment, and godliness. The second path is paved with the stones of convenience, indolence, frivolity, impulse, irresponsibility, and excuses. It is a long, gradual downhill ending in a quagmire of failure, frustration, and discontent. The farther you go on one path, the harder it is to switch over to the other.

Here's the truth: the good things that we desire rarely fall into our laps. They require effort. If every desire of your heart came without effort on your part, you would become selfish and demanding, unworthy of those good things.

**Maturity means to quit making excuses, start making right choices, learn self-control, and learn to love as God has loved us.** It is disheartening when kids don't learn to be responsible. ***There is nothing but sadness and sorrow for parents whose children do foolish things, Prov. 17:21.*** It's even worse to meet grownups still acting like adolescents, blaming others for their failures, making excuses for their sin. **We have no excuses: [God's] *divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness...* 1 Peter 1:3.**<sup>5</sup>

Mom asks: "What are you reading Charlie?" Her boy responds: "It's a book called 'Child Training,' that I borrowed from Mrs. Jones." "Did you find it amusing?" laughs the mom. "I'm not reading it for that. I merely wanted to see if I've been raised properly."

## Don't Be A Victim

Few of us grow up under ideal circumstances – some are better than others. Yet, here's the truth for all: **you become what you believe.** Believe you're a victim and you'll likely act like a victim. Act like a victim and you'll likely become a victim. Believe that you are fearfully and wonderfully made in God's image and you'll begin to live as a child of God. ***How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! ... 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. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure,* 1 John 3:1-3.**

**We are made to be like Him: to give and receive true love, and to be responsible for ourselves. God has given you the capacity to overcome obstacles and temptations, freely choosing right over wrong, to excel in some manner, and to bring glory to your Creator. What does that mean? It means **don't focus on what you cannot do; focus on what you can do.** Always do your best, and ask God to help. In Christ we are on the winning team. ***In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world, John 16:33.*** Choose not to be a victim. Choose Jesus.**

### **Life Giving Children**

**The 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment admonishes us all: *Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you ... Deut. 5:16.*** We may not always like our parents, but we are to honor them. How can we honor our parents? Be cooperative, helpful, caring, rather than giving in to impulses. **Children who learn to do this are life-givers ... and they find the most contentment in life. Love is not just saying the words. **Love is doing what is right for the sake of God.****

***May your father and mother be glad; may she who gave you birth rejoice!***  
**Prov. 23:25.**

---

<sup>1</sup> Think of the brotherly love of Cain and Abel (Gen. 4 - In a fit of jealousy, Cain killed his brother Abel). What to do with kids who are not a blessing to their parents? How about this? *Now if someone has a consistently stubborn and rebellious child, who refuses to listen to their father and mother—even when the parents discipline him, he won't listen to them—the father and mother will take the child before the elders of that city at its gates. Then they will inform the city's elders: 'This son of ours is consistently stubborn and rebellious, refusing to listen to us. What's more, he's wild and a drunkard.'* Then all the people of that town will stone him until he dies. Remove such evil from your community! Deuteronomy 21:18-22 CEB. Whoa! Why so harsh? It's because kids out of control are a threat to the whole community (haven't we seen videos of mobs of kids out of control in various cities?). I do not advocate such treatment for a wayward child. But it shows the need for instruction and discipline.

<sup>2</sup> *It is foolish to ignore what your parents taught you; it is wise to accept their correction,* Proverbs 15:5.

*Wise children pay attention when their parents correct them, but arrogant people never admit they are wrong,* Proverbs 13:1.

<sup>3</sup> *Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers,* Psalm 1:1-3.

<sup>4</sup> Among Jews and Christians, the traditions of bar/bat mitzvah or confirmation, mark entrance of the child into the circle of adult believers who trust in God for their life. It is expected that by age 12-14 a person can distinguish between right and wrong, good and bad, and be able to make right choices with God's guidance. It is expected that they will put away childish things, and take responsibility for their own lives.

<sup>5</sup> *His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness ... For this very reason, make very effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self control; and to self control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love (agape), for if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive...* 1 Peter 1:3, 5-8.