

THIRD EDITION
WORKBOOK

Children & Childhood *in the Bible*



Dan Brewster

Foreword by Roy B. Zuck

CHILDREN
& CHILDHOOD
IN THE BIBLE
WORKBOOK

Dan Brewster

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Acknowledgements



THE IDEA for these studies came from a reading of the excellent book *Precious in His Sight* by the late Roy B. Zuck (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 1996). Much of the material in the early versions then was based on gleanings from *Precious in His Sight*, and I am grateful to Dr. Zuck for permission and encouragement to explore in his book for those insights and principles. The book called *Children and Childhood in the Bible Revised Edition* was a result of that exploration.

This Workbook is basically a revision and updating of the earlier versions of *Children and Childhood in the Bible*. Those several versions were developed under the auspices of Compassion International, the fine organization under which I served for more than 30 years. I am thankful now for their permission to publish this revision. The Workbooks have been used profitably as a supplement each time I have taught my course “Child, Church and Mission” over the past several years, as well as in many other contexts.

I received valuable assistance in those earlier versions from Dr Rosalind Tan, Director of the Holistic Child Development (HCD) Institute at the Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary, and also from my good friend, Ms. Lim Siew Ling. Their inputs are still recurrently present in this edition. Thank you both very much for your contributions, suggestions and encouragement.

Once again, I am indebted to my friend Mr. Kok Chik Bu in the editing, overall design, and the look and feel of the book. As has been the case with his work on other HCD resources, his creative touch has fashioned the attractive and readable style and format of the book. Thanks Chik Bu!

Dan Brewster

Penang, Malaysia

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Foreword

“WHY BE concerned with children? They can’t learn spiritual things or contribute in any way to the life of the church.”

Unfortunately this is the view of many Christians. They think of children as having no interest in the Bible.

But nothing could be further from the truth! Children are sensitive to spiritual things and are open to the gospel. Surveys show that many Christian leaders came to Christ for salvation at an early age. And an individual’s personality is largely formed by the time he is six years old. A person’s life as an adult is largely determined in his early formative years.

Jesus had an intense interest in children. He brought back to life three people, two of whom were children. He encouraged children to come to Him, and He used them as illustrations of simple trust in Him. His interest in children is seen in His taking them in His arms and blessing them.

Thus, to neglect children is to run counter to what the Bible says about them.

This Workbook will enable you to explore many aspects of ministry to children, including ways to teach them, parental responsibilities, and theological issues related to children. Each Study introduces you to statements in the Scriptures about children, gives you key insights on the topic of that chapter, and asks you “reflection questions” that encourage you to think of the implications of the issues in that lesson.

May you be blessed as you study about and minister to children, all of whom are “precious in His sight.”

Roy B. Zuck, Th.D.

Senior Professor Emeritus of Bible Exposition,
Dallas Theological Seminary, and editor, *Bibliotheca Sacra*
(Sadly, Dr. Zuck passed away in March, 2013)

Introduction

THE PURPOSE of this Workbook is to help learners dig deep into the Word to see what it says about children and childhood. But more importantly, they are to create understanding of the worth and significance of children, and their role in pointing to and illustrating Christ's "upside down" Kingdom.

Some people have said that the Bible has little to say about children and childhood. But in fact the Scriptures are *full* of references to children. This Workbook include hundreds of verses relating to the child. Moreover, these studies show that children play a significant role in the unfolding of the message of the Bible – that God loves and protects them; that they are extremely perceptive in understanding the things of God; and that God often deploys them as His messengers and models – often it seems when adults may have been too corrupt and deaf to His calling.

This Workbook has six parts. They are:

Part One: The Worth of a Child

Part Two: Family Life in Bible Times

Part Three: Nurture and Training of Children

Part Four: Parental Modeling and Generational Consequences

Part Five: Child Protection

Part Six: Theological Significance of Children

How to Use this Workbook

THIS WORKBOOK contains twenty-six studies on a specific theme with a variety of Bible verses or reflections about children. The studies are structured as follows:

Topic Overview: A brief introduction to the topic which presents real life case-studies or scenarios as a backdrop to the Scriptures and reflections of the study.

What Does the Bible Say? Here you will be asked to go to specific Bible passages to explore what the Bible says about children and understand more of God's heart for them.

Key Insights or Principles: For those Bible passages, you may find new insights or key learning related to the theme. It may be that the number and breadth of

Scriptures on a topic surprises or impresses you. Or you may be convicted anew with the biblical perspective on some topics which contrast sharply with the perspectives we see today and hear about in the news. Write down the main biblical principle, as well as your personal observations and gleaned knowledge about the Scriptures on the topic.

Reflection Questions: This section asks you to apply the key biblical principles to your **personal life**, the **culture** in which you live, and the **context** of your society and circumstances in your own country. They may require more inquiry, research and personal reflection. There are no right or wrong answers to the reflection questions, but they will provide the basis for interesting and lively discussions about how children are viewed and treated in your own personal life, context, and culture/country. Ideally these questions should be discussed in groups. The discussions will draw you deeper into the biblical material, and point to the contemporary significance of the topic.

Where I have quoted Scriptures, I have used the New International Version. However, as you are doing your studies, you may profit from using a variety of versions if available. Also, while often single verses are given; good Biblical scholarship requires you to read the Scriptures around the verses, to have a fuller understanding of the historical settings, and contexts of the Scriptures.

Note: There are frequent references especially to Dr. Roy Zuck's outstanding book *Precious in His Sight*,¹ which inspired this Workbook. In some places we have sought to include more of Dr. Zuck's fine analysis and development of the many themes he addresses in his book. However, the references to his book can surely not do it justice. I highly recommend that learners using this Workbook get a copy of *Precious in His Sight* which will add immeasurably to the depth and breadth of the topics explored here.

Whether you are a front-line childcare worker, a church or organization leader, I trust that this Workbook will encourage, inspire, and provide you broad new insights about children and childhood in the Bible—and about your ministry and mission priorities.

¹ Roy B. Zuck, *Precious in His Sight-Children & Childhood in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1996).



Part I:

The Worth of a Child

ADULTS ACROSS the world differ in their perspectives about the worth of children in as many different ways as there are cultures, languages, and countries! At the beginning of Roy Zuck's book, *Precious in His Sight*, he presents the following contrasting common attitudes about children. Do these statements describe your feelings about children?²

"Children are such a nuisance! I don't like to be around children because they are so demanding and annoying."

"My wife and I don't plan to have children. We can't be tied down to parenting, which demands such time, energy, attention, and money."

"I'm pregnant, but I don't want a baby. So I'll simply get an abortion."

"How can I have time for child-rearing when my career demands so much time?"

"Changing diapers, getting up in the night with a sick child, helping kids with homework are not for me. I'd rather be child-free."

Or do these more accurately reflect your feelings about children and childhood?³

"Children are so much fun! They are full of life and energy, and are so eager to learn new things."

"I enjoy the way children respond so readily to love and attention."

"Raising kids is one of the greatest rewards in all of life."

² Roy B. Zuck, *Precious in His Sight – Childhood & Children in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1996), p.11.

³ Ibid.

“It’s a delight to teach children. They are so open to spiritual truths.”

The two extremes are common among people in many cultures today. Interestingly, similar attitudes about children were apparently common in biblical times as well. We know from the well-traveled passage in Mark 10:13, that Jesus’ disciples certainly didn’t think children were worthy of taking His valuable time. But Jesus had a different attitude. Mark says Jesus was indignant – very displeased and told the disciples in no uncertain terms that they were to let the children to come to Him, and He demonstrated His love by taking the children in His arms and blessing them (Mark 10:16).

That contrast provides a good starting point for our reflections on what the Bible says about children, and how our churches, communities, societies and cultures view the worth and role of children. Our first studies will zero in on the inherent worth of children, regardless of their gender, status, health or any other external characteristics. You will discover that the TRUTH of Scripture speaks to the highest standard, God’s standard—every child is a precious gift from God!

Let’s begin.

STUDY 1: God's View of Children

■ Introduction

WHAT DOES the Bible say about the origin and importance of children? The Bible's perspectives about children are both explicit and implicit. They provide the basis of how children should be treated and valued. They form the core foundation from which all child development agencies should view and structure their work. They are eternal principles that speak to our conscience daily in our personal encounters with children.

Let us explore the origin, importance, formation, images and perception of children both in the Old and New Testaments.

For Further Exploration:

Roy B. Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*, pp. 11-15, 39-44 and 53-56.

■ What Does the Bible Say?

1. READ: Genesis 1: 27-28.

What do these verses say about the origin of humanity and where did the idea of children begin?

2. READ: Deuteronomy 14:1-2 and Isaiah 66:13.

How does God's relationship with Israel in the Old Testament compare to a father's and mother's relationship with their children?

3. Describe how children are valued in these passages:

References	The Value of Children
Psalm 8:2	<i>The praises of children and infants are precious and powerful in God's eyes. He uses them to silence the enemies.</i>
Psalm 34:11	
Psalm 131:2	
Isaiah 9:6	

■ **Key Insights or Principles:**

■ **Reflection Questions:**

1. God's first command to Adam and Eve concerns children. What was it? How does this reflect the importance of children in families and society? Is the command still valid today? Why or why not?

2. In *Precious in His Sight*, Zuck notes the significant number of Bible references about children viz. “child”. (121 times); “children” (448 times); “childhood” (4 times), and “sons” (2700 times). There are more than 1,400 references to children, childhood, parenting and other matters related to children in the Bible.

What are the implications of this number of references?

3. How are children viewed in your family and community in the past and recent times? Are they treated as a blessing or a burden? Has this changed in the past generation? Explain by citing examples.

4. How might studies on biblical perspectives of children affect the perception of children in your culture? What role can you play to correct wrong perceptions and treatment of children in your culture? (Think of one or two examples in terms of your home, school, and community.)

STUDY 2: Jesus' Heart for Children



Jesus and the Children



Compassion Reception area

■ Introduction

THE NEW Testament shows Jesus has a high regard for children. Believing that Jesus is fully God and fully human, we can discover in the New Testament, God's heart for children through Jesus. Jesus' own words and attitudes about children set the stage for this set of verses. Remember the many incidents involving children in the life of Jesus, e.g. the boy who offered Jesus the loaves and fishes (John 6), the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7), and the daughter of the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28). These are just a few examples. We may not know the names of these children but their very presence in the biblical record lets us know that they were significant to Jesus. Though it is often overlooked, we cannot deny the prominent role of children in the life and ministry of Jesus.

Jesus loved to have children around him. "While few of the world's great religious leaders have had little regard for children, Jesus was different. Not only did he

welcome them; he even used them to teach adults some essential spiritual lessons!"⁴

In the spacious lobby of the international headquarters of the organization for which I work, are several slightly larger than life size bronze figures. The main figure is Jesus, seated on a rock, with a child on his lap playing with his short beard, and the laughing Jesus has a big smile on his face. In the setting around him, there comes another little girl, bringing Jesus a flower, and a boy with a lamb, shyly coming towards him. A playful little bronze dog is eagerly wagging his tail, joining in on the fun. But off in the distance (over by the front door), is another bronze figure of a little Asian boy, pulling his mother along with one

⁴ Zuck, p.201, quoting from Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to St. Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), p.226.

hand, and excitedly pointing to Jesus with the other. The message is clear. The little Asian boy wants his mother to come meet this gentle man who so enjoys playing with the children.

This picture depicts our understanding that Jesus did indeed have time for the children, and that the children themselves are often spiritual resources, influential in bringing their parents to Christ. Especially in non-Christian contexts, children are often the first to understand the love of Jesus. They may be the ones who learn to pray for their parents. Because the children may be learning to read, while the parents are illiterate, the children may be the ones who are able to tell or read the

stories of Jesus to their parents, and tell them of his healing power. Compassion's programs are replete with stories of just those things happening. Countless parents testify that it was their children who first heard of the Jesus, and who influenced them to make a decision to follow Him.

There is no better way to understand Jesus' attitude and heart for children than to reflect on how Jesus interacted with the children, what he said about the children, and the lessons he taught about and through children. Let's see how they fared.

For Further Exploration:

Roy B. Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*, pp. 201-216.

■ What Does the Bible Say?

1. For each spiritual truth Jesus taught the adults, list the things the adults must do or avoid with regard to children (the first is done for you):

Spiritual Truths For Adults	References	Things To Do or Avoid with regard to children
Enter God's Kingdom	Matthew 18:1-3 cf: Mark 9:33-34; 36; Luke 9:46-47.	<i>Become like little children.</i>
Be great in God's eyes	Mark 9:35 cf: Matthew 18: 4; Luke 9:48b.	
Demonstrate our welcome of Jesus	Luke 9:48 cf: Matthew 18:5; Mark 9:37	
Avoid God's Judgment	Matthew 18:6-7 cf: Mark 9:42; Luke 17:1-2	
Identity with God's plans	Luke 18:16 cf: Matthew 18: 10,14; Mark 10:14	
Avoid rebuke from Jesus	Mark 10: 13-16 cf: Matthew 19:13-14; Luke 18:15-16	

2. The following passages in the Synoptic Gospels record the disciples trying to hinder children from going near to Jesus. What was Jesus' reaction to the disciples?

Synoptic Gospels	Jesus' Reaction
Matthew 19:13-15	
Mark 10: 13-16	
Luke 18: 15-17	

3. Jesus' heart and attitude towards children is also revealed by the fact that He healed many of them. Who are the children Jesus healed and what types of sicknesses were they were healed from?

References	Children	Sicknesses
John 4:43-54	<i>A royal official's son</i>	<i>"Dying" – no specific illness</i>
Matthew 17: 14-18 cf: Mark 9: 17-27 Luke 9: 37-43	<i>A boy belonging to a man in the crowd</i>	<i>Demon-possession</i>
Mark 5:21, 35-43 cf: Matthew 9:18-19; 23-26		
Luke 7:11-17		

■ **Key Insights or Principles:**

■ **Reflection Questions:**

1. Discuss what Jesus was teaching His disciples who were striving for position and greatness. What principles was Jesus teaching them when He placed the child in the midst of the discussion?

2. Compare and contrast the attitudes of Jesus with the pastors and church leaders you know today. Are their attitudes more like those of Jesus or more like the disciples? Why? Give examples.

3. In your context, do children have opportunities to serve or respond to altar calls for salvation, healing or prayer? Why or why not?

4. How can we apply the above principles learned from Jesus with regard to children in our church context today?

STUDY 3: The Sacredness of Unborn Life

■ Introduction

FEW SOCIAL issues in recent times have provoked such passionate support and condemnation as the matter of abortion.

The contending issue is: “When does life begin?” The “Pro-Choice” camp (pro-abortion really) would have us believe “that the foetus is not a person and that, therefore, a woman has a legal and moral right to end a pregnancy if she so chooses.”⁵ They argue further that every child should be a *wanted* child, and that aborting an unplanned or “inconvenient” unborn child is only being responsible and preventing the likelihood of future neglect or mistreatment. Surely, such a stance trivializes all human life and ultimately demeans the child. The child is denied the basic right to be born or to exist.

Interestingly, but tragically, “pro-choicers” have made themselves as gods. If the mother wants a baby, then the foetus is a child. If not, then it is just a piece of tissue which can be done away with.

Since the United States Supreme Court gave women the legal right to abort their

unborn babies in 1973, more than 50 million unborn babies have been aborted in the U.S. And each year, in the United States, 1.3 million⁶ unborn babies die as a result of their “Pro-Choice” mothers. Similar statistics could be cited for many nations around the world. In some countries, abortion is almost assumed. One worker in Ukraine was asked by a new Christian, “What is the Christian way to have an abortion?”

We have seen that God forms children in the womb. In this study, we will also see that God called individuals *even while still in the womb*. Let us revisit these and other biblical passages with the question of abortion specifically in mind, and once again learn from the pages of Scripture.

For Further Exploration:

Roy B. Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*, pp. 71-81.

⁵ Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*, p.71.

⁶ The 1.3 statistic is from www.prolifeaction.org/faq/abortionphp/. Their source was as follows: Finer LB and Henshaw SK, Estimates of U.S. Abortion Incidence in 2001 and 2002, Alan Guttmacher Institute, 2005 [PDF], accessed May 17, 2005.

■ What Does the Bible Say?

1. Read the following verses: Genesis 30:20; Psalms 127:3; John 1:13. What is implied about the VALUE of human life—both born and unborn?

2. READ Psalm 139:13. What expression is used by the psalmist to describe how we are made in our mother’s womb? What other words are used in the following verses to describe the formation of the child in the mother’s womb?

Primary Scripture	Descriptive Word(s) for the Formation of the Child
Job 10:8, 9	
Psalms 103:14	
Isaiah 29:16	
Isaiah 64:8	
2. Corinthians 4:7	

3. How do these biblical writers describe themselves in the womb?

Authors of the Bible	References	Descriptions of the child in the womb
Job	Job 3:11,16; 10: 8-11	<i>"Why did I not perish at birth and die..." "Your hands shaped me and made me.... clothe me with skin and flesh and knit me together with bones and sinews."</i>
David	Psalm 139: 13-16; Psalm 119: 73	
Isaiah	Isaiah 49:5	<i>"he who formed me in the womb"</i>
Jeremiah	Jeremiah 1:5; 20: 17-18	

From the above descriptions, discuss the negative and positive ways men and women view the unborn child in the womb today.

4. Doctrine of Incarnation: Read Galatians 4:4 and Hebrews 2:17. In light of these, discuss Zuck's statement that "If the foetus is not a person, then Jesus Christ, when he was in Mary's womb was not a person." (Zuck, p.77).

5. Doctrine of Original Sin: Read Psalm 51:5. Discuss David's confession: "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." Based on David's comments, what do you think this passage says about original sin? What does this reveal about the status of the unborn child?

6. In 1 Samuel 1:11, Hannah made a vow to dedicate her baby to serve the Lord all his life if He grants her a child. How does this verse affirm the status of the unborn child?

7. READ Exodus 21:22-25. This Scripture states that punishment will be meted out to the offender if he causes a pregnant woman to give birth prematurely or inflicts serious injury on either the mother or the unborn child. What does this Mosaic instruction reveal about the status and value of unborn and premature babies?

■ **Key Insights or Principles:**

■ **Reflection Questions:**

1. How do people in your society or culture view abortion? What are the legal aspects of abortion in your country? Discuss the impact of abortion on society and on individual mothers in your country.

2. Do you think there are some legitimate reasons for abortion? What about rape or incest? Defend your answer.

3. If there is a foreknowledge of a severe deformity or incapacity of the developing child in uterus, how does this affect the decisions about abortion?

4. Here are two “biblical” arguments sometimes used by “pro-abortion” groups to justify abortion. How do you respond to each one of these?

a. Because Adam became a “living being” when God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (Genesis 2:7), a child becomes a living being when at birth he or she begins to breathe.

- b. Personhood begins at birth, because, though the foetus appears human, it is not a human being for it lacks consciousness.

5. Here are three other “pro-abortion” arguments. How do you respond to each of these?

- a. The foetus tissue is part of the pregnant woman and, therefore, is not a separate person.

- b. The woman has the right to do with her body what she wishes.

- c. Abortions are a way of avoiding the bearing of unwanted children.

6. What is the view of different kinds of “birth control” in your culture? Which methodologies are validated and which are controversial?

STUDY 4: Parents in the Bible *Wanted* Children

■ Introduction

DID YOU know that there are many couples today in postmodern society who don't want to have children? The family size is shrinking and an increasing number of couples are opting for "child-free" marriages. In fact, there are books written and websites created for those who choose not to have children. According to Wikipedia, quoting author Patricia Cohen, (accessed July 5, 2011), a 2003 U.S. Census study found that a record 19% of U.S. women age 40–44 did not have children (compared with 10% in 1976). Being childless was considered bizarre in the 1950s. "Childfree" couples tend to be more educated, have more management and profession commitments, are less "religious", and live in urban areas.

Throughout biblical history, it is clear the women and men wanted to have children. In fact, God wanted His people to bear children. Recall the first commandment given in Scripture! It was to "be fruitful and multiply!" (Genesis 1:28) Barren Sarah referred to having children as a "pleasure" (Genesis 18:12). Job *delighted* in having his children around him (Job 29:5) and the psalmist refers to the "*happy mother of children.*" (Psalms 113:9)

In biblical history, childlessness was considered a disgrace (Genesis 30:23) and misery (Genesis 29:32, I Samuel 1:11). Barren women of the Bible were sometimes desperate to have children. Rachel cried: "Give me children or I'll die!" (Genesis 30:1). Also, Hannah of I Samuel 1:7-16, was desperate to have children.

In the 21st century, many married couples are experiencing infertility and childlessness, too. To fill the gap of childlessness, many couples choose to adopt while others contribute to society and are satisfied in roles as foster parents. Zuck points out that "as of 1991, more than one million children were in adoptive families."⁷ Thousands more couples are waiting in line for more babies to be available for adoption."⁸ According to the Adoption Institute, over a quarter of a million children were adopted between 1971 and 2001.⁹ In the U.S.A., most of these children were from Russia and China.

⁷ Zuck, quoting the *World Almanac and Book of Facts* 1995 (Mahwah, N.J.; Funk and Wagnall's, 1994), p. 962.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ www.adoptioninstitute.org.

It is interesting to note that the New Testament uses the theme of adoption to illustrate some important theological truths. When we place these two pictures side by side—barrenness and adoption—once again, “the child in our midst” will shed some light on our human predicament.

(Note: This study can be a painful one for some men/women who desire children but are unable to do so. It is important to be sensitive to the members of your group who may be wrestling with these concerns.)

For Further Exploration:

Roy B. Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*, pp. 45-53, 96-99.

Michael J. Sandel, “The Case Against Perfection” in *Atlantic Monthly* (April 2004), pp.50-62.

■ **What Does the Bible Say?**

1. Read the following verses which describe how parents responded to having children. Summarize and write their responses to this news!

References:	Parents	Responses to Having Children
2 Samuel 14:7	A woman from Tekoa	<i>To have an heir, for the child to carry on the family name and have descendants.</i>
Job 29:5	Job	<i>Children were a blessing to be around.</i>
Luke 1:58	Zechariah and Elizabeth	
Genesis 30: 11-13	Leah and Jacob	

2. Read the following verses to discover how these biblical characters felt about their children. List what they did or said about their love for their children:

References:	Parents	Statements on Parents’ Love for Children
Old Testament Passages:		
Genesis 21:15-16	Hagar	<i>“I cannot watch the boy die.”</i>
Genesis 25:28	Isaac and Rebekah	<i>Isaac loved Esau; Rebekah loved Jacob.</i>
Genesis 37:3; 44:34	Jacob	

Exodus 2:3	Moses' mother	
2 Samuel 12: 15-17;	David	<i>After receiving the judgement from Nathan, David pleaded with God for his child to live. He fasted and spent the nights lying in sackcloth on the ground.</i>
New Testament Passages:		
Luke 8: 41-42	Jairus	
John 4:46-49	Royal Official	<i>He begged Jesus to heal his dying son.</i>

3. The following passages refer metaphorically to “motherhood” or “fatherhood”. God explains His love for us through these metaphors. Comment on the Thessalonian passage below.

References:	Metaphor of “Parents”	How God Loves His Children
Isaiah 49:15	God as spiritual “mother”	<i>Just as an earthly mother cannot forget the baby at her breast nor have no compassion on her child, God will never forget us nor have no compassion on us, His spiritual children.</i>
I Thessalonians 2: 7, 11	Paul and the apostles as spiritual “mother” and “father”	

4. In the Bible, there are many Scriptures which refer to “adoption.” In fact, there are specific biblical characters which were either “fostered” or “adopted.” One child was actually a servant! Read the passages and note some details about these specific children:

References:	Adoptive/ Foster Parents	Child’s Name/Circumstances
Exodus 2:5-10	Pharaoh’s daughter	Child’s name: <i>Moses</i> <i>Moses was spotted by Pharaoh’s daughter at the River Nile. She felt sorry for him as he was crying and hired a Hebrew woman (Moses’ mother) to nurse him. When Moses grew older, he stayed in the palace with Pharaoh’s daughter who took him as her son.</i>
Esther 2:7,15	Mordecai	Child’s name:
I Chronicles 2:34-35	Sheshan	Child’s name: Jarha

■ **Key Insights or Principles:**

■ **Reflection Questions:**

1. How do you feel about married couples who intentionally opt for a childless marriage? What legitimate reasons might there be for being intentionally childless?

2. While some women today do not want to have children, others, like most of the biblical women, are also desperate to have children. What are some of the ways that “barren” or infertile women seek to do so? What are your thoughts and feelings about having “test-tube” babies, or other means available today to aid in conception?

3. How does culture influence parent’s attitudes and decisions about having children (birthed or adopted)? In your role as a spiritual leader, how can you restore or increase the capacity of parental love and respect for children in your culture?

4. Read the following excerpt from the blog called “Motherhood Is a Calling (And Where Your Children Rank)” by Rachel Jankovic.¹⁰ Discuss where children ‘rank,’ in your society, based on the prevailing priorities of action and attitudes.

Children rank way below college. Below world travel for sure. Below the ability to go out at night at your leisure. Below honing your body at the gym. Below any job you may have or hope to get. In fact, children rate below your desire to sit around and pick your toes, if that is what you want to do. Below everything. Children are the last thing you should ever spend your time doing.

If you grew up in this [Western] culture, it is very hard to get a biblical perspective on motherhood, to think like a free Christian woman about your life, your children. How much have we listened to partial truths and half lies? Do we believe that we want children because there is some biological urge, or the phantom “baby itch”? Are we really in this because of cute little clothes and photo opportunities? Is motherhood a rock-bottom job for those who can’t do more, or those who are satisfied with drudgery? If so, what were we thinking?

5. What is your opinion about child adoption and fostering children? Are these practices common in your culture? Share with your group testimonies about child adoption or fostering children. How can the church support those who decide to embark on adopting or fostering children who need parental nurture and love?

¹⁰ Rachel Jankovic, “Motherhood Is a Calling (And Where Your Children Rank).” July 14, 2011. <http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/motherhood-is-a-calling-and-where-your-children-rank#.Th-UzV85Xp1.facebook>. Accessed July 23, 2011.

6. Due to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, there are countless orphans left behind without parents. What is being done in your culture concerning this issue? How can the Church respond to support the plight of the orphans of HIV/AIDS?



Part II:

Family Life in Bible Times

IN THIS section, we will explore a wide range of topics related to children and families in the Bible. The Bible is a case book illustrating so well the “good, bad and ugly” about family relationships. Interestingly, one has to look very hard throughout Scriptures to find fully Godly and functional families. But just as lawyers and doctors learn from the case study method, we can also learn much from both the positive and negative “cases” we find in the Bible.

Families come in all shapes and sizes. Do you know that having children—“godly offspring”—was the reason God created the institution of marriage? (See Malachi 2:13-15) Some societies highly value the extended family—the more aunts, uncles, cousins, and other relations, the better! Other societies are more “nuclear”—there is less inter-generational contact, and less involvement of the extended family in daily activities, matters of discipline, and other social situations.

Generally, around the world, families are smaller today than in times past. In the 1970’s there were pessimistic population projections that the world would grow to **20 or 50 billion people**. At that time, there was the fear that we wouldn’t be able to feed everyone. There would be mass starvation, and not enough resources and energy to support even a modest standard of living.

It hasn’t quite turned out that way. Fertility rates (the number of children per woman), have dropped dramatically not only in the more developed countries, but also in the less developed countries as well. We know that Western families are typically smaller; but in fact, nearly 100 countries around the world have a fertility rate under the replacement rate of child per child. Recognizing how devastating the

shrinking next generation is to economies and social well-being, many countries are now offering significant subsidies and other incentives for women to have children.

No matter where you are born, there will be family matters concerning siblings and possible rivalries. They are as ancient as those between Cain and Abel. Just as there is no one child who is exactly the same as another, there is no one family the same as another. But we can learn about godly families through Scriptures which teach us this vast topic.

Families begin with the birth of a child. As in biblical times, childbirth is an exciting, sometimes frightening, and certainly an unknown experience as each child's birth is unique to the child herself! Once born, the mystery and awe of a new life can be a blessing to the parents and extended family.

As we explore childbirth in Bible times and how God blesses the future generations through the birth of children, let us begin with a new appreciation of God's love for His world to allow His very own Son to also be born as a helpless infant, into our world!

STUDY 5: Childbirth in Bible Times

■ Introduction

CHILDBIRTH IS one of the most amazing and complex experiences in life. No one can fathom exactly the marvellous way a child is formed and brought into the world. Despite the “remarkable facts”¹¹ science has revealed to us about the development of a baby in a mother’s womb, pregnancy and childbirth remain deep mysteries. Such is the mystery that whenever a child is born, it “stagger[s]” the imagination and causes parents to experience a deep sense of amazement and awe.”¹²

Yet, while the birth of a child is an occasion of joy, the act of giving birth itself is often described in Scripture as the epitome of pain and suffering. Moreover, there is always the risk of miscarriages, stillbirth and birth defects.

What does the Bible say about the joys and pains of childbirth? How did the people of old respond to these extremes of experience in childbirth?

For Further Exploration:

Roy B. Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*, pp. 45-63, 69-70.

■ What Does the Bible Say?

1. Read the following Scriptures to summarize what is said about childbearing:

Primary References	Statements on Childbearing
I Chronicles 4:9	Jabez’s mother: “I gave birth to him in pain.”
Psalms 48: 6	“... pain like that of a woman in labour.”
Isaiah 13:8	“pain and anguish will grip them; they will writhe like a woman in labour.”

¹¹ Zuck, p. 53 quoting from Lennart Nilsson and Lars Hamberger, *A Child is Born*, trans. Clare James (New York: Delacorte Press, 1990), pp.39,78,83,85,108.

¹² Ibid.

Isaiah 26: 17	'As a pregnant woman about to give birth writhes and cries out in her pain..'
Jeremiah 50:43	"Anguish has gripped him, pain like that of a woman in labour."
Micah 4:9-10	"Has your ruler perished, that pain seizes you like that of a woman in labour?" "Writhe in agony, Daughter of Zion, like a woman in labour."

2. Women in the Bible were exhilarated at the prospect of being pregnant and giving birth to children (even through their maidservants). For each passage, identify key words uttered by these mothers with reference to children.

	Mother's Name	Child's Name	Mother's Expressions	Key Words
Genesis 4:1	Eve	Cain	"With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man."	<i>Help of the Lord</i>
Genesis 4:25	Eve	Seth	"God has granted me another child."	
Genesis 30:11 30:17,18 30:20	Leah	Gad Issachar, Zebulun	"What good fortune!" "God has rewarded me." "God has presented me with a precious gift."	
Genesis 30: 23	Rachel	Joseph	"God has taken away my disgrace."	
I Samuel 1:20	Hannah	Samuel	"Because I asked the Lord for him."	

3. Conditions for childbirth during Bible times were challenging. Read the following passages and describe the conditions and the help mothers received during childbirth.

	Scripture Contents	Conditions/Places of Childbirth	Help Received
Genesis 35:17	And as she was having great difficulty in childbirth, the midwife said to her ... "Don't despair, for you have another son."	Rachel died while giving birth to Benjamin on the way from Bethel to Ephrath (Bethlehem).	<i>Midwife</i>

Exodus 1:15, 16	The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, "When you are helping the Hebrew women during childbirth on the delivery stool, if you see that the baby is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live."		
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4. Roy Zuck in *Precious in His Sight* (pp. 69- 70) provides 7 possible interpretations from several commentators on the puzzling verse found in 1 Timothy 2:15: "But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety."

Which of the following interpretations would you choose? Give your reasons.

- 1. Women will be saved physically through the difficult process of childbirth. (quoting H.A. Ironside)
- 2. Women will be saved spiritually through the childbearing of the Messiah. (Quoting Homer A. Kent, Jr.)
- 3. Women will be saved spiritually even though they must bear children. (quoting E. F. Scott)
- 4. Women will be saved spiritually through being faithful to their role as Christian women. (quoting Ann L. Bowman)
- 5. Women will be saved spiritually through performing their duties as mothers. (Quoting Robinson, cited in Albert Barnes' work on the New Testament.)
- 6. Women will be kept safe from the sinful influence of society by being at home raising children. (quoting Barnes' work who cites Wetstein)
- 7. Women will be kept safe from Eve's error of usurping the husband's leadership role by being a godly mother. (quoting S. Jebb)

5. The results of mankind’s “Fall” are reflected in the Scriptures. Genesis 3:16 states that the consequences of sin would result in “pains in child bearing.” Discuss the meaning in context in each passage and explain why pain in childbirth is used as a metaphor here.

	Place/Person	Scripture Contents	Meaning in Context
Isaiah 21:3	Babylon/Jeremiah	“At this my body is racked with pain; pangs seize me, like those of a woman in labour...”	<i>The prophet Jeremiah was expressing suffering and terror when prophesying on coming judgement on Babylon.</i>
Jeremiah 30: 5,6	Israel/Judah	“Cries of fear are heard – terror, not peace. Ask and see: Can a man bear children? Then why do I see every strong man with his hands on his stomach like a woman in labour, every face turned deathly pale?”	
Jeremiah 49: 24	Damascus	“Damascus has become feeble, she has turned to flee and panic has gripped her; anguish and pain have seized her, pain like that of a woman in labour.”	
Romans 8:22	Creation	“We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.”	
Galatians 4:19	Paul	“My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you...”	

■ **Key Insights or Principles:**

■ **Reflection Questions:**

1. What risks do women in your culture face during pregnancy? Do these risks cause them to have more or fewer children? Do they cause the parents to treasure or despise their children? Why?

2. Discuss the conditions/places and the assistance women receive during childbirth in your culture. What are the pros and cons? What positive or negative effects do these birth conditions/places have on the young infants and their subsequent childhood?

3. It is a well-documented fact that the nutrition of the pregnant mother influences the health of her baby during pregnancy. Read the following Scriptures involving food and diet. Judges 13:4-5, 7 (Manoah's wife) and Luke 1:24 (Elizabeth).

What are some of the preparations, precautions and traditional observances for pregnant women in your culture? Discuss the pros and cons of these practices on the mother and child.

4. Chuck Swindoll has said that "Since He assigns children to parents, there is no such thing as an 'accidental birth' or a 'surprise pregnancy' from God's viewpoint."¹³ Do you agree? What are the viewpoints in your society and their consequences?

¹³ Charles R. Swindoll, *Living Beyond the Daily Grind, Book II* (Dallas, Texas: Word Publishing, 1988), p.326.

5. The Scriptures reflect the feelings and thoughts of women who have learned they are expecting a child. Do you see any evidence in Scripture of an active role of fathers in childbirth? In your culture, what roles to husbands have during their wives' pregnancy and childbirth?

■ **Case Study: Children with Special Needs**

Roy Zuck notes that “although some babies born in Bible times had physical defects,” they were not abandoned or put to death because of their handicaps. For example: a man born blind (John 9: 1-7), a beggar born crippled (Acts 3:1-10) and a man born lame (Acts 14:8-10).

Discuss how these “special” children were mightily used by God to promote His Kingdom. What are the implications for child development ministries for “special” children? Discuss and reflect about how children with special needs are treated in your context and culture.

STUDY 6: What's in a Child's Name?

Introduction

CHILDREN COME with all kinds of names.¹⁴ Many people believe that a name can influence all of life! Have you ever stopped to reflect on the fact that the names we give our children are the names by which they will be known throughout eternity? God uses whatever name we give our children. The very same names are those which (hopefully) will be written down in heaven.

Some cultural groups give children unflattering names to make them less appealing to the demons. Others give names which are biblically based. For example, the name, "Nathan" means "gift from God", and indeed the prophet Nathan in King David's life provided the "gift" of admonishment to King David. As a result of Nathan's counsel, David repented and turned his life around towards obedience to God.

My name, "Daniel," means "God Judges" (or something like that!). My Asian friend Lim Siew Ling tells me that her name means - "petite" and "active"—a pretty good description of her, I'd say, even now as an adult! (Apparently though, it may

mean something different depending upon what Chinese characters are used! Whew!) And names differ widely from place to place. If you are born in Africa, you might be named Abeni, Chika, or Khamisi. If you are born in Poland, your first name could be Babina, Dobieslaw, or Sergiusz. In Korea, the given name may be Moon, Shin, Soo, or Sun. In China, Wei Xia, and Xiang are common given names. In Ethiopia, common names include Dawit, Mulatu, and Shiferaw.

Interestingly, even in the secular Western culture, the most common names today are biblical names. A popular "website" shows that the three most popular names for boys in America in 2006 were (in order) Jacob, Michael, and Joshua. Matthew, Daniel, and Andrew were also in the top 10. As recently as 2011, according to the Social Security Administration Statistics, the top name continues to be Jacob, with Michael, Noah, and Daniel all making the top ten boys' names!

Do you know what the most common given name is for boys in the UK today? Mohammed! (Think what that says about how society and ethnicity is changing there today!)

¹⁴ There are many fascinating websites on names. This one has lots of information about baby's names around the world:
<http://www.babynames.org.uk/>.

How should one name a child? Today, it is considered trendy to name a child after a famous person whom the parents idolize e.g. a famous author or celebrity. Some parents name their children after a relative or even themselves! Just as in the Bible, there are parents who name their children after nature (e.g. flowers), places (cities, towns, and countries), an event (e.g. tsunami, el Nino), colours, days, months or gemstones.

It was common for some illiterate cultures to name their children after domestic objects (e.g. plates, scissors), or animals (e.g. cat, dog, cow). In the past, some children were also given derogatory names that describe their negative

physical appearance or disability (e.g. dumb, deaf, limping leg).

Because God knows each of our names, we will explore the meaning and significance of names of children then and now throughout the Bible. We will find that parents in the Bible who feared God chose names that were deliberate and purposeful for their children. And children in the Bible were expected to live up to their names to fulfil God’s plans for their lives.

For Further Exploration:

Roy B. Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*, pp. 63-67.
<http://www.ssa.gov/OACT/babynames>

■ **What Does the Bible Say?**

1. Read the following Scriptures to discover when children were named in the Old and New Testaments. Identify the children and the time they were named:

	Child	When was the Child Named?
Genesis 29:32	Reuben	<i>Not mentioned specifically but assumed to be after birth.</i>
Genesis 35:18	Benjamin	<i>When Rachel was at her last breath after giving birth. She originally named the child Ben-Oni which means “son of my trouble” but Jacob changed it to Benjamin which means “son of my right hand.”</i>
I Samuel 1:20	Samuel	
Luke 1:59	John	
Luke 2:21	Jesus	

2. The following passages reveal how children are named with specific meanings. Identify the person/s who named the children and, if possible, the circumstance that influenced the choice of the names.

	Child's Name	Meaning	Context	Named by:
Genesis 4:1	Cain	"brought forth" or "acquired"	<i>Eve was grateful that the Lord helped her to bring forth a child.</i>	<i>Probably Eve but not specifically mentioned.</i>
Genesis 16: 11	Ishmael	"God hears"	<i>God instructed Hagar to name her son "Ishmael" to remind her that God has heard her misery and will favour her.</i>	<i>Hagar as instructed by the Lord</i>
Genesis 17: 17	Isaac	"he laughs"		
Genesis 25: 25	Esau	"hairy"		
Genesis 25:26	Jacob	"grasps the heel" – Hebrew idiom which means "he deceives."		
Genesis 30:24	Joseph	"may He add"		
Genesis 38: 27-30	Perez & Zerah	"breaking out" "scarlet" or "brightness"		
I Samuel 4:21-22	Ichabod	"no glory"		
I Samuel 25:25	Nabal	"fool"	<i>Not mentioned</i>	<i>Not mentioned</i>

2 Samuel 12:24	Solomon Jedidiah	"loved by the Lord"	<i>David & Bathsheba</i> <i>Prophet Nathan</i>	<i>The Lord instructed Nathan to name him "Jedidiah" because He loved him.</i>
I Chronicles 4:9	Jabez	"pain"		
Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23	Immanuel Jesus	"God with us" "the Lord saves"		
Luke 1: 13,59	John	Not mentioned here.	<i>Angel Gabriel appeared before Zechariah and instructed him to name the child "John".</i>	<i>Zechariah</i>

3. In the Bible, some people had their names changed. Whenever this happened, it was usually a significant event, indicated by the change of name and also the character of the person. Discuss the new meanings and transformations that took place after the following name changes:

References:	Name Change:	New Meanings/Transformations Observed
Old Testament Examples:		
Genesis 17:5	Abram to Abraham	Abram = "exalted father" Abraham = "father of many" Although he initially doubted God, Abraham went to fulfil God's promise to become a father of multitudes.
Genesis 17: 15	Sarai to Sarah	Sarai = "a princess" Sarah = "mother of nations"
Genesis 32:28	Jacob to Israel	Jacob = "deceiver" Israel = "he struggles with God"

New Testament Examples:		
Mark 3:16	Simon to Peter	Simon = "hearing" Peter = "rock"
Acts 4:36	Joseph to Barnabas	Joseph = "son of prophecy" Barnabas = "son of encouragement"
Acts 13:9	Saul to Paul	Saul = "asked for" or "prayed for" Paul = "small" or "humble"

■ **Key Insights or Principles:**

■ **Reflection Questions:**

1. What is the meaning of your original given name? If you know it, share with your group the process and background of how your name was chosen for you as a baby. In what specific ways, positively or negatively, has your name impacted you as an adult?

2. How are children named in your country/culture? Describe the process of choosing and determining names in your culture. Who chooses the names of children—the father, the mother, in-laws, extended family or pastors? Are names chosen to challenge or provide life direction? Discuss.

3. Does your culture give derogatory names to their children? What is the historical and cultural background of this practice? To what extent is this practice a spiritual bondage?

4. Is it common for believers in your culture to adopt a Christian name after they become believers? Why? Do you agree with that practice? Describe the process of how believers change their names and the response from their community (e.g. family, friends, or colleagues).

5. Names (and nick-names) can have a powerful impact on a child right into adulthood. What is your opinion on the names given to children today?

6. If you are in a position of influence, what guidelines would you give to parents when naming their infants? List some ways you can influence young parents in your church to choose meaningful names for their children.

STUDY 7: Family Membership and Size

■ Introduction

“HOW DO you define a family?” What is the size of a “real” family? And what about cultural currents in which homosexual couples are seeking legal recognition as families? In the past, such questions did not arise. It was understood that a family consisted of a father, mother, children and often live-in grandparents or other relatives.

Today, it is hard to insist on one definition of a family. As Zuck describes it aptly, “a family may consist of a divorced or never married mother and her child or children” or an “unmarried couple living together, with or without children” or “households with adopted children.”¹⁵

God’s original definition of a family is far from what we hear or observe in the 21st century. Most Bible families were complete with a father, mother, children, grandparents, in-laws, and servants. They averaged 6.1 per family. Concubines and slave girls were considered part of the Bible families in view of their roles in bearing children.¹⁶

Case Study: Until recently in China, abortion was not just an option for women, but mandated by the One Child Policy. This policy was established by Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping in 1979 to limit communist China’s population growth. Although designated a “temporary measure,” it continues long after its establishment. Fines, abortions, and even forced sterilization are often imposed for second or subsequent children.

Abortions were not the only result of this misguided policy. There is alarming evidence that the intense pressure on couples to make sure their only child is a boy has prompted a resurgence of female infanticide, despite official attempts to stamp out the centuries-old practice.

Rural families are said to be particularly tempted to kill female offspring, such was the pressure to produce a child capable of coping with the physical demands of farming and prevent cash-strapped farming households from being plunged even deeper into poverty. In some cases, according to reports, other girls are hidden from the authorities, or die at a young age through neglect.¹⁷ China’s One Child Policy is one of the ways that

¹⁵ Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*, p.91.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.92.

¹⁷ McCurry, Justin and Rebecca Allison *The Guardian*, London, Tuesday, Mar 23, 2004, quoted in *The Taipei Times* <http://www.taipetimes.com/News/editorials/archives/2004/03/23/2003107449>

children are victimized. This policy has caused a disdain for girl children, and, neglect, abandonment, and even infanticide.

Unfortunately when one seriously examines the one-child policy, it is clear that these are not the only catastrophes that have emerged. One acquaintance who works in China made the obvious point that the One Child Policy means that children today have no brothers and sisters. (Of course!) But if the policy is continued for more than one generation, it also means that the child has no aunts or uncles, no cousins, no nephews or nieces. In fact, the policy destroys the entire

extended family, for such children have no relatives at all. How tragic for a child! (And how lonely once the child is an adult, with grandparents and parents gone – not a single related person in the world!)

Sadly today, many societies have a “de-facto” one child policy. Families are voluntarily deciding they cannot afford more than one child – if indeed they have any at all. Think what this means for our societies in the coming decades.

For Further Exploration:

Roy B. Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*, pp. 91-94.

■ **What Does the Bible Say?**

1. We discover in the Bible that it was “ideal” to have 7 children and if you did, it was an indication of a special blessing from God. Identify key words in the Scriptures to form implications on the significance of having 7 children.

	Scripture Contents	Implications of Having 7 Children
Ruth 4: 15b	“Your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons...”	<i>Implies having 7 sons as the ultimate blessing one could ever wish for.</i>
I Samuel 2:5	“she who was barren has borne seven children.”	
Job 1:2,3; 42:13	“he had seven sons and three daughters ... He was the greatest man among all the people of the East.”	
Jeremiah 15:9	“The mother of seven will grow faint and breathe her last.”	<i>Implies that even the most blessed woman will not stand under God’s judgement.</i>

2. Consider Solomon’s statement in Ecclesiastes 6:3: “A man may have a hundred children and live many years; yet no matter how long he lives, if he cannot enjoy his prosperity and does not receive proper burial, I say that a still born child is better off than he.”

- What does this verse say to you concerning family size in the Bible?

- How does having many children compare with acquiring properties and achieving prosperity in the Bible?

3. There are countless examples of “blessed” fathers in the Bible, not only with children who were boys, but also girls. Here are a few examples¹⁸:

Fathers	Number of Boys	Number of Girls
Ishmael	12	1
Elkanah (Samuel’s father)	4	2
Rehoboam (who had 18 wives and 60 concubines!)	28	60
Cush	0	5
Ibzan	30	30
David	19 (born to his wives; how many to his concubines?)	
Isaiah	20	
Lot	0	2
Ishmael	12	1
Abijah (He had 14 wives!)	22	16
Hosea	21	
Joseph (Married to Mary, Jesus’ mother)	4	Several

¹⁸ Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*, pp.92-93.

In your opinion, how many children should modern parents have today? Why?

Who should determine the number of children a couple should have? Is the husband, wife, parents, or parents-in-laws? Why?

4. Psalm 127:5 says, "Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gates." Consider the list of selected fathers and number of children above. In what ways are these fathers "blessed"? How does family size play a role in being a blessing to the men in the family in the Old Testament in Bible culture?

5. Observe the following Scriptures. You will discover that the following parents have only ONE child. Identify the context and write your observations on the grief they suffer at the prospect of losing their only child to a sickness or tragedy:

References:	Incident Described	Observations on Parents' Grief
I Kings 3:16-28	2 prostitutes came before King Solomon with each claiming the baby is hers. The king suggested cutting the child in two and give half to each mother. The real mother pleaded for the child not to be killed but the "fake" mother insisted on cutting the baby in two so that neither she nor the other mother could have the baby.	<p><i>The real mother fought for her only child to be returned to her to the extent of bringing her case before the king.</i></p> <p><i>The "fake" mother resorted to stealing another woman's child after her own died. Perhaps she was grieved to the point of desperation upon losing her only child.</i></p>

I Kings 17: 7-24	Elijah was staying with the widow who had a son. He fell seriously ill and died. The widow implied that Elijah had brought judgement to her house and “killed” her son. Elijah prayed for the boy and he was resurrected.	
2 Kings 4:11-37	The Shunammite woman had a boy who died of a sudden pain in the head. She rushed to seek Elisha’s help who prayed for the boy and he was resurrected.	
Luke 7: 11-17	A widow at Nain brought her only son who had died to Jesus. Jesus commanded the young man to rise up and he sat up and began to talk.	
Luke 8: 40-42; 49-56	Jairus fell at Jesus’ feet pleading for him to go to his house to heal his only daughter who was dying. As Jesus was healing others, the girl died. Jesus went to Jairus’ house and commanded the child to get up. Immediately she stood up.	

■ **Key Insights or Principles:**

■ **Reflection Questions:**

1. Discuss the effects of a “one-child policy”. If practiced for more than one generation, what are the results for the society and the extended family?

2. In many societies, modern couples delay having children, intentionally limit their family size, or opt for childlessness today. Is such an attitude a rebellion against God’s general command to “be fruitful and multiply” (“Genesis 1:22)? Give your reasons and examples if applicable.

3. Some people feel that there are already too many people in the world, especially in some heavily populated countries, and each new child adds to the problem. Do you agree or disagree? What is your response to this perspective?

STUDY 8: Siblings and Extended Families in the Bible

■ Introduction

ALL FAMILIES everywhere work through the familial joys and challenges of the interaction between siblings. The Bible has several examples (sometimes fatal) of siblings competing with or not getting along with each other. Sometimes rivalry between siblings was a direct result of parental partiality or a result of many different factors including personality differences, family circumstances, financial stresses, etc.

The Bible alludes to the privileges of the firstborn, yet we also see that in His sovereignty, God at times intentionally chooses the younger over the older child to fulfill His purposes. Although this might have created rivalry amongst the siblings, the outcome was usually positive for both the older and the younger child.

Generally, the phrase “extended family” is used to refer to traditional family units in cultures such as Asia or Africa. The extended family usually includes grandparents and grandchildren, aunts, uncles, cousins, nephews, nieces, and perhaps other family members. In western cultures, the role of the family could be different due to many factors, including distance, career choices, health, etc.

Scripture reveals that extended families can play a vital role in the lives of the “immediate” family unit. Far from being perceived as “outlaws,” as sometimes stereotyped in western cultures, grandparents, relatives and in-laws were a blessing to their “immediate” families. This is true across many cultures today including western cultures. In biblical passages, in some instances, extended families acted as adoptive parents to their relatives’ or in-laws’ children. For example, it has been suggested that Jacob adopted his grandchildren Ephraim and Manasseh (Genesis 48:5). Perhaps he helped the destiny of his grandchildren by crossing his hands in the blessing, favouring the younger Ephraim over the elder Manasseh (Genesis 48:13-20).

Have you ever wondered why Joseph is not considered one of the 12 tribes of Israel? It is rather Joseph’s sons, who headed the “half-tribes.” Why do you think that happened?

For Further Exploration:

Roy B. Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*, pp. 95-104; 168-175.

■ What Does the Bible Say?

1. Read the examples of sibling rivalry found in the Bible. What are some of the causes? Who was “at fault?” Why?

References:	Siblings:	Causes and Outcomes
Genesis 4:4-8	Cain and Abel	The Lord favoured Abel’s offering but not Cain’s. Cain became angry and jealous. He lured Abel to the field and killed him.
Genesis 21:8	Ishmael and Isaac	
Genesis 27:41	Jacob and Esau	
Genesis 37: 2-4, 8-9	Joseph and his brothers	
Numbers 12:2	Miriam and Aaron	

2. Read the following passages about the parental partiality towards one child which results in sibling rivalry in the Bible. Describe the long-term effects of this partiality and how it influenced their children:

References:	Parents Who Showed Partiality	Effects on their Children
Genesis 25:28; 27: 1-28	Isaac and Rebekah	
Genesis 37:3; 45:1-7	Jacob and Rachel	

3. In the Bible, there is a pre-eminence of the younger siblings over the older siblings in various passages. Read the following Scriptures and identify the siblings involved and trace the outcome of their lives. Two are done for you.

Reference:	Younger Sibling/ Older Sibling	Outcome
Genesis 4:25-5:8	Seth/Cain	Seth was Adam's genealogy
Genesis 29: 16-18	Rachel/Leah	
Genesis 38: 27-30; Ruth 4:18-21; Matthew 1:3	Perez/Zerah	Perez in David's and Jesus' genealogy
Genesis 48:14	Ephraim/Manasseh	
Exodus 7:7	Moses/Aaron	
I Samuel 16: 10-13	David/his brothers	

4. The Bible refers to grandparents and the special influence they have over their grandchildren. Read these verses to identify the roles and responsibilities of grandparents.

	Scripture Contents	Roles and Responsibilities of Grandparents
Genesis 48:5,9	<p>"Now then, your two sons born to you in Egypt before I came to you here will be reckoned as mine; Ephraim and Manasseh will be mine, just as Reuben and Simeon are mine.</p> <p>"Then Israel said, "Bring them to me so I may bless them."</p>	Jacob described his grandchildren as his own children and he blessed them.
Deuteronomy 4:9	"Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them."	

Psalm 78: 5-6	“He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our ancestors to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children.”	
Proverbs 13:22a	“A good person leaves an inheritance for their children’s children...”	
Ezekiel 37:25	“They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where your ancestors lived. They and their children and their children’s children will live there forever, and David my servant will be their prince forever.”	
2 Timothy 1:5	“I am 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.”	

■ **Key Insights or Principles:**

■ **Reflection Questions:**

1. What are the prevailing customs concerning the rights and privileges of older and younger siblings in your culture/country? How do these cultural practices hinder or enhance sibling relationships?

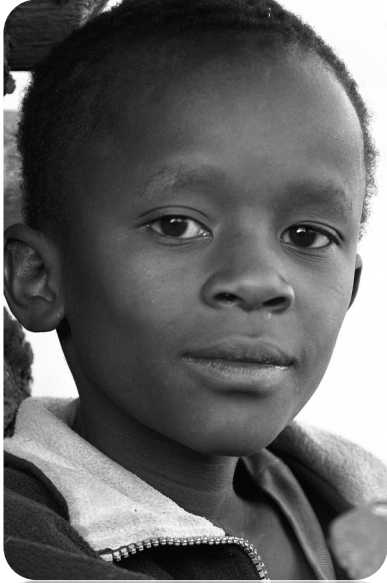
2. From your observations in the Bible, what lessons can be learned concerning sibling rivalry today? What can parents and children do to prevent or overcome sibling rivalry in a Christian context, in particular?

3. What is the definition of “extended family” in your culture? Who are the members that officially belong to a typical “extended family”? Discuss this definition.

4. Proverbs 17:6 states that grandchildren are a “crown to the aged.” What are some common quotations about grandchildren in your culture and their implications in grandparents/grandchildren relationships?

5. As mentioned in the introduction, sometimes “in-laws” are stereotyped as “outlaws” in different cultures. Generally, what are the types of problems that occur in relation to “in-laws”? Discuss some root causes and how in-laws can live as godly families with God-given roles without becoming “outlaws.”

6. Ruth is a classic example of a godly daughter-in-law who enjoyed both the favour of her in-laws as well as the special blessings of God despite the odds against her. What godly attitudes and qualities set Ruth apart, not only as a loving daughter-in-law, but more so as a godly woman? List or discuss these qualities and her actions based upon her godly character.



Part III:

The Nurture and Training of Children

THE BOOK of Proverbs gives many guidelines for those of us working with and for children. It is challenging in the ever-changing panorama of parenting norms from culture to culture to be steadfast and committed to the positive training and nurture of children. In every generation of parents and children, there are new challenges in the cultural contexts which are not addressed by Scripture.

The family structure is the structure God has created in which to protect and nurture children. God's design for a family includes a healthy, God-honouring marriage, a husband/father who models spiritual leadership in the home and fathers and mothers working together toward godly parenting who are passionate about building strong families.

Families are under pressure today. Even within the church, many families are struggling or dysfunctional. We are told that in most places the divorce rate among Christian families is essentially the same as for non-Christians. Many of the issues facing families, and children today are vastly different than those from any other age. At the same time, many of the challenges are the same – helping children to grow in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man (as Jesus did, in Luke 2:52). Our studies in this section won't have specific response to all issues, but we will get examples—both good and bad—of the family issues in the Bible. The insights and biblical principles you will find are timeless—serving well the families in any culture and every generation.

STUDY 9: The Nurture and Training of Jesus

■ Introduction

I HAVE a problem with some of the pictures we see of Jesus. Sometimes the “shampooed” hair look, often strangely backlit, is a bit too feminine for my liking. I believe Jesus was very “manly.” He was probably muscular from wielding a saw and a hammer. He had a whip, and apparently knew how to use it. He was a “real man,” but still had time to be loving and even playful with children. We know too that obviously Jesus could read and write (Luke 4:16-20; John 8:6, 8). “Undoubtedly, He knew and could read and converse in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.”¹

Who were Jesus’ teachers? Certainly He would have learned much from his parents. He probably also learned from the rabbis and synagogue leaders every year as a youth when His parents took Him to Jerusalem for the Passover celebrations. Where did He learn? From the wisdom of His teaching, we see that His was not a sheltered life, but that He learned much about the ways of the world from watching, listening, and being instructed. He learned and was able to apply “real world” lessons from the everyday things He saw and experienced around Him. What lessons can we learn about the training of children from what we see in the education of Jesus?

For Further Exploration:

Roy B. Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*, pp. 195-200.

■ What Does the Bible Say?

1. From the following verses in Matthew, we discover that Jesus’ education and life experiences were from ordinary daily contexts. Compare these with the life experiences of today’s children and give your comments from one or two of these verses. A few has been done for you.

¹ Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*, p.196.

References in Matthew:	Jesus' Life Experience and Learning	Comments on Life Experiences of Today's Children
6:3	He was a carpenter's son.	<i>Jesus grew up in a simple home with little resources in contrast with some of today's children. Yet, He "grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (Luke 2:52). Hence, raising godly kids is not dependent on abundance of material possessions but a godly upbringing.</i>
6: 19-20	He knew of the corroding effects of moths and rust.	
7: 3-5	He knew about carpentry – the problem of getting a speck of sawdust in one's eye.	<i>Unlike children of earlier generation, children today do not make their own toys anymore such as paper dolls or wooden guns. They are deprived of precious life experiences in such do-it-yourself learning environment.</i>
7: 24-27	He had the wisdom of building a house on the rock instead of sand.	
9: 16-17	He understood the problems with sewing new cloth on old wineskins.	<i>In a culture where we throw rather than repair broken things, how would today's children understand what Jesus understood in this area? Perhaps adults need to create an environmentally-friendly culture at home for our children to learn precious lessons from?</i>
13: 52	He knew the use of storerooms in a house.	
5:15	He was aware of the need of oil in oil lamps.	
20:2, 9-10, 13	He was familiar with the value of coins.	
21: 42,44	He knew the value of a capstone.	
22: 15-21	He knew the payment of taxes.	

5:13, 13:33, 15: 26, 16:6,11: 23:25-26	He referred to domestic life including stocked kitchen items such as spices, flour, yeast, salt, bread, and the washing of dishes.	
6:26; 13: 4; 24:28	He was acquainted with outdoor life: birds, vultures.	
7:6,10,15; 13: 47-50; 23: 24,33,37	He knew about farming and farmers, animals, fishing etc.	
9:36, 12: 12,34; 15:24,26; 17: 27;18: 12-13	He knew what are sackcloth ashes, yokes, pearls, millstones, watchtower; tombs.	

2. A further study of Matthew will reveal that Jesus was familiar with horticulture and agriculture. How did Jesus apply this knowledge and use it to teach His disciples?

References in Matthew:	Jesus' Familiarity with Horticulture and Agriculture	Wisdom that Jesus Taught (Parables, object lessons, etc.)
6:28-30	Lilies, grass	<i>We are exhorted not to worry about clothes because the lilies and grass reminds us that God "clothes" them in splendour despite them being worthless in comparison with us.</i>
7: 16-20	Trees with good and bad fruits	
13: 3-9, 18-23	Seeds	
9: 37-38	Harvesting	

3. Jesus' disciples asked: "How did this man [Jesus] get such learning without having studied?" (John 7:15)? What does the phrase "not having studied" suggest about Jesus' schooling? Where do you suppose Jesus was educated?

4. Jesus was certainly wise (Luke 2:52) as well as educated. He knew the OT Scriptures well. The Gospel of Luke records at least 39 times when Jesus quoted from the OT. Discuss what the education of Jesus suggests to us in comparison with the education of children today.

■ **Key Insights or Principles:**

■ **Reflection Questions:**

1. From reading the Matthew passages, what can you discover about Jesus’ methodology of teaching? Why was He so effective? In what ways can you model His abilities to communicate to your context and culture?

2. Children everywhere should have the opportunity to grow the way Jesus did—in “wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man” (Luke 2:52). What is your definition of “wisdom” and how is it different from knowledge?

3. As church leaders and child development workers, how might you, your churches or schools teach wisdom today? List some ideas here.

4. At what age do you think children should start their formal education in public institutions today (if at all?) What is your opinion of parents who send their children, as young as 2 years old, to preschool centres for half-day or full day early childhood programs? What are the benefits or harmful effects on such children?

■ **Case Study: Reflections about Schools/Education**

The major part of the education of children today is left up to the schools. Some have argued that this is one of the most damaging of decisions ever made for the welfare of our children. Some suggest that the highly competitive school environment found in many school systems around the world, with such enormous consequences resting on the results of just one or a very few exams, that school itself can be a form of child abuse. Moreover, very suspect subject matter and a toxic school environment can be contrary to biblical worldviews and devastating to Christian values.

- Do you think this may be at least partly true in your country or society?

- What is the learning focus children are experiencing in schools today? In what ways, positively or negatively, does public school education affect children today? How might parents “take back” some of the responsibilities for teaching and training their children?

- In your culture, which is most emphasized or valued? Why?
 - Formal or informal education?
 - Academics or character-building training?
 - Skills or knowledge?

STUDY 10: Parents' and Children's Responsibilities to One Another

■ Introduction

MILLIONS OF children suffer today in our “childless parents and parentless children”¹ cultures. This is a time in history when family units have been broken and many children are estranged from their parents, even while living together under the same roof

The biblical portrait of a family which consists of father, mother and children are no longer commonplace globally. Single parent families, not to mention the many other combinations and “blending” of families, along with varying parental roles amongst cultures, create a climate for emotionally scarred and socially disadvantaged families.

It is easy to blame parents for most family-related problems. However, consistent with their age and understanding, God does expect children to respond appropriately to the training and discipline from their parents, and to the moral teachings of the Bible. A godly home consists of both the parents *and* the children fulfilling their God-given roles and responsibilities regardless of their circumstances.

Obedience of children to their parents is taught throughout the Bible, but beyond obedience, there are at least **nine** specific responsibilities children are expected to fulfil in relation to their parents.

For Further Exploration:

Roy B. Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*, pp. 43-44; 105-121; 159-168.

■ What Does the Bible Say?

1. Read these verses to determine specific things parents should do for their children. Identify **ONE** word to summarise the specific responsibilities of fathers and mothers. The first one is done for you.

¹ Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*, p.105.

References:	Responsibilities of Father/Mother	One-Word Summary
Ephesians 5:23; Genesis 18:19; I Timothy 5:14	The father is the head of wife and children, responsible for their physical and spiritual welfare; lead and direct their families; mothers are to manage the homes.	<i>Lead</i>
I Samuel 1:11,27; Ezra 8:21	Prays and fasts for their children	
I Samuel 1:11; 27-,28; Luke 2:22	Dedicates the child to serve the Lord.	
John 4:46-49; I Thessalonians 2:7	Compassionate and caring even when the children have gone the wrong way.	
Isaiah 66:13 I Thessalonians 2:11-12	"As a mother comforts her child..." "...as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God..."	
Ephesians 6:4	"Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."	
1 Timothy 5:8	"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."	

2. Read the following Scriptures to discover the responsibilities of children to their parents. The first two are done for you.

Reference	Nine Specific Responsibilities of Children
Ephesians 6:1; Colossians 3:20; I Peter 1:14	<i>Obey their parents*</i>
Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16; Malachi 1:6; I Timothy 3:4	<i>Honour and respect their parents*</i>
Hebrews 12:7-9	
Proverbs 7:1-3	

Deuteronomy 32:7	
I Timothy 5:4-5	

* These 2 responsibilities are further discussed in "Honour and Obedience".

3. Proverbs 13:1b describes an undisciplined child as a "mocker" who "does not listen to rebuke". Give some other examples of undisciplined children in the Bible and discuss how they are mockers.

4. Proverbs also provides us with a list of verbs and commands concerning actions expected of children to their parents' (especially the father's) instructions. In the following sets of verses, list specific verbs or actions expected of children. The first two are done for you.

Proverbs References:	Words Related to Father's Instructions	Verbs or Actions Expected of Children
1:8; 4:1, 4:10 4:20	Your father's instructions What I say My words	<i>Listen to the father</i>
7:24 5:1	What I say My wisdom	<i>Pay attention to the father's advice</i>
5:7	From what I say	
3:1	My teaching	

1:8b	Your mother's teaching	
2:1	My words; my commands	
4:13	Instruction	

5. Read the following passages about the responsibilities of children with regard to their own faith and spiritual life. What do these verses mention about a child's own faith development? The first one is done for you:

Reference	Children's Responsibilities Concerning their Own Spiritual/Faith Development
Psalms 148:12	<i>Join others in praising the Lord</i>
Ecclesiastes 12:1	
Psalms 119:9	
I Timothy 4:12	
2 Timothy 2:22	
Titus 2:6	
Exodus 12:26-27	

■ **Key Insights or Principles:**

■ **Reflection Questions:**

1. What are some responsibilities modern parents (Christians included) are finding hard to practice today? Why?

2. While encouraging and affirming our children is important, do you think some children today are getting *too much* affirmation? Discuss by giving examples.

3. What pro-active measures would you take as a spiritual leader to prepare young parents for effective biblical parenting?

4. Roy Zuck says, "To be effective, training (discipline) is two-sided; it must be given by parents, and it must be received by children."² In your culture, which side (parents or children) tends to fail in their responsibilities in discipline and what are the causes?

5. Do children in your culture work with and for their parents? What kinds of work enable children and parents to work together? Discuss the disadvantages and advantages of this practice.

6. How are children in your culture encouraged to nurture their own spiritual growth and faith at home? What programs/activities/guidance does the church in your community provide for families to help children nurture their spiritual life at home?

² Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*, p.165.

■ Case Study:

Two year old Rumi is in the market place with her parents. She spies a small bouncy ball at the vendor and picks it up to play with. However, her parents cannot afford to and do not wish to spend their money on such a toy so they ask Rumi to put it back in the basket. Rumi is very distraught and doesn't want to give the toy back to the vendor. She throws herself on the ground in a tantrum making the dust fly everywhere, wailing loudly.

What should her parents do at this point? How do you think they should deal with a young child's misbehaviour?

STUDY 11: *How* and *What* are Parents to Teach their Children?

■ Introduction

PROVERBS 22:6 famously instructs and encourages parents with a command and a promise: “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” Note that nothing is said about encouraging our children to try to be physically attractive, financially independent, or to have a high intelligence or worldly knowledge. The goals for our children relate exclusively to producing people of quality and godly character.

Many parents have a sense of inadequacy when it applies to teaching their children. *WHAT* do we teach our children? Most parents employ institutions to help them with this task. The good news is that excellent childhood development programs do not need to be expensive. They are within reach by everyone around the world, young or old, rich or poor. Again, the key is to unlock the treasures in God’s timeless Truth.

HOW then do we communicate with our children when we are hoping they will

listen and do as we ask? How should parents impart a God-centered education to their children? Does this sound familiar? “JUST DO IT! And don’t ask questions!” Or “Do it because I SAID SO!” These phrases and other authoritative approaches used by teachers and parents sometimes do more harm than good in motivating a child. This is a teaching methodology which might not be motivating in a positive manner! In recent years, more and more child educators (both Christian and secular) have recognized the timeless wisdom found in Scripture and incorporated some of these truths into their early childhood development programs and parental training opportunities.

This study discusses *how* parents are to teach their children and what, *specifically*, is to be the *content* of that teaching or training.

For Further Exploration:

Roy B. Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*, pp. 129-147.

■ What Does the Bible Say?

1. Read the following verses and summarize WHAT parents are to do when instructing their children in the faith.

References	What Parents are to Do in Training Children in the Faith
Exodus 12:26-27; 13:8,14	<i>Allow children to participate in spiritual ceremonies and explain the meanings to them to affirm their spiritual heritage and faith.</i>
Deuteronomy 4:9,10	
Joshua 4:4-7	
Psalms 44:1	
Isaiah 38:19	<i>Fathers are to tell their children about the faithfulness of God.</i>

2. Read Deuteronomy 6:4-8; 11:20. Moses told the Israelites to do these things when instructing their children at home. What are they and why?

3. Discover who was doing the teaching of children and the place of learning from the following Scriptures. What do you learn from these?

References	Who was teaching?	Where was the teaching?
Proverbs 1:8		
Proverbs 4:3,4		

4. From the passages below, imagine yourself and the children in similar contexts where Jesus taught and make implications for teaching children today.

New Testament Scriptures	What and How Did Jesus Teach?	Where Did Jesus Teach?
Matthew 4:23	The Good News of the Kingdom; PREACHING	Throughout Galilee in the synagogues
Mark 1:21	Kingdom Truth; TEACHING	A synagogue in Capernaum
Luke 8:1-15	Good News; STORY TELLING (Parable of the Sower)	“From one town and village to another”
John 6:8-14	Gospel and Its Power; MIRACLE (feeding 5,000 with 5 loaves and 2 fish)	The shore of Sea of Galilee in the midst of multitudes.
John 13:12-15	Lesson on servanthood and humility; DEMONSTRATION (washing of disciples’ feet)	Upper Room on Mt Zion in Jerusalem

5. Read the following verses to identify WHO and WHAT is taught to children. What does this suggest about different parental roles in teaching/training responsibilities?

	References	WHO is to Teach	WHAT was Specifically Taught
IN PROVERBS	1: 8,10,15	<i>Father & Mother</i>	<i>Godly moral values, wisdom</i>
	3: 1,11,21	<i>Father</i>	<i>Discipline, sound judgement and discernment</i>
	6:20	<i>Father & Mother</i>	<i>Warnings against adultery</i>
	23: 15-16		
	23:20-21		
	23:22-23		
	31: 1, 26		
IN PAUL’S TEACHINGS	Ephesians 6:4	<i>Fathers</i>	<i>Trainings and instruction of the Lord</i>
	I Thessalonians 2:11-12		
	2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14-15		

■ **Key Insights or Principles:**

■ **Reflection Questions:**

1. Illiteracy and dropping out of school is a problem in most cultures today, including the western society. Why do you think this is happening? In your opinion, to what extent is this problem related to the home environment, family unit, church engagement, and community support?

2. In some cultures, students are pushed to spend long hours in school and experience extra “tuitions”, remedial, and other academic supplements to fill up their days, often at the expense of other holistic activities such as sports, free time, or family time. Is this a concern? If so, how can it be addressed in these situations and cultures?

3. Does your community influence the role of mothers and fathers in the teaching/training of their children? In what ways do mothers and mothers have differing responsibilities in teaching/training their children?

4. Why do some Christian children stray from their faith and live ungodly lives as adults in spite of having received godly training and teaching from their parents?

5. In the well-known passage from Proverbs 22:6, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.," the Hebrew word which is translated *train*, has a meaning of "narrowing" or restricting. Discuss how "training" of a child has the aspects of narrowing and restricting attitudes and behaviours.

■ Case Study: Home-schooling:

“Home Schooling” is an important alternative to public and private formal schooling today. Share and discuss what positive or negative impacts home-schooling might have on children’s learning. Discuss home-schooling from the following holistic child development perspectives:

- a) Spiritual perspective:
- b) Academic , cognitive, mental perspective:
- c) Character-building, social –emotional perspective:
- d) Physical perspective: logistics, child’s activity levels, health, nutrition, etc.

In your opinion, how might John 17:18 concerning “being in the world but not of the world” relate to a child who is home-schooled apart from secular society/culture?

Are you acquainted with any home-schooled children? If yes, what are your impressions? What, in your opinion, are the “upsides” and the “downsides” of home-schooling or of other alternate (non-public) schooling options?

STUDY 12: The Capacity of Children to Understand the Christian Faith

■ Introduction

IT IS not only God's love and care for children that are striking in the Bible. We also see that God has a very high regard for their ability to understand the faith and to participate in His redemptive activities. Throughout the Bible, young people are encouraged to influence their communities by maintaining personal purity, by obeying God's word (Psalm 119:9), by being exemplary in their speech, love, and faith (1 Timothy 4:12), and by pursuing godly virtues (2 Timothy 2:22). Indeed, the conduct and moral standards for children differ very little for children and for adults.

Contrary to what adults think, children can grasp spiritual truths easily, they can "sense the guilt of sin"¹ and understand what Jesus has done for them and what it takes to receive Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. Zuck states: "A child of five, if properly instructed, can as truly believe and be regenerated as any adult."²

For Further Exploration:

Roy B. Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*, pp.17-22.

Wess Stafford, *Too Small to Ignore*, p. 212.

Vinay Samuel, "Some Theological Perspectives on Children at Risk" in *Transformation* (Vol. 14, No. 2: April/June 1997), p. 27.

■ What Does the Bible Say?

1. Read and review the following verses. What events throughout the Bible included the participation of children? What do these events imply on the ability of children to understand the Christian faith?

Reference	Event/Activity	What are the implications?
Deuteronomy 31:12-13	Moses' Instructions to the Israelites before crossing entering the Promised Land (on reading the Law to children)	<i>Children can listen and learn to fear the Lord and obey God's command.</i>

¹ Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*, p.18.

² Zuck, p.18 quoting Frank G. Coleman, *The Romance of Winning children* (Cleveland, Ohio: Union Gospel Press, 1967). pp.9-10.

Joshua 8:34-35	Joshua reading the Law during Covenant Renewal at Mt Ebal	
Nehemiah 12:43	Dedication of the Wall of Jerusalem	
2 Timothy 3:15	Paul's charge to Timothy	

2. Based upon your knowledge of Scripture, in addition to the events described above, discuss and identify at least 3 additional events in which children participated in these spiritual activities along with adults. If possible, cite the biblical passages.

3. Read the following Scriptures. What do they imply about a child's sensitivity and openness (or inherent transcendence) to the spiritual truths of God?

References	Implications
Psalm 22:9-10	
Psalm 71:5-6,17	
Matthew 11:25	

Matthew 21:15-16	
Luke 1:15	
Acts 26:4	

4. Explore the Scriptures which speak of developing a child-like faith. Search and describe how these verses further support a child's faith development.

References about Developing a child-like Faith	Insights/Themes to support a Child's Faith Development
Matthew 19: 13-15	
Mark 10: 14-16	
2 Timothy 3:15	

■ **Key Insights or Principles:**

■ Reflection Questions:

1. READ Exodus 12:26-27 and Joshua 4:6-7. Against the backdrop of child participation in events and spiritual activities in the Old Testament, note that it is not “if” your child asks, but “when” your children ask “what do these.... mean?” To what extent are children expected to participate in the activities of faith in your church or community? How can children today be encouraged to participate and even initiate faith discussions in the home or at church?

2. Author James Montgomery Boice³ states:

“Children’s sermons might distract people from the worship of God. They are meant to involve children in the worship service by offering something appropriate to their age. But the effect may be to focus the attention of the adults on the children rather than upon God... Children’s sermons may also contribute to the “dumbing down” of the Gospel message. The goal for our children should be to bring them up to the level of the adults—that is to enable them to begin to function on an adult level in their relationships to God. But what we have succeeded in doing instead is to bring the adults down to the level of the children.”

Do you have “children’s church” or “children’s sermons at your church? And do you feel that “children’s church” and/or a “children’s sermon” contributes to the participation of the children in worship, or does it tend to “dumb down” the message of the Gospel for children? Discuss.

³ James Montgomery Boice, “I Don’t Do Children’s Sermons” in *Modern Reformation* magazine at <http://articles.christiansunite.com>.

3. On page 21 of *Precious in His Sight*, Zuck gave 3 reasons why children are equipped to respond to spiritual truths:
- a. Their dependency and trust
 - b. Their sensitivity to sin
 - c. Their loving nature

In your experience with children in your community, can you give examples of each of these qualities?

4. Dr. Vinay Samuel has said,

*“Children are born with transcendence. While they are born into risk, children recognize transcendence. Yet if they are not immediately invited into the kingdom...if they do not experience and enjoy the realities of kingdom, they will lose that sense of transcendence.”*⁴

- What is your understanding of transcendence? Do you believe children inherently have some kind of *transcendence* that most adults may not have? Why?

- Can you think of a time when you sensed the transcendence of a child?

- Read and reflect on the Parable of the Sower in Luke 4: 3-20. How does this parable apply to a child’s context in relation to his or her sense of transcendence (child-like faith)?

⁴ Vinay Samuel, “Some theological Perspectives on Children at Risk” in *Transformation* (Vol 14, No. 2. April/June 1997), p.27.

STUDY 13: Baptism and Dedication of Children

■ Introduction

MANY CHRISTIANS baptize only adult believers upon their profession of faith in Jesus Christ. However, for centuries the Roman Catholic Church and many Protestant churches have baptized not only adults who profess faith in Christ, but also the children of believers. Whether it is for the purpose to “mark an individual’s entrance into the church” or to “serve as a sign and seal of the child’s participation in the covenant of grace,” this ancient practice certainly deserves some in-depth discussions.

In *Precious in His Sight*, Zuck presents four major arguments for and twelve reasons against infant baptism. Did the early church practice infant baptism? Did infant baptism take place in the New Testament church? What are the other biblical evidences for or against infant baptism? Although Zuck presents his own biblical perspective, and is in good company with many theologians on this subject, it is recommended that you study this issue thoroughly from several perspectives to determine your belief about the practice of baptism.

For example, R.C. Sproul, a well-known Reformed theologian, makes a case for infant baptism based upon the meaning of the word “sanctify” as used in Scripture and the correlation between the Old Testament Covenant between God and

Abraham and the New Covenant of the Gospel and redemption in Jesus Christ. He proposes that circumcision of the Old Testament was a visible sign of the spoken promise which was fully realized in the redemption in Jesus Christ of the New Testament and was replaced by baptism. This act of faith to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour was accompanied no longer by the actual sign of circumcision, but by the sign of baptism.

In addition, baptisms which occurred in the Book of Acts were not only for adults, but also in some cases were for the entire household (*oikos*-Greek) which many scholars believe included children. If infant baptism is practiced, it is imperative that children who have been baptized learn about the reason for their baptism as they grow in a nurturing home and church. It is the responsibility of both parents and the church to explain the “sign” of the New Covenant so that those children can come to learn and grow to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

Discover the baptismal events that speak of the glorious redemption in the Lord, Jesus Christ, as found in the Scriptures below:

For Further Exploration:

Roy B. Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*, pp. 226-238.

■ What Does the Bible Say?

1. Read the following amazing Scriptures about the Early Church that provide evidence that “households” were saved and baptized. Do you believe that these “whole households” include the presence of infants and children? Discuss.

References:	Evidence of Households were Saved and/or Baptized
Acts 11:14	<i>Peter explained how he was called to Joppa “to bring a message through which you and all your household will be saved.”</i>
Acts 16: 14-15	
Acts 16: 31-34	
Acts 18: 8	
I Corinthians 1:14-16	

2. Read Acts 2:39 and consider the phrase, “you and your children”. As we compare this verse with Acts 16:31 where Paul said to the jailer, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household,” do these verses suggest infant baptism which require the faith of parents substituting the faith of infants? Discuss from Scripture and your experience in your church community.

3. In the same light, read I Corinthians 7:14. In your opinion, what, really, might this passage mean? Can the faith of the parent/s “sanctify” their children? Do a word study on the word, “sanctify” to discover its various meanings and how these might or might not support infant baptism.

4. Once again, let’s continue our study in the Book of Acts. Read about the people who were baptized in the Early Church. Are they adults or infants? Is Scripture definitive about their age in these passages? Identify one common factor in these passages which “qualifies” them to be water-baptized.

References:	People who were Baptized	Common Factor for Water Baptism
Acts 2:39, 41	<i>3,000 people</i>	<i>“Those who accepted his message” implies faith and conviction of the Gospel.</i>
Acts 8:12		
Acts 9:18		
Acts 10: 44-48		
Acts 16: 11-15		
Acts 16: 31-34		
Acts 18: 8		
Acts 19: 4-5		

5. Read the passages in the Synoptic Gospels which tell of water baptism in Jesus' Great Commission (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:16). What is the biblical implication on the validity of infant baptism based upon these passages?

■ **Key Insights or Principles:**

■ **Reflection Questions:**

1. Is infant baptism practiced in your culture and church community? What is the history and theological basis behind this practice and why?

2. What is your personal belief about infant baptism/or dedication in light of Scriptural truths studied here? Make a case for your belief using Scriptures.

3. From a biblical point of view, can infant baptism be equated as an act of regeneration? If yes, why? If not, what is your opinion concerning whether or not churches should continue to practice infant baptism? Why or why not? What Scriptures speak to this issue?

4. Do you know of Christians who have been infant-baptized and then found a vital faith later in life? What might that suggest to you about the validity of infant baptism?

5. Do you know of adult-baptized persons (or baptized after reaching the “age of accountability”), who have abandoned their commitment to Christ? What does that suggest to you about the efficacy of adult baptism? Is baptism at any age a **guarantee** of a lifelong faithful personal relationship, discipleship and salvation in Jesus Christ?

6. What is the overall purpose of baptism? Could it be a sign and seal of the covenant between God and His people? What Scriptures might support your viewpoint?



Part IV:

Parental Modeling and Generational Consequences

NONE OF us live lives only unto ourselves. Galatians 6:7-9 reminds us that we will reap what we sow – whether we sow to please our own desires or whether we sow in righteousness. Our actions affect the people around us, and especially those we love the most. Throughout Scripture we see a principle in operation – the obedience to the Lord is always best, both for the adults and for their families. Whatever the Lord tells us clearly to do, we should obey.

In the accounts in the Bible we sometimes find parents disobeying God because of a misplaced concern for their children or indulgence in them. (See Numbers 14, 1 Samuel 2, 1 Samuel 20 – how foolish we can be to think that we can better help our children by disobeying God!). Other times we read of those like Abraham who obeyed God in spite of what it would seem to do to his son, and the result was blessing for the children cascading down the generations – and indeed “all the nations [and children to come!] of the earth will be blessed because you have obeyed my voice” (Genesis 22:18).

This next lessons look more specifically at the importance of parental modeling of right attitudes and behaviour. Then we will look specifically at the generational consequences, and blessings for the children of parental obedience and faithfulness. Finally we will look at the negative – even disastrous consequences on children and even succeeding generations from parental disobedience and unfaithfulness.

STUDY 14: Promises and Blessings for the Generations

■ Introduction

GOD IS a God of generations! His intent is that we will pass the torch of faith to the next generation. Psalms 78:2-7 reads:

“I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old—what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children; We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done. He decreed statutes...which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds...”

Solomon puts it simply: “The righteous man leads a blameless life; blessed are his children after him.” (Proverbs 20:7). There are examples of good parental modeling, and many examples of bad parental modeling in Scripture. Children often followed those examples, repeating the mistakes of their fathers and mothers. As we shall discover, the consequences of bad parenting can affect whole nations and generations for as long as 200 years!

The words “generation(s)” and related ideas occur frequently throughout Scripture.

Here is a partial list:

- “generation” —46 times (OT) ; 28 times (NT)
- “forefathers” —84 times(OT); 15 times (NT)
- “you and your descendants” —10 times (OT)
- “you and your children” –10 times (OT) ; 1 time (NT)
- “Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” —13 times (OT); 4 times (NT)

This study will explore God’s concern for, and the promises He has made for the “next generation” and the impact of parental modeling to the generational blessings.

“May the footprints that we leave cause them to believe, and the lives we lead inspire them to obey!”¹

For Further Exploration:

Alemu Beeftu, *God Heard the boy Crying* (Compassion International), pp. 25-16.

Herbert Lockyer, Sr., *Nelson’s Illustrated Bible dictionary*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986).

Roy B. Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*, pp. 115-121.

¹ Steve Green, *Find Us Faithful*.

<http://www.stlyrics.com/songs/s/stevegreen21959/findusfaithful567183.html>.

■ What Does the Bible Say?

1. Read the covenantal promises of God involving children in these “you and your children” phrases. For accurate interpretation, be careful to read the passages in context by referring to the verses surrounding the references. The first one is done for you.

References:	“You and Your Children” Phrases	God’s Covenantal Promise Involving Children
Deuteronomy 4:40	“so that it may go well with you and your children after you and that you may live long in the land the Lord your God gives you for all time.”	<i>Long life and inheritance of the Promised Land.</i>
Deuteronomy 12:28	“so that it may always go well with you and your children after you, because you will be doing what is good and right in the eyes of the Lord your God.”	
Deuteronomy 30: 2-10	“and when you and your children return to the Lord your God ..., then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations.....”	
Psalms 115:14	“May the Lord make you increase, both you and your children.”	
Isaiah 49:25	“I will contend with those who contend with you, and your children I will save.”	
Acts 2:38-39	“Repent and be baptized... for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise is for you and your children...”	

2. Read the following passages concerning the promises God made about children and/or future generations. Then, write your “lessons to be learned” from these promises:

References:	God’s Promises About Children and/or the future generations	Lessons from the Promises
Genesis 6:18	“I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark – you and your sons and your wife and your sons’ wives with you.”	<i>Obedience to God leads to blessings and covenantal relationships between God and us, our families and their generations.</i>
Deuteronomy 11:21	“so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land the Lord swore to give your forefathers...”	
Psalms 25:12-13	“He will spend his days in prosperity, and his descendants will inherit the land.”	
Psalms 112: 1-2	“His children will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed.”	
Proverbs 20:7	“blessed are his children after him.”	

3. Read the following Scriptures to discover how the bad behaviour of parents affect the behaviour of their children.

Reference	Mother’s/Father’s Example	Reference	Son’s Response
Genesis 20:1-17	Abraham lied twice, saying that Sarah was her sister when in fact she was his wife.	Genesis 26: 1-11	<i>Isaac told the same lie. He also lied that Rebekah was his sister when she was his wife.</i>
Genesis 25:28	Rebekah loved Jacob more than Esau.	Genesis 37:3-4	
Genesis 30: 3-12	Rachel gave her servant to her husband Jacob to bear children.	Genesis 35:22	
2 Samuel 5:13-16	David took “more” concubines and wives in Jerusalem.	2 Samuel 16:21-22	

4. Read these positive examples in Scripture. What characteristics of good parental modeling do you see in the following examples:

Reference	Characteristic of Good Parental Modeling
Deuteronomy 6:7-9	<i>Impress the Lord's commandments upon the children. Talk about them when at home, when going out, lying down or getting up. Use visual means to impress these Scriptures on the children e.g. write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.</i>
Proverbs 14:26	
Proverbs 20:7	

5. Eli is one example of an apparently very poor parental model. What were the resulting characteristics in his sons, Hophni and Phinehas? List the characteristics of Eli's sons:

Reference	Characteristics of Eli's sons
I Samuel 2:12-17,22	

6. In I Samuel 2:25, 29, identify 2 reasons why Eli as a father failed to impact his sons positively despite rebuking them of their sins?

7. I Kings 12:28-33 reveals King Jeroboam as an example of one man's sins which affected the entire nation for many generations. What are some of the wicked actions that Jeroboam did which resulted in "amazing" and "alarming consequences" amongst every one of the 19 kings of the Northern Kingdom?

8. Exodus 20:5b "I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me." To what extent are parents responsible for the divine judgment upon their future generations?

9. Judges 2:10 states the following: "After that whole generation [of Joshua] had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel."

Why did the generation after Joshua turn away from God in spite of God's pronouncements of generational blessings over them?

■ **Key Insights or Principles:**

■ **Reflection Questions:**

1. Based upon your experience as a child advocate, church leader, or child development worker working directly with children, which of the promises found in this study are the most comforting to you? Why?

2. What are some warnings for both adults and children that are repeatedly mentioned in the above passages as conditions for enjoying God's promises?

3. Read and reflect upon Luke 1:50 which states: "His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation." In what ways can we impact the next generation, with its challenges, opportunities, and issues today?

4. In your group, share specifically how your parents have been POSITIVE role models to you during your childhood and how their positive actions have influenced you as an adult.

5. If you are comfortable with it, reflect on how your parents were NEGATIVE role models to you. How has this impacted you?

6. As parents, child workers and leaders, what is one thing that is most difficult for you to model to your children? What might be the easiest to model to your children? Give examples from your experience and life.

STUDY 15: Honour and Obedience

■ Introduction

HONOUR, RESPECT, and obedience of children towards parents are commanded in the Bible. Indeed, honouring our parents is one of the Ten Commandments: “Honour your father and your mother” (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16). The fifth commandment is the only one of the ten addressed specifically to children and it comes with a promise—God promised that they “may live long in the land.” Likewise, Paul echoed this command and also the reason for the command—“that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth” (Ephesians 6:2-3).

Honour and obedience go hand in hand. A child who obeys his parents also honours them and vice-versa. The consequences of dishonouring and disobedience are serious and grave in the Bible. On the other hand, the rewards of honouring and obeying one’s parents are bountiful. Here we will look at some of these consequences and rewards of honouring and obeying parents, and also compare and contrast these actions/attitudes with some others which are similar, but perhaps importantly different.

For Further Exploration:

Roy B. Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*, pp. 161-165.

■ What Does the Bible Say?

1. Read the following Scriptures and identify how different children of the Bible “honoured” their parents. Keeping in mind the context of these verses, discuss how these actions/practices are similar or different in your community or family traditions.

References	Children	Actions that Honour Parents
Genesis 50:1-5	Joseph	“Joseph threw himself upon his father and wept over him and kissed him... directed the physicians in his service to embalm his father ... now let me go up and bury my father...”
Joshua 2: 12-13	Rahab	“... please swear to me by the Lord that you will show kindness to my family... that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and that you will save us from death.”

I Samuel 22:3-4	David	"Would you let my father and mother come and stay with you until I learn what God will do for me?"
John 19:26-27	Jesus	"He said to his mother, 'Dear woman, here is your son,' and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' From that time on, this disciple took her into his home."

2. Read the biblical passages below. You will discover the consequences of dishonouring actions. List and make note of these unfortunate consequences.

References	Actions that Dishonour Parents	Consequences
Exodus 21:17	"Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death."	<i>Death</i>
Proverbs 19:26	"He who robs his father and drives out his mother is a son who brings shame and disgrace."	
Proverbs 30: 17	"The eye that mocks a father, that scorns obedience to a mother, will be pecked out by ravens of the valley, will be eaten by the vultures."	

3. Read the following words from Jesus affirming the Old Testament teachings on honouring one's parents. What were the contexts and objective of Jesus' teachings on this matter?

References	Context/Objective	Jesus' Words
Matthew 15:4-5		"For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.'
Mark 10: 19; Luke 18:20		"You know the commandments: 'Do not murder ... honor your father and mother.'"

4. Read the following passages to learn how Proverbs gives many examples of blessings to children who are obedient to their parents' teaching. Observe and list the specific blessings that children will experience as a result of their obedience to their parents.

References from Proverbs	Blessings Experienced by Obedient Children
Proverbs 2:1-5	<i>Understand the fear of the Lord.</i>
Proverbs 3:1-2	
Proverbs 4:20-22	
Proverbs 6:23-24	
Proverbs 16: 20	
Proverbs 19:20	

5. Children in the Bible demonstrated obedience to their parents. Read the following Scriptures to learn about their stories of obedience:

References	Children	Acts of Obedience
Genesis 22:7-8	Isaac	<i>Despite knowing there was no lamb for the burnt offering, Isaac obeyed his father Abraham and "went on together" with him to Mount Moriah to do what God had instructed him to do.</i>
Genesis 28:6-7	Jacob	
I Samuel 9:3-5	Saul	
I Samuel 17:17-20	David	
Luke 2:51	Jesus	

6. In the Old Testament, the Mosaic Law instructed parents on how to handle children who were persistently rebellious. **READ Deuteronomy 21:18-21** to discover the consequences for disobedient children. What are the spiritual implications for obedience/ disobedience towards parents?

7. In the New Testament, Paul’s teachings included the subject of children’s disobedience to their parents. Read **Romans 1: 28-31** and **2 Timothy 3:1-5** to discuss the root cause and consequence of disobedience.

■ **Key Insights or Principles:**

■ **Reflection Questions:**

1. How do children honour and respect their parents or elderly in your community? Name some specific actions or activities. How can honour and respect toward parents and the elderly be restored and encouraged, particularly in the church and in your community today?

2. What is the “best” age for teaching a child to honour, respect and obey his parents? Give some practical illustrations in the home environment.

3. What are some differences in meaning between the words: Obey, Esteem, Honour, Revere, Respect, Cherish? (Check a dictionary to uncover some of the variations of these meanings.) Which of these are appropriate attitudes/actions toward parents and ancestors? Which are not? Why?

4. How does the biblical “honour and respect” for parents relate to the respecting or veneration of ancestors (ancestor worship) in some customs and traditions, e.g. Asia? In what ways are these practices a counterfeit and distortion of biblical truths?

5. Why is managing the family well and having obedient children a criteria to qualify as an elder in the church? (2 Timothy 3:4)? Discuss how having obedient/disobedient children may benefit/hinder an elder’s ministry.

STUDY 16: The Impact of Parental Obedience (and *Disobedience*) on Children

■ Introduction

WE HAVE seen in the previous study that children in the Bible tended to follow in their father's footsteps, whether the father was walking in faithfulness or in sin. Modeling really does matter. But there is more. In this and the next study, we will see how parental obedience or disobedience resulted in either blessings or curses for the children, and sometimes throughout many generations to follow. God *longs* to bless not only those who obey him, but also their children and their children's children. God delights in obedience, and showers blessings of long life, protection, salvation, honour, and prosperity on the obedient and their descendants.

Unfortunately, the opposite is also true – sin, disobedience or faithlessness by parents can ruin not only one's own life, but the lives of children and their children – even to the third and fourth generation (Exodus 20:5). We have seen elsewhere

how sons tended to follow their fathers' example whether good or bad. Abraham lied twice about his wife and got into trouble. His son Isaac followed his example (Genesis 12, 20, 26). Isaac showed partiality, his son Jacob followed that example, and Joseph suffered the consequences (Genesis 25:28, 37, 3-4). Pharaoh's son died because of his father's stubbornness and unbelief (Exodus 12:29).

This does not mean that our children are absolved of responsibility for their own actions, nor does it mean that they will always be punished for their parents' failures – but there does seem to be a general principle that parents need to take seriously. Someone has said, "Every father should remember that one day his son will follow his example instead of his advice." Modeling is extremely important for both the mother/father and primary caregiver.

Let's start with the positive.

■ What Does the Bible Say?

1. Read the following verses. What specific act of obedience was asked of the father or patriarch? What was the promised blessing to the children or descendants?

References	Father/Patriarch's Act of Obedience	Promised Blessing to the Children/Descendants
Genesis 22:15-18	<i>Willing to sacrifice his only son to God as an act of obedience</i>	<i>God promised to make Abraham's descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Abraham's descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies and through his offspring, all nations on earth will be blessed.</i>
Exodus 12:11-13		
Psalms 132:11-12		
1 Kings 9:1-5		

2. Throughout the Old Testament, promises are made to those who are obedient, *and to their descendants*. It is not only the children who will enjoy the blessings of parental obedience, but the succeeding generations as well! For each of the passages below, indicate the obedience required, and the promise made to the children and/or descendants.

References	Obedience or Faithfulness Expected	Promise to Children and/or Descendants
Deuteronomy 4:40	<i>Keep God's decrees and commands</i>	<i>"that it may go well with you and your children after you and that you may live long in the land the Lord your God gives you..."</i>
Deuteronomy 30:19-20		
Psalms 37:25-26		
Psalms 78:5-8		
Psalms 103:17-18		
Psalms 112:1-2		

Psalms 128		
Proverbs 14:26		

3. Read the following Scriptures and formulate a principle relating to parental obedience which results in blessings for the children/descendants. The first one is done for you.

References	Principle
Proverbs 20:7	<i>It is a wonderful heritage to have an honest father.</i>
Jeremiah 11:4-5	
Joel 2:28 (and Acts 2:38, 39)	
Acts 16:31	
Isaiah 59:21	

4. In the Old Testament passages, the outcomes for the next generations are sometimes negative as indicated in the following passages. For each passage, note the failure of obedience in the father, and the resulting consequence for the children.

References	Failure or Disobedience	Results for Children and Descendants
1 Kings 11:1-12	<i>King Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines who later turned his heart after other gods and did evil in God's sight.</i>	<i>God became angry with Solomon and promised to tear his kingdom away from him and his son.</i>
1 Kings 14:6-16		
II Kings 5:19-27		
I Chronicles 5:1		
II Chronicles 21:12-20		
Nahum 1:14		

■ **Key Insights or Principles:**

■ **Reflection Questions:**

1. Who is/was a particularly memorable role model for you as a child? What qualities did that person exhibit? How has that person's character qualities impacted the way in which you parent/or train children in your context?

2. Apparently David *never* disciplined his son Adonijah at all or even scolded him (1 Kings 1:6). This wild son then thought he could have the kingship just because he wanted it. Adonijah was Absalom's younger brother – if they were raised the same way, it is not surprising that Absalom acted as spoiled as he did. Give examples in your family or society of undisciplined children assuming and grabbing inheritance that should rightly have been earned.

3. Do you think that Solomon’s lack of self-discipline with women was in part due to the lack of fatherly discipline? Discuss how that might be the case.

4. David was described as a man after God’s own heart. Even though he was not a good father, and didn’t finish well, his love of God and general obedient spirit was rewarded with a promise of eternal dynasty. Many of David’s descendants were also disobedient, but their punishment was less than they deserved, “for the sake of your father David.” Read 1 Kings 11: 11-13.

What implications can we draw from here on the heart of God?

5. See Ezekiel 16:20, 21. The parents were sacrificing to idols the very children God had given them to raise. Are we sacrificing our children whom God has entrusted to us to our modern idols of materialism, ease, TV, self-gratification, money-making? Discuss.

6. How can other “role models” from the church or community provide support to children without positive home environments? Brainstorm ideas of how you can facilitate this as a leader.

STUDY 17: Discipline and the Spiritual Destiny of Children

■ Introduction

THE BIBLE gives us a reliable guide to the nurture and training of children in a positive manner. Our goal, as parents/leaders of children should be to see the fruits of a godly character in our children. Throughout the Bible, parents are encouraged to “train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it.” (Proverbs 22:6). The Hebrew root for the word we translate as “train” (*khaw-nak*) means “to narrow.” Of the wide range of possible attitudes and behaviours, training *narrows* them into the ones which are culturally and biblically acceptable. That is the task of training. How can parents, through Biblical nurture, training and discipline, help children to become all God had created them to be?

Parents have a responsibility to lovingly nurture and train (narrow the range of attitudes and behaviours) in their children. Often this training involves some sort of discipline or consequences

for wrong behaviour. An undisciplined child possibly becomes an undisciplined adult. A nurtured and positively disciplined and behaved child hopefully becomes a responsible, positive adult. Hebrews tells us that we should welcome “discipline” (12:7) and not become discouraged or make light of the discipline in our lives (12:5) as it is at God’s loving heart (12:6) to enable us to be disciplined and “blessed” so that we can not only bring Him glory, but provide a light for others. Hebrews 12:11 states: “No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”

Let’s examine some of the biblical guidelines and truths about nurture and discipline of children.

For Further Exploration:

Roy B. Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*, pp. 121-126.

■ What Does the Bible Say?

1. Read the following passages in Proverbs which describe the natural inclination for children towards sin and fleshly gratifications:

References in Proverbs	Children's Inclinations Toward Sin
1:8, 10	
22:15	

2. Read these verses in Proverbs to determine the consequences of an undisciplined child. and contrast these with that of a lovingly disciplined child. Compare and contrast the consequences you discover.

References in Proverbs	Consequences of an Undisciplined Child	Consequences of a Disciplined Child
Proverbs 5:23 ; 6:23	<i>"He will die for lack of discipline and led astray by his own great folly."</i>	<i>He will acquire life and be kept from immorality and lust.</i>
Proverbs 10: 17		
Proverbs 13: 18		
Proverbs 15: 32		
Proverbs 29:15		

3. Read the following verses to find the loving parental nurture and discipline. Assess what can be learned about biblical discipline from these verses and make your comments below:

References in Proverbs	Lessons about Discipline
Proverbs 3:12	<i>As a father loves his son, God disciplines those He loves.</i>
Proverbs 13:24	

Proverbs 23:13	
Proverbs 23:14	
Proverbs 29:17	

4. How would you characterize the loving discipline and nurture described in the following passages:

References	Characteristics of Discipline
Deuteronomy 8:5	<i>Loving discipline is part of parental nurture. Likewise, as His beloved children, God the Father disciplines us to nurture us to be all that He desires us to be in His divine will and purpose.</i>
Hebrews 12: 6-9	
Hebrews 12:10-11	

5. Read the following Scriptures concerning the “rod” found in Proverbs. What do these verses say about physical discipline?

References in Proverbs about the “rod”	Comments about Physical Discipline
Proverbs 13:24	
Proverbs 14:3	
Proverbs 23: 13-14	
Proverbs 26:3	

■ **Key Insights or Principles:**

■ **Reflection Questions:**

1. What is your view of the discipline spoken of in the verses in Hebrews as discussed above? How do these verses compare to the wisdom on discipline found in many Proverbs passages?

2. Roy Zuck asks the following thought-provoking questions:

- “Is your child unruly or rowdy?
- Does he intentionally disobey what you tell him to do or not to do?
- Does he delay following through on what he know needs to be done?
- Does he get into mischief or even into serious trouble?
- How should you discipline children so that they obey more willingly and readily? How can you channel them into meaningful, rather than disruptive or mischievous conduct?”²⁷

²⁷ Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*. p.121.

How would you respond to some of these questions based on the Scriptures you have studied on discipline?

3. In your mind, what are the differences in meaning between the following words? (You may want to check a dictionary for the variations of meaning): "Training," "Correction," "Reprimand," "Discipline," "Punishment."

4. Some people today think that the "rod" in Scripture is primarily metaphorical – arguing that a rod or stick should never be used to train (discipline) a child. What do you think?

5. The verses mentioned in Proverbs on the “rod” (see question #5 above) are controversial in some cultures. What is your opinion concerning the spanking of children? How do you (or others in your culture) feel about it?

6. Some people today argue that children subjected to physical punishment are more likely than others to be aggressive to siblings; to bully other children at school; to be violent to their spouses and children and to commit violent crimes. What are your experiences or observations?

7. How are children disciplined in your culture/country today? Which of these approaches are effective and which are not? Why?

8. What are some positive and effective ways you can train and discipline your children? What are some additional verses about positive discipline in the Bible? How do these relate to the Scriptures you have studied?

■ Case Study: Abuses and Misuse of Physical Punishment

The matter of physical punishment today is an important and very sensitive topic – so much so that it deserves some further comment. While Scripture suggests that physical discipline is sometimes necessary and appropriate, clearly it is often misused and misunderstood. Obviously some parents do not know how or when to lovingly discipline their children. Elanor Jackson and Marie Wernham, co-authors of the ChildHope child protection materials²⁸, discuss in great detail **the various kinds of physical punishments used on children, many horrific and all clearly wrong, harmful and unbiblical!** (See their Appendix 5, Alternative forms of Discipline, pp 127 and following). These include such things as:

- Beating, hitting, slapping or lashing, with or without the use of an instrument such as a cane, stick, shoes, whip or belt;
- Other direct assaults on a child’s body, such as pinching, pulling ears or hair, twisting joints, cutting and shaving hair, cutting or piercing skin, carrying or dragging a child against his or her will;
- Forcing a child to perform physically painful or damaging acts, such as holding a weight or weights for an extended period, kneeling on stones, standing or sitting in a contorted position;
- Forcing the child to stay in uncomfortable or undignified positions, or to take excessive physical exercise;
- Use of external substances, such as burning or freezing materials, water, smoke (including from smouldering peppers), excrement or urine, to inflict pain, fear, harm, disgust or loss of dignity;

²⁸ Elanor Jackson and Marie Wernham and ChildHope. (Consortium for Street Children, London.) 2005, www.childhopeuk.org

Jackson and Wernham also have helpful guidance on positive discipline. These include:

- Positive discipline requires confidence from parents: confidence that you really are the most important people in your children’s lives.
- People learn much more through cooperation and rewards than through coercion and punishment. The rewards don’t have to be things like presents or sweets; what children really want is parental attention. They want you to notice them, talk to them, share your life with them, acknowledge and affirm the positives in them.
- Children need your attention and will do anything to get it. The more you give when they are being a pleasure, the less they will try to force from you by being a pain. Do you always answer when they speak or only when they whine? Positive discipline means trying not to be negative:
 - ‘Do’ works better than ‘don’t’;
 - Try to say ‘yes’ and ‘well done’ at least as often as ‘no’ and ‘stop that’.
 - Be as ready to praise behaviour you like as to scold for behaviour you don’t.
 - Explain your real reasons - ‘because I say so’ teaches nothing for next time.
 - Even when you dislike your child’s behaviour, never suggest that you dislike your child.

■ **Action Plan:**

1. Discuss the aspects of a “discipline policy” in your context of working with children. Does your organization/ church have a written document concerning guidelines for positive nurture and discipline for those who work directly with children? How do you manage difficult children and or teenagers in your context, if applicable?

2. Analyze the concept of “child protection” in your context. How do you think nurture and discipline supports the child protection policies of your organization or church? What are the challenges?



PART V:

Child Protection

IN THIS section we have to deal with something quite unpleasant – the exploitation and abuse of children.

Children have always been at risk. The book of Job, perhaps the earliest book of the Bible includes heart-breaking passages about the neglect and exploitation of children (see Job 24). But while children have always suffered, there is one thing abundantly clear in Scripture—that God has a special place in His heart for those children—the orphaned, the abused the neglected, the hungry. The Oxford Statement on Children at Risk puts it well:²⁹

Scripture clearly shows that God is outraged about what is happening to children. Our own anger is but a pale reflection of God's own fury and indignation. Our compassion for hurting children and the righteous anger that arises within us reflects nothing less than the jealous love and righteous anger of our Heavenly Father...Over and over again, God's warning throughout the Bible is "Don't touch my precious children!" (Exodus 22-24; Psalm 68:5; Ezekiel 16:1-14. Deuteronomy 24:17 etc.)

Jesus warned of terrible consequences for anyone harming his children: "...it would be better that a millstone be hung around his neck and [he] be drowned in the depths of the sea" (Matthew 18:6).

²⁹ The Oxford Statement on *Children at Risk*, drafted in Oxford in January 1997 provides both a practical and biblical rationale for Christian care for children. The entire Statement may be viewed at: www.viva.org.

The Oxford Statement continues:

Nowhere do we learn more of the loving and jealous character of God than in His protection and defence of His children (Deuteronomy 24:17, 27:19). Indeed, God entrusting His own son to humankind as a vulnerable child, requiring that Son to be nurtured by a frail but able family and community, symbolically provides a model of trust and responsibility which sets an example for His interaction with all humanity, and which shouts to us about the significance of children.

The justification for special protective guardianship of children at risk is clearly demonstrated and mandated throughout Scripture. Our studies in this section will help us understand that God's heart is broken when children suffer, and that our hearts must similarly be broken. Consider the challenges which are facing children at risk in your own cultures. What can you as leaders and child care workers do to advocate for children? Advocacy is one way EVERYONE can get involved, whether working specifically with children or within the different structures of society, to be a voice for the vulnerable.

STUDY 18: Child Protection in the Bible

■ Introduction

WE HAVE seen that God is the defender of the poor and needy and children are His primary concern. In these last days, millions of children globally are in trouble. Advocacy for children at risk in this 21st century is no longer confined to the poor refugees in the Sub-Saharan deserts, but also in the concrete jungles of developed nations. "All children are at risk!" is a battle cry from global child advocates. Therefore, all children need protection wherever they are.

What child protection "policies" has God put in place for His precious ones? For one, He has placed the burden on the adults to "speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves." (Proverbs 31:8). With the same intensity, He has warned that His wrath is upon those who are guilty of abusing these little ones. Over and over again, the Bible repeats His warnings: "Don't touch my precious children!"

For Further Exploration:

Roy B. Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*, pp. 168-175.

See the Oxford Statement on Children at Risk at www.viva.org.

■ What Does the Bible Say?

1. Discover how **God** care and protect the weak in the following verses. Identify who the **primary recipients** are:

References:	Primary Recipients of God's Care and Concern	How God Protect the Weak & Helpless
Primary Scriptures:		
Psalms 146:9	<i>The alien, fatherless and widow</i>	<i>God watches over the weak and those who needs protection e.g. alien, fatherless and widow.</i>
Jeremiah 22:3		

Lamentations 2:11,19		
Matthew 18:10		
Psalms 82:3-4		
Hosea 14:3		

2. Read the following to identify actions we are to take or avoid to protect the interests of children:

Our Task/Responsibilities: References:	Child Protection in the Bible
Isaiah 1: 17, 23	
Zechariah 7:10	
Matthew 19:14	
Luke 17:2	
James 1:27	

3. What kind of child protection is provided for children in the Mosaic Law of the Old Testament? Write your observations in column below:

References:	Child Protection Under the Mosaic Law
Numbers 27: 7-11	
Deuteronomy 14:29	
Deuteronomy 16: 11,14	

Deuteronomy 24:17, 19-21	
Deuteronomy 26:12	

4. Proverbs 17:7b provides advocacy-related contents which states that “A brother is born for adversity.” Identify below the brothers in these passages and briefly comment on the advocacy actions they took in defending their siblings in adversities:

Reference:	Brother	Comments on their Advocacy Actions
Genesis 34:17		
Genesis 43:34		
2 Samuel 13:21		

5. Read and study Isaiah 58. Answer the following questions below from your observations of this remarkable chapter:

- Vs. 6-7: What is the “true fasting” that God requires?

- Vs.8-12: List the blessings that God promises to those who defend and help the “hungry,” the “poor wanderer,” and the “naked” as mentioned in these verses.

- Read Vs. 12 and Psalm 10:14. What did God call those who cared for and protected those in need? How does this apply to you in your context?

■ **Key Insights or Principles:**

■ **Reflection Questions:**

1. Discuss the type of help given or preventative actions taken to protect the children in your culture. (Example: local child protection laws or policies, NGO's etc.)

2. Are any of the preventive child protection actions taken in your culture related to traditional values similar to those provided in the Mosaic Laws of the OT? Discuss.

What are some specific kinds of child protection children in your culture need the most? Discuss.

3. In your opinion, what kinds of risks are **urban children** experiencing in this decade? What kinds of child protection measures need to be implemented in urban environments? How can you, in your context, advocate for these measures?

4. In addition, discuss the risks **rural children** are facing and the measures needed for their protection. If this is your context, how can you advocate for these measures?

5. Based upon the Scriptures in Isaiah 58 and Psalm 10 you have just read, construct a “job description” for a person who would be a “Repairer of Broken Walls”, (Isaiah 58:12). List the job responsibilities and the benefits that will come to those who are so called. (Then see below for version provided by the author, Dr Dan Brewster)

■ **Case Study:**

POSITION DESCRIPTION from Isaiah 58

JOB TITLE:	REPAIRER OF BROKEN WALLS
BASIC FUNCTION:	Not to turn away from your own flesh and blood. (v. 7)
REPORTING RELATIONSHIP:	The Lord will guide you always; The glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. (vv.8,9,11) (Your emails will be answered!)
RESPONSIBILITIES AND DUTIES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To loose the chains of injustice. • Untie the cords of the yoke. • To set the oppressed free and to break every yoke. • To share your food with the hungry • To provide the poor wanderer with shelter. • When you see the naked, to clothe him. • Spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry. • Satisfy the needs of the oppressed. (vv. 6, 7, 10)
BENEFITS PACKAGE: (Health, pension, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your light will break through like the dawn • Your healing will quickly appear. • Your righteousness will go before you. • The glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. • Your light will rise in the darkness. • Your night will become like the noonday. • He will satisfy your need in a thirsty land. • He will strengthen your frame. • You will be like a well-watered garden, • Like a spring whose waters never fail... (vv. 8, 10, 11, 12)

STUDY 19: Children as Victims of Infanticide and Sacrifice

■ Introduction

“THE SO called right to abort an unborn baby has led to the view that parents have a right to terminate a live baby.”¹ In some countries, like China, where there is a one-child policy and boys are preferred over girls, many parents and doctors are forced to commit abortions and infanticide. Some may have heard of the case of “Baby Doe” who was born with Down’s syndrome in 1982 in Indiana, United States. This innocent one was left to die by the parents because they “were simply exercising their freedom of choice?”²

Unfortunately, even infanticide and child sacrifice are not unknown in the Bible. Roy Zuck points out to us that there are 3 forms of infanticide in Bible times, viz., killings of infants and children in warfare, child sacrifice in pagan worship, and child cannibalism during siege and famine.³

Let’s examine the Scriptures closely regarding this most disturbing subject.

For Further Exploration:

Roy B. Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*, pp.81-89.

Oxford Statement on Children at Risk at www.viva.org.

■ What Does the Bible Say?

1. In Scriptures, we learn that there were times in biblical history when children were killed. Identify the contexts and the names of the persons/tribes who committed this act. One is done for you.

References:	Context	Description of Infanticide
2 Kings 8:12	<i>Hazael murdered King Ben-Hadad of Aram and succeeded him as king.</i>	<i>King Hazael dashed the little children to the ground.</i>

¹ Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*, p.81.

² Ibid., p.82.

³ Ibid.

Exodus 1:15-22; Acts 7:19		
2 Kings 3:26-27		
Psalms 137: 9		
Isaiah 13:16,18		
Hosea 10:14		
Nahum 3:10		
Matthew 2:16		

2. There are a disturbing number of passages in the OT which indicate that the Israelites committed infanticide. Read the verses in context in order to discover the circumstances, persons/kings/tribes who committed this act:

References:	Context	Description/Motive of Infanticide by the Israelites
2 Kings 16:2-4	<i>King Ahaz "walked in the ways of the kings of Israel 'following' the detestable ways of the nations the Lord had driven out."</i>	<i>He "even sacrificed his son in the fire" as sacrifices to the idolatrous gods.</i>
2 Chronicles 33:6		
2 Kings 25:1-21		
Jeremiah 7:31		
Lamentations 2:20; 4:10		
Ezekiel 16: 20-21		

Ezekiel 20: 26,31		
Micah 6:7		

3. Read Joshua 6:21 and compare with Genesis 15:16 and Deuteronomy 9:4-5. Why do you think God command the slaughtering of children in the following passages? Discuss how these might be interpreted in today's modern contexts/situations.

4. Read the following Prophets to determine the denouncement of infanticide. What were the words used? (Examine the context of the verses to understand thoroughly.)

References:	Prophet	Words Used to Denounce Infanticide
Jeremiah 7:30-34; 32:35	<i>Jeremiah</i>	<i>"done evil", "detestable", "defiled", "beware"</i>
Ezekiel 16: 20-23		
Ezekiel 23:39		
Micah 6:7-8		

5. God's commands to the Israelites regarding infanticide are in the following Scriptures. Determine the commands given about this subject.

- Leviticus 20:1-5

- Deuteronomy 18:10

6. Explore the root causes of infanticide as mentioned in these passages. What are these causes?

- Leviticus 26:27-29

- Deuteronomy 28: 53-57

- Ezekiel 5:8-10

■ **Key Insights or Principles:**

■ **Reflection Questions:**

This study gives us some very unpleasant topics to think/talk about. Let's learn from each other as we discuss the following questions:

1. Do people in your culture still commit infanticide or murder of children today? If so, in what ways are these acts practiced? Explain the contexts and reasons for these acts and relate them to the biblical examples we have studied.

2. In Judges 11:30-31. What is your opinion concerning Jephthah's killing his daughter as a sacrifice? Do you agree that his action constitutes murder of his daughter? Why or why not?

3. Why did God not spare the lives of the “innocent” children when He passed judgment upon the adults? Note these examples: The flood (Genesis 6:5), destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:20); and the Canaanites (Exodus 23:33).

4. Have you ever reflected upon Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22? Give your reasons why this is not a pagan act of child sacrifice. Cf. Genesis 17:4-7.

5. Would you say that mothers (especially unwed teenage mothers), who abandon their babies in public places are committing infanticide? How can you or your community help to prevent such forms of infanticide from occurring? What might be your action plan to help combat this practice?

STUDY 20: Children as Victims of Abuse and Exploitation

■ Introduction

IT IS difficult to know, much less discuss, the horrific abuses innocent children around the world are facing daily. Many of these are culturally rooted. For example, some children born out of wedlock or from incestuous relationships often feel despised throughout their lives. Others in impoverished nations are blatantly exploited through abusive child labour or sold into prostitution. Unless intentionally addressed, these abuses continue to be passed down from generation to generation.

Dr. Wess Stafford, the president of Compassion International was a victim of abuse as a child during boarding school. He spoke of years of struggle in overcoming his childhood scars right through his adulthood.¹ He determined not to let the resulting anger and bitterness of those experiences define his life. He was able to put it all behind him and move on with a commitment to caring for children in similar circumstances all over the world. Imagine how many more lives are being ruined each day in the hands of wicked perpetrators if child abuse and exploitation are not confronted or prevented.

The voice of the Lord continues to speak on behalf of child victims as in the days of old—“...spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed” (Isaiah 58:10). Stand up and be counted as a “Repairer of Broken Walls” and “Restorer of Streets with Dwellings” (vs. 12).

For Further Exploration:

Roy B. Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*, pp23-44, 168-175.

Protecting Children: Prevention and Immediate Response—Compassion International’s Guide to Protecting Children from Abuse (Colorado Springs, USA: Compassion International).

¹ *Protecting Children: Prevention and Immediate Response—Compassion International’s Guide to Protecting Children from Abuse* (Compassion International: Colorado Springs, USA). Most portions of this study are taken from this important Guide.

■ What Does the Bible Say?

1. Read the following Scriptures. What kinds of abuses or oppression were orphans in the bible subjected to? These verses give you some examples.

Reference:	Abuses and Oppressions Faced by Orphans
Job 6:27	
Job 24:3,9	
Psalms 10:18	
Isaiah 10:2	
Joel 3:3	

2. One of the problems faced by children in the Bible was the fact that they were taken away forcibly from their homes. Identify the circumstances in the OT which caused them to be in such circumstances. One is done for you.

References:	Child	Circumstance
Genesis 37: 12-36	Joseph	<i>Sold as a slave by his brothers to Egypt; lived in Egypt for 93 years.</i>
Exodus 2:8-10	Moses	
2 Kings 4:1-7	Widow whose sons were going to be sold into slavery	
2 Kings 5:1-3	Naaman's slave girl	
Daniel 1:3-7	Daniel and his 3 companions	

3. The following Scriptures describe children who were despised in the Bible because they were products of the sinful incestuous or illicit acts of adults. Can you identify them? As always, also examine the verses surrounding these specific verses to understand the context.

References:	Child	Incestuous/Illicit Relationships
Genesis 19:30-38	<i>Moab and Ben-Ammi</i>	Lot and two daughters
Genesis 38: 1-30		Tamar and her father-in-law, Judah
2 Samuel 12:15-23		David and Bathsheba
Hosea 1:2-9		Gomer and Hosea

4. Read all we know about Abishag in 1 Kings 1:2,3, 15; 2:17-22. It is very likely that she was a very young girl when she was brought in to sleep next to David to keep him warm. (!?) Have you ever thought of what young Abishag might have been thinking or how she was mistreated and “passed” around? We never hear a word from her – she was just a piece of property. How might you compare what happened to Abishag in your experiences today?

5. What does the Bible say concerning incestuous or illicit sexual relationships? Read the following additional Scriptures on this subject. Is the Bible silent regarding the offspring of such relationships? Defend your answers from Scripture.

- Leviticus 18:17; 20: 14

- Ezekiel 22:11

6. What are some of the consequences for those who abuse and exploit children or refuse to protect their rights? Read the following passages:

References:	Consequences for Child Abusers
Exodus 22:22-24	<i>God will hear the cry of the orphans and "be angry" and "will kill you with the sword."</i>
Proverbs 23:11	
Zechariah 7:11	
Malachi 3:5	

■ **Key Insights or Principles:**

■ **Reflection Questions:**

1. Discuss the effects of TV, violent movies, internet pornography and other aspects of media on violence, abuse, and exploitation of children and youth in your country. What can the church and families today do to counteract this influence?

2. What are the most common forms of child abuse or exploitation in your community or country? Who are the abusers? Who are the groups who help rescue and restore the children?

3. What are some of the cultural practices of your country that may contribute to child abuse? Who are the perpetrators of this kind of abuse? How can this type of child abuse be prevented?

4. Recall Isaiah 58:7 which mentions “the hungry”, the “poor wanderer” and the “naked”. In what ways might the children who are victims of child abuse and exploitation in the world today similar to those described by Isaiah long ago? Why?

5. Think of how traumatizing it must have been for young Herodias to have to dance before the king, and then be used by her mother to ask for the head of John the Baptist. Further, she was told to carry it on a tray to the king! (Mt. 14:3,6; Mk 6:17,19). What might be the comparable traumatic experiences for young children today?

6. Another very different type of “abuse” and exploitation can be what has been called the instrumentalization of children. You have probably seen children imitating the roles of adult preachers, fiery evangelists, prophets, missionaries and the like. What do you think of this practice? What are the positives and negatives/dangers? Discuss how and why this can be another form of exploitation of children.

■ Case Study:

Consider the story of Dinah in Genesis 34. Note especially verses 1 – 12 and verse 30 and 31. (Background of story is that Dinah was the only daughter of the household of Jacob, the youngest child of Leah. We do know that she went “out” to the city which placed her in a vulnerable position for the events that followed in the passage.) Read the passage to suggest responses to the following questions:

- Based on her birth order and what you know about her father Jacob’s time in Padan Aram with his uncle Laban, how old might Dinah have been when she went to visit “the daughters of the land”? (Use a Hebrew dictionary to discover the meaning of the words that are translated “women,” “girl,” etc.) If you agree that she may have been a girl of only 10-12 years of age (or less), how does that affect your interpretation of and feelings about the story?
- How might the fact that Dinah was a daughter born *to Leah* have affected Jacob’s care and protection of his only daughter?
- Do Dinah’s actions invite the consequences that occurred to her as a result of “going out?”
- Note as many instances as you can of how adults failed to protect this vulnerable girl.
- Note the absence of anything said by or to the girl. (She did not have a voice in her own tragedy. She is basically a piece of property.)
- Based upon Jacob’s response and “silence”, what do you think incensed Jacob the most? His sons’ response? His relationship of trading with the Canaanites? His defiled daughter? His own personal safety?
- What concerns you the most in this terrible story? Is it the rape of Dinah? Jacob’s failure to protect Dinah? The sons’ deceit as described in vs. 13-17? Or, the brothers’ revenge as described in vs. 25-29?
- Discuss how this reminds you of girls who are being trafficked today.

■ **Action Plan:**

Would people in your church recognize the symptoms exhibited by a child who was being abused in the home? What training could/should be provided to equip the Church to recognize and respond when such cases are present? What procedures does your organization or church have in place to help prevent, identify, and report possible child abuse? Make a preliminary plan to strategize and mobilize to prevent child abuse and exploitation in your context.

STUDY 21: Biblical Perspectives on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

■ Introduction

DO CHILDREN have rights? Aren't all human rights God-given? Is it biblical for humankind to create rights for children through the passing of laws and documents?

Amongst all the initiatives and documents promoting the welfare of children by NGO's and governments, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is "the most powerful legal instrument for the recognition and protection of children's human rights."¹ Its origins go back to a visionary Christian named Eglantyne Jebb in the early 1900's. The CRC was developed from the Jebb draft on the "Rights of the Child." It now has 54 articles and is ratified by all nations except two, (which two are they?) It can be categorized into 4 groupings of rights, viz., survival, protection, development, and participation.²

Despite the CRC being widely used today, there were some concerns raised by Christians concerning the "rights" of a child. For example, Article 3 is perceived by some to transfer God-given rights and responsibilities of the child to the State. Another concern is the secular rights' language created by laws which may contradict the biblically based God-given

rights. John Collier has a much more proactive approach to this child rights' issue. He says: ³

If we have not got anything better, then we can still as Christians affirm much in the CRC. Just because it does not come from a Christian source, does not mean we must despise it. The challenge to the church is to maintain Christian input.

In this study, we shall take a closer look at three representative major provisions from the CRC and view them through the lens of Scripture. Most of the discussions here were taken from pages 193 – 199 of *Child, Church and Mission, Revised Edition*. As you study each of these Articles, you will discover that they merely affirm what God commanded the Church to do as we have already learned throughout this Workbook. But watch closely to see how they might be misinterpreted, or misused.

For Further Exploration:

Dan Brewster, *Child, Church and Mission, Revised Edition*, pp. 193-199.

John Collier and Associates, *Toddling to the Kingdom* (Chapter 10), pp. 57-59.

Douglas McConnell, *Understanding God's Heart for Children*, pp. 23-31.

www.unicef.org/crc--Text of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Accessed April 29, 2008).

¹ Dan Brewster, *Child, Church and Mission*, p.194.

² John Collier, *Toddling to the Kingdom*, p.58.

³ *Ibid.*, pp.77-78.

■ What Does the Bible Say?

1. Article 3 of the CRC on Best Interest of the Child says: *“All actions concerning the child shall take full account of his or her best interests. The State shall provide the child with adequate care when parents or others charged with that responsibility, fail to do so.”*

Read the following biblical commands from God. Determine and discuss how Article 3 of the CRC is supportive or contradictory of these commands. Write briefly your observed biblical implications for the Church.

References:	God’s Commands	Supportive or Contradictory?	Biblical Implications for Church
Numbers 27:7			
Deuteronomy 10:18			
Deuteronomy 26:12			
Deuteronomy 27:19			

2. Article 14 of the CRC on Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion states: *“The State shall respect the child’s right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, subject to appropriate parental guidance.”*

Read the following Scriptures. Determine and discuss how Article 14 of the CRC is supportive or contradictory of these Scriptures. Write briefly your observed biblical implications for the Church.

References:	God’s Commands	Supportive or Contradictory?	Biblical Implications for the Church
Deuteronomy 6:6-7			
Proverbs 22:6			

3. Article 19 of the CRC on Protection from Abuse and Neglect states: *“The State shall protect the child from all forms of maltreatment by parents or others responsible for the care of the child.”*

Read the following Scriptures. Determine and discuss how Article 19 of the CRC is supportive or contradictory of these Scriptures. Write briefly your observed biblical implications for the Church.

References:	God's Commands	Supportive or Contradictory?	Biblical Implications for the Church
Genesis 21:17 Psalm 82:3,4			
Isaiah 30: 20-21			
Isaiah 58:10			
James 1:27			

4. After having an in-depth look at Articles 3, 14, and 19 of the CRC; discuss in a broader manner how the provisions of the child rights in the CRC are reflective of God's view on Rights and write briefly the biblical implications for the Church based upon these additional verses.

References:	God's View on Rights	Biblical Implications for the Church
Proverbs 31:8-9		
Luke 20: 46-47		

5. Some Christians argue that Rights are God-given and cannot be given or created by people or laws. Others suggest that the emphasis of the CRC should be more about **responsibilities and obligations** because rights are self-centred. Do you agree or disagree with these statements? Why? Discuss.

6. Based upon the above argument, discuss and analyze how the rights in the CRC are supportive or contradictory to God-given rights, which reflect God’s purposes, in the following Scriptures. Once again, write briefly the biblical implications for the Church as you reflect upon these passages:

References:	Purpose of God-Given Rights	Supportive or Contradictory?	Biblical Implications for the Church
Psalm 33:5			
Proverbs 29:7			
Isaiah 1:17			
Zechariah 7:9,10			

■ **Key Insights or Principles:**

■ **Reflection Questions:**

1. Does Article 14 of the CRC promote Western values (or tend to destroy traditional values) in your culture?

2. How could this Article be used to challenge parental authority in your culture, if applicable? In what other ways might this Article be abused?

3. Based upon what you learned in studying the biblical teachings about parental discipline/behaviour management of children, compare the provision of Article 19 with the following Scriptures studied previously: How does the Article compare and contrast to these Scriptures and others? Discuss.

- Proverbs 13:24; 29:17

- Hebrews 12:6

Is this Article 19 a benefit or a hindrance, in your opinion, to protecting children in your culture? Why or why not?

4. Some people argue that the whole discussion of “rights of a child” may not be culturally appropriate (especially in Asia). Discuss why this is or is not the case, and give specific illustrations from your context/culture.

5. Look at some of these other provisions of the CRC. Discuss how they might be very helpful in protecting and providing for children, and encouraging their participation:

- Article 2: Every child has the right to a life free from discrimination.
 - In what ways can the Christian community advocate for non-discrimination in your context? Discuss how schools and churches can contradict discrimination in their contexts.

- Article 6: Children have the right to survive and develop to the fullest.
 - How is it that the “right to survive and specifically develop to the fullest” can be so different across cultures and socio-economic borders? Can the CRC provide positive feedback and encouragement and enforcement when the ideas of surviving and developing to the fullest can be so different?

- Article 13: Children have the right to express themselves.
 - What does this article mean to you specifically in your context? In what ways should children express themselves? Is it ever right for a child not to express herself/himself? Discuss.

Discuss some of the CRC Articles as to how they could be misused or misappropriated in your country or culture:

6. Despite the almost global ratification of the CRC, why are so many governments failing so badly in protecting children at risk? Discuss and list your opinions below.

7. What are the factors in your culture that encourage or hinder a child from exercising his or her God-given rights?

8. Have you seen children “flaunting” their rights, or behaving with an attitude of “entitlement” in opposition to parental authority? Discuss. How do you think a child’s rights should be exercised in your culture?

■ **Action Plan:**

Based upon all the Scriptures you have studied in this specific study and others, draft a brief “Christian Rights of the Child” with at least 5 or more provisions. Support with Scripture references.



Part VI:

The Theological Significance of Children

MY FRIEND, Keith White has been my mentor in seeking to understand the **significance of the child that Jesus placed in the midst of his disciples.** He has also caused me to reflect much on the puzzling mystery of the Isaiah 7:14 passage: “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and you will call him Immanuel.” This final lesson will be one to help us explore a bit of the theological significance of the “child in the midst,” and of the significance of the child as a sign of the coming Kingdom.

Keith White¹ has reminded us that,

“Jesus made specific theologically-significant statements with children in the midst of his disciples, or even in his arms. These statements, which are found in all three synoptic gospels, are not primarily concerned with urging adults to care for, teach (or venerate) children. They are about fundamentally important aspects of Christian theology: the Kingdom of God; greatness and humility; the change needed to enter the Kingdom of God; how welcoming a little child in the name of Jesus is a way of welcoming not only Jesus, but the One who sent him.

The lessons in this Book will be just a “taster” of the deep theological significance of the child in Scripture – a depth only now beginning to be sounded.

¹ Keith White, “Children as Signs of the Kingdom of God – a Challenge to us All,” in *Now and Next: A Compendium of Papers presented at the Now & Next Theological Conference on Children Nairobi, Kenya, March 9-12, 2011.* To be published in Penang, Malaysia in 2011.

STUDY 22: Children as Signs of the Kingdom

■ Introduction

THE BIBLE is full of “signs.” In fact the word “sign” is used 81 times in the NIV, and “signs”, another 75 times. Signs are pointers to something else, usually the more important or “real” thing. They are not the “real thing” but pointers to the “real” thing.

Dr Keith White notes that throughout the OT while children are the first to suffer when sin, deceit, war, and famine affect a tribe or city, they are also “seen as a sign of God’s blessing.” He writes, for example, of the great insight in Isaiah 11:6 where the Messianic Kingdom is portrayed thus:¹

The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.

A child leading! What a triumphant picture of a new world order! Where once children were often victimized in an “urban, war-torn, consumer market-dominated jungle of today,”² now they will enjoy the blessed freedom to roam and

play even as wolves and lambs live peaceably with each other. They will lead – signifying a new and prominent role.

Isaiah also prophesied that the new earth will never again witness an infant “who lives but a few days” (Isaiah 65:20). God will remove all sorrows and sufferings. Indeed, children as “signs” point us not only to the Messianic Kingdom but also help us understand our mission on earth.

This study and the reflection questions may challenge us to think more “theologically” than other studies. It is deep, but immensely significant and rewarding.

For Further Exploration:

Keith J. White, “A Little Child Will Lead Them” at <http://www.childtheology.org>.

Jürgen Moltmann. *In The End – The Beginning* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), pp. 2-18.

John Collier & Associates, *Toddling to the Kingdom*, p. 15.

¹ Keith J. White, “A Little Child Will Lead Them,” at <http://www.childtheology.org>. I am indebted to Dr. Keith White for many of these insights about the child as a “sign.”

² Ibid.

■ What Does the Bible Say?

1. Reflect on how children or a child is related to biblical “signs” in the following passages. What are the circumstances provoking the sign in each instance? Discuss the significance.

Reference	Circumstances/Significance
Joshua 4:6	<i>Joshua asked each representative from the 12 tribes to take a stone from the middle of the Jordan to serve as a memorial and a sign for the future generation concerning God's power and deliverance among the Israelites.</i>
Isaiah 7:14	
Luke 2:12	
Luke 2:33	
Revelation 12:1- 2	

2. Reflect on Isaiah 7:14 and discuss why God used a child to reveal His plan of salvation to mankind, rather than some more “predictable” indicator. What is the implication for things that are “small” or “insignificant” in God’s Kingdom?¹

3. Reflect similarly again on Luke 2:12. Why did God use a tiny baby as a “sign” of His Incarnation? What does this reveal about the character of God?

¹ Question adapted from Keith White, “A Little Child Will Lead Them.”

4. What is the significance of the word “child” being repeated again and again in the following Incarnation narratives of both Matthew and Luke?

Reference	Significance of the Child
Matthew 1:18, 23	
Matthew 2:8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 20, 21.	
Luke 1:31, 36, 42, 59, 62, 66, 76, 80	
Luke 2:5, 17, 27, 34, 38, 40	

5. Compare the narratives in Exodus 12 with that of Matthew 2:15, 16. What is the common theme? Discuss how children were the first martyrs for the foundation of the nation of Israel as well as the first martyrs for Christ.

■ **Key Insights or Principles:**

■ **Reflection Questions:**

1. One of the common themes in Scripture is that of strength in and through weakness. (Think of Jesus stooping to wash the feet of his disciples.) Jesus also “stooped” to receive little children. Discuss how this was not a sign of weakness, but one of strength and a “sign” of the Kingdom.

2. What is your understanding of the phrase “The kingdom of God [or heaven] belongs to such as these [the children] in Matthew 19:14; Mark 10:14 and Luke 18:16?” In what sense(s) does the Kingdom belong to children?

3. We know almost nothing about the child that Jesus placed in the midst of the disciples in the Matthew 18: 2-5; Mark 9:36-37; Luke 9:47-48. The only clue we have about his nature was his humility in the Matthew account. Why then is the child here a powerful starting point for theological discussions in Child Theology today?

4. In Isaiah 11, the Messianic Kingdom is vividly portrayed: "The wolf will live with the lamb...and a little child will lead them" (v.6). What is your interpretation of this verse? What does this verse suggest concerning the role of children in the future Messianic Kingdom?

5. Theologians commenting on the Kingdom of God often note that it is "already" and "not yet." The Kingdom is already and manifested in every act of kindness done in Jesus' name. At the same time, it is "not yet," for many people do not believe, and there remains much evil and "incompleteness" in the world.
- a. Reflect on how the child is also "already" and "not yet," and how they both shed light on each other.

- b. List the similarities between the child and the Kingdom.

6. Theologians also refer to Christ's Kingdom as the "Upside-Down Kingdom."² Remembering Jesus' words that unless the disciples changed and became like a child, they would not enter the Kingdom, what does this say to you about an "upside-down Kingdom?"

7. Reflect and comment on this quote:

*"This unknown child is placed by Jesus and is a sign of hope, of promise, of a journey ahead, of potential growth, of discoveries and learning. Jesus offers a sign of life, and of encouragement. The disciples are to continue to dream, to long, to hope to experiment (and no doubt to fall over and have to start again) on their journey of faith."*³

² Donald Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1978).

³ Keith White, "Children as Signs of the Kingdom of God – a Challenge to us All," in *Now and Next: A Compendium of Papers presented at the Now & Next Theological Conference on Children Nairobi, Kenya, March 9-12, 2011*. To be published in Penang, Malaysia in 2011.

STUDY 23: God Uses Children for Special Tasks

■ Introduction

THROUGHOUT SCRIPTURE, we see God entrusting special truths to children or using them as His messengers or instruments.

Dr. Wess Stafford, the President of Compassion International, likes to say that often when God had something REALLY important to do—something that He couldn't entrust to adults, He uses children instead. Sometimes, Stafford says, "God seemed to pause, rub his hands together, smile warmly, and say, "I need someone really powerful for this task. I know—I'll use a child."¹ "For example," he says, "think of how different things would be, for example, if Moses' sister, Miriam—just a child herself—had not rescued Moses from the Nile (Exodus 2)! Or think when God needed to get a stern message across to Eli, He confidently entrusted that message to a very young Samuel (I Samuel 3). How about the young captive servant girl, who knew how God was using Elisha, and urged Naaman, the powerful Syrian General, to go to him for healing (2 Kings 5:1-3)? All are remarkable examples of God valuing children enough to deploy them for special tasks in His dealing with His people.

What then, is the place of children in this turbulent 21st Century world? What is God's plan for children in the family, community, and the Church—His Kingdom?

For Further Exploration:

Dan Brewster, *Child Church and Mission, Revised Edition*, pp. 25-27.

Keith J. White, "A Little Child Will Lead Them—Rediscovering Children at the Heart of Mission" at <http://www.childtheology.org>.

¹ Wess Stafford, *Too Small to Ignore* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2005). p.212.

■ What Does the Bible Say?

1. Read the following Scriptures below. Determine the **special tasks** God gave to the children in these verses. The names of some of the children mentioned are unknown, while others are specifically named. When possible, find or approximate the child's age. What important lessons do you see in His entrusting these matters to children?

Reference	Child	Approximate Age?	Special Tasks	Outcomes and Impact of Others
Genesis 22:6-12	Isaac		<i>Used as a vessel to test his father, Abraham's faith and love for God</i>	<i>A type of Christ that points people to God</i>
Genesis 37: 5-11; 36; 45:5-8	Joseph			
Exodus 2: 4-10	Miriam			
I Samuel 2:11; 3: 1-20				
I Kings 17:22				
2 Kings 5: 1-6				
2 Kings 11:21; 12:2				
2 Kings 22: 1-2; 23:3				
2 Chronicles 34:1-7				
Esther 2:17; 4:15-16; 7:3				
Jeremiah 1:4-10				

2. Read the following Scriptures and discuss **how** God used the children mentioned for special tasks. Note the **particular ability** or **quality** as demonstrated by the child to do the task.

Reference	How God Used Children	Particular Ability/Quality or Responsiveness Needed
2 Kings 5:1-3	<i>God used the slave girl to point her master to Prophet Elisha for healing of leprosy.</i>	<i>Childlike faith and prior knowledge or experience of God's healing power. She also knew of how God had used the Prophet Elisha to do miracles. The slave girl also had courage, compassion, took high risks and was also highly confident that the prophet Elisha could heal her master Naaman.</i>
Psalms 8:2		
Mark 9: 33-37		
John 6:5-13		

3. There is a **“mission”** component to God’s plan for children in that God sometimes uses children in special ways to further His Kingdom and to bring others to faith. See if you can find a “missional” component in the familiar passages below.

Reference	Children as Resources for Mission
I Kings 17: 19-24	<i>After Elijah resurrected the boy of the widow of Zarephath, she declared “Now I know that you are a man of God and the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth.”</i>
2 Kings 5:4-6; 13-17	
John 6:8-14	

4. Consider the phrase “Now I know.....” used by Naaman in 2 Kings 5:15, and the widow of Zarephath in I Kings 17:24. What is the significance of these phrases in relation to children being used in the context of missions and evangelism?

5. When Jesus multiplied the 5 loaves and 2 fishes (given by the boy) to feed the multitude in John 6, how was this event a “missional” event? (Note vs. 14).

■ **Key Insights or Principles:**

■ **Reflection Questions:**

1. If a child (perhaps your own) tells you that God has spoken to him/her to do a certain thing to make a certain decision, in a manner such as the boy Samuel, what would be your reaction? Why? Discuss the appropriate steps to take in this situation in light of the above discussions.

2. Reflect upon the life of Joseph as it unfolded in the book of Genesis. What is the most common characteristic we know about Joseph from the many chapters devoted to his life? What same characteristics might we pray for in our own children today?

3. Based upon the Scriptures and examples above, can you identify other similar examples in the Bible? Does God use children in the same way today? Can you share a case study of a child from your experience?

4. Why do you think God uses children instead of adults in accomplishing certain tasks? In what ways are children unique from adults when accomplishing His tasks? Discuss and share examples from your family, community and church experiences.

5. Based upon this study, it is apparent that God will use young people for special tasks in the future. What do you think it might mean in Joel 2:28 and Acts 2:17 that “the young men will see visions.” How does this influence your attitude and perspective of children under your care?

STUDY 24: God Uses Children to Influence Adults

■ Introduction

DR. WESS Stafford writes: So far as we see in reading the Gospels, Jesus never admonished children to become more grown-up. He did, however, exhort grownups to become more like children (Mark 10:15). How often have you heard an exasperated parent (maybe yourself) growl at a child through clenched teeth, “Would you please grow up?!” Jesus said the opposite to His adult followers: “Would you please grow down?” That is what it will take for you to enter my Kingdom.”¹

Apparently, just as we see today, there were some occasions when adults just didn’t “get it.” There is a remarkable pause in Jesus’ teaching about some very grown up things in Matthew 11. In the midst of the teaching, Jesus seemed to stop with wonder and amazement and exclaimed, “Father, I praise you that you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, but you have revealed them to little children”. What was it, do you think, that God had actually hidden from the wise, but revealed to the little children?

Why did God use children to teach Kingdom Truths? Who are His “target” audience, if not adults? What if we miss the whole idea of doing theology, missions and church simply because we adults have “misread or neglected God’s revealed teaching about children and childhood?”²

The truth of the matter is that God uses children to teach adults. This theme should provoke us all to attain a fresh perspective of spirituality and ministry. As we sit at the Master’s feet and open our hearts to these little ones, we will learn the “secret things” of the Kingdom.

For Further Exploration:

Roy B. Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*, pp. 201-216.

Keith J. White, “A Little Child Will Lead Them” at <http://www.childtheology.org>.

¹ Stafford, *Too Small to Ignore*, p.211.

² Ibid.

■ What does the Bible Say?

1. Read the following Scriptures from the synoptic Gospels. Identify and state how Jesus used the ministry to/with children to influence adults:

References	How Jesus Used Children to Influence Adults
Mark 5:40b-42	<i>Jesus used the resurrection experienced by the little girl to influence the adults to believe in the miraculous power of God.</i>
Mark 9: 23-24.	
Matthew 19: 13, Mark 10:13, Luke 18:15	

2. Read the story of David and Goliath found in I Samuel 17. In this passage, David's oldest brother (Eliab) "burned with anger" at David for his idea to confront the giant (I Samuel 17:28). Also, King Saul initially doubted David's ability because he was "only a boy" (vs. 33). Goliath, too, disdained David as "only a boy" (vs. 42). What spiritual truths did Eliab, Saul and the Philistines learn from young David's victory?

3. Read the following "child-related" words or phrases in the Pauline epistles. Study the contexts and identify the Kingdom truths or message that Paul wanted to teach the adults. The Primary Scriptures are mentioned below. For further investigation, you may also study the Supplemental Scriptures. Some are done for you:

Pauline References: Primary Scriptures	Child-related Words/Phrases	Kingdom Truths/Message
Romans 8: 15-16, 23	"we cry 'Abba Father'" "we are God's children" "our adoption as sons"	<i>Sonship; redemption; adoption</i>

I Corinthians 13:11	"when I was a child, I talked like a child; I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child."	
2 Corinthians 6:18	"I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters"	
Galatians 4:5-7	"God sent his Son" "no longer a slave, but a son"	<i>Redemption; sonship (heirs)</i>
Ephesians 4: 14	"no longer be infants, tossed back and forth...blown here and there	
Philippians 2:15	"children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation...shine like stars"	

Pauline References: Supplemental Scriptures	Child-Related Words/Phrases	Kingdom Truths/Message
Colossians 3:20	"Children obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord."	
I Thessalonians 5:5	"sons of light and sons of the day"	
I Timothy 2:15	"women will be saved through childbearing"	
2 Timothy 3:15	"from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures."	
Titus 1: 6	"a man whose children believe"	
Philemon 10	"my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains."	<i>Sonship: we are all equal at the foot of the cross</i>

■ **Key Insights or Principles:**

■ **Reflection Questions:**

1. Jesus told His disciples to “change and become like little children” or they “will never enter the Kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3). What are the “changes” that Jesus is expecting from the disciples? In this context, are these changes possible without the influence of the little children?

2. God chose Samuel to reveal His will for the Israelite nation (I Samuel 3; 1-21) during a time when “the word of the Lord was rare” and “there were not many visions”. (I Samuel 3:1) Why do you think God chose Samuel at that time, and how did God use young Samuel to influence the adults in his days?

3. In 1 Corinthians 13:11 Paul says “when I was a child, I talked like a child; I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child.” Discuss how it is possible to put away childish things, and still “become like little children ” as we are commanded to do in Matthew 18:3?

4. Share and discuss 1 or more examples from your own community of how adults (believers and non-believers) are dramatically **transformed** because of the influence of children.

5. In what ways in your ministry or leadership have you experienced the ability of children to **minister to, encourage, or stimulate faith** in adults? Give one or two examples. In what context did this happen?

STUDY 25: Children and Youths as Partners in Mission

■ Introduction

IN THE last quarter of the 20th century, children have gained increasing significance in the Kingdom of God. The Church is being made aware of God’s heart for children. It is awakening to the significant role children played in the building up of the Kingdom of God throughout the 20th century and beyond.

In an earlier study I mentioned “The 4/14 Window: Child Ministries and Mission Strategy.” It has become clear that the 4/14 Window is not just a catchy phrase, but a true ‘window’ of receptivity – an established fact. People do tend to come to Christ while they are young, while the ‘cement’ in their lives is still soft and impressionable.

But mission thinkers today are not just viewing children as objects of mission, but also as agents for mission. Indeed, many new initiatives and strategies are understanding children and youth as one of the most important resources for mission in the coming decades. This study will examine some of the bases for this new understanding of children and youth as “strong partners in Mission.”

■ What Does the Bible Say?

1. In previous studies we have already noted many children in Scripture who made a difference, not just by their presence, but also through their actions. We might say they were “change agents.” For each of the following young people from Scripture, write a statement about how they were a “change agent.” Several are done for you.

	Children as Change Agents in the Bible
Naaman’s wife’s servant girl 2 Kings 5	<i>The brave servant girl of Naaman’s wife is a clear “missional” story: she was in a cross-cultural situation; she knew a lot about the faith; God used her to influence a leader in a foreign land; that leader declared, “Now I know . . . !”</i>
Josiah 2 Kings chapters 22 & 23	<i>A boy king, hugely active as a change agent. Was the most effective of any OT king in confronting and challenging the worship of Baal.</i>

Joseph (Was only 17 when sold into slavery.) Genesis 41:41-57; 50:19-20	
Miriam Exodus 2:1-10	
Uzziah 2 Chronicles 26:3-5 Was 16 years old when he became king.	
Jeremiah Jeremiah 1:6	
Joash 2 Kings 11:21 – 12:19	
Azariah 2 Kings 15:2	
The boy with loaves and fishes John 6:8-9	
The brave servant girl Mark 14:66-70	<i>She twice had the courage to confront Peter about "being with Jesus" when Jesus was arrested.</i>
Timothy 2 Timothy 3:15	
Jesus himself Matthew 2:40-52	

2. What do you think it is that has been 'hidden from the wise and learned and revealed to little children' (Mt. 11:25) (Note this is possibly related to Jesus reference to the children playing silly games, causing Jesus to challenge the Bethsaida and Capernaum. At the very least, perhaps it has to do with a child's willingness to repent, to not take things too seriously, to laugh and to celebrate.)

3. Review the story of the boy Samuel in 1 Samuel chapters 1-3.

- Note the instances where God spoke directly to Samuel, or ministered before the Lord. What does this say about God speaking directly to children and using them for his purposes?

- Continuing with the story of Samuel, Dr. Susan Greener notes that it is clear that “Samuel is not a passive receptacle of adult input, but an active participant in worship and service to God under the supervision of Eli the priest and likely in ways that are developmentally appropriate to Samuel’s age and abilities.”¹ List 4 important lessons which can be drawn from God’s interaction with Samuel in chapters 1-3.

¹ Greener, Susan. “Raising Samuel.” Paper presented to the 4/14 Missiology Conference on Children, Seoul, Korea, February, 2013.

- Greener also notes that while God spoke directly to Samuel, he still used Eli – a very imperfect role model – as a mentor. “[Samuel] needs a nurturing adult at this time of calling to help him discern God’s voice. Without Eli’s caring counsel, Samuel would likely remain only confused by a voice in the night that may be no more than a waking dream.”² Discuss what it may have meant for Eli to have this role.

4. Look at Joel 2:28-32, and Peter’s use of that text in Acts 2:17-21 below. What differences to you see? Do you think these are “missional” passages? Why or why not? What might these imply as we think of children and young people as agents for mission?

Joel 2: 28-32	Acts 2: 17-21
<p>And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. 29 Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.</p> <p>30 I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. 31 The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. 32 And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved</p>	<p>In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. 18 Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.</p> <p>19 I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. 20 The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. 21 And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved</p>

² Ibid.

Mark Oxbrow raised the following points in light of our biblical understanding of childhood in contemporary missions:³ Which of these points are in place or absent in your church structure with regards to children and why? Discuss.

- Whether churches regard children as full members of the Body of Christ and agents of God's mission

- Whether we expect children to engage in mission as 'little adults' or as children, exploring the particular gifting and calling that God has given to each child.

- Whether our churches allocate resources to children to facilitate their development, equipping, participation in, and initiating of, mission in their own contexts.

5. In Matthew 5:3-12, Jesus teaches that the Kingdom belongs to the poor. It is clear that children share with the poor the state of being socially marginalized, even excluded from God's favor. At best they occupy a peripheral position in human kingdoms. How does Jesus reverse this view?

³ Mark Oxbrow. "A Critical Review of Modern Missions Movement," Paper presented at the 4/14 Window Missiological Conference, Seoul, Korea, February, 2013

■ **Key Insights or Principles:**

■ **Reflection Questions:**

1. Do you believe that children can hear directly from God? Or must His voice be mediated through an adult? Explain.

2. Dr. Bambang Budijanto gives the following reasons for not engaging children in missions:⁴ What is your opinion on these statements?

A. Caring for Children vs. Scoreboard of Evangelistic Efforts. There has been a concern that focusing missions on and with children could be done for the sake of adding “numbers” to the evangelistic “scoreboard.” Do ministries utilize children and youth in evangelism to get higher numbers on the scoreboard?

⁴ Bambang Budijanto, in Brewster and Baxter-Brown, *Children and Youths as Partners in Mission*, Penang. p. 30, 31.

B. *Children are Easily Manipulated.* Do children accept Christ and play different roles in the ministry of the church with wrong motives (to gain acceptance or approval for example)? (The fact that the majority of Christians made their decision to follow Christ before the age of 18 would mean that many of us have been successfully manipulated.)

C. *Children are Immature.* Children and youth do not possess adequate biblical and theological understanding (cognitive). They are immature and unwise (mentally). There is a concern that engaging children in missions could be harmful for the children themselves, as well as hurting other people and ministries.

D. *Calling the Exception the Norm.* There are leaders who argue that God “normally” utilizes adults to fulfill His purpose. However Scripture indicates that He did utilize some children—Samuel, David, Esther, Naaman’s slave girl, Josiah, Jeremiah, and the young boy who offered the fish and bread to Jesus—but these are exceptions. To call these exceptions as the “norm” is heresy.

3. Susan Greener writes that the attitudes of both Hannah and Eli toward Samuel demonstrates that adults are to be godly stewards of the life of a child, recognizing that the sovereign God gives adults the opportunity to participate in children’s lives as a gift and blessing, not as a right or merely for self-gratification.⁵

What stories/parables in the Bible could you use to support this principle?

4. Vinay Samuel writes:⁶ The child in my view does not need empowerment for mission but release. Whether it is mission as proclamation or mission as transformation, empowerment language continues to be significant in Christian mission. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

⁵ Greener, Susan in Brewster and Baxter-Brown, *Children and Youths as Partners in Mission*. Penang, Compassion. p. 174

⁶ Samuel, Vinay, in Brewster and Baxter-Brown, *Children and Youths as Partners in Mission*. Penang, Compassion. p. 276

STUDY 26: Will Infants Who Die Go to Heaven?

■ Introduction

FOR CENTURIES, theologians and laity have been intrigued by some practical issues on the spirituality of children. One of these issues concerns the spiritual destiny of (innocent?) children. Some of the questions presented by Zuck in his book, *Precious in His Sight* are the same kind of questions believers would have asked at one time or another, viz.,⁵²

Are children born with a sin nature? If so, what is their eternal destiny if they die as infants?

Will children be condemned to an eternity in hell, or will they in some way make it to heaven?

If children are doomed to eternal punishment, is it attainable by some means other than faith in Christ?

If children are incapable of exercising personal faith in Christ, how can they be lost?

Most of us “instinctively” know and hope our answer to the question -- of course, infants will go to heaven! But most of us have never given much thought to what biblical foundations support this conviction. This rather “theological” study will give us some background to the issue and a more biblically informed response (or, it may raise more questions than answers for some!).

■ What Does the Bible Say?

1. Below are some Scriptures concerning the spiritual state of humankind for us to ponder. “What is your opinion on categorizing every human being into 3 classes, viz. the saved, the lost and the “innocent?”⁵³ In what ways does your opinion **support** or **contradict** the following Scriptures concerning the universality of sin in humankind regardless of their age?

⁵² Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*, p.217.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.221.

References:	Spiritual State of Mankind
Genesis 8:21	<i>This verse states that "Every inclination" of a man's heart is "evi" from childhood and suggests that children are not "innocent" but falls under the category of "lost". Like adults, they too need to repent from their sins for salvation through Jesus Christ.</i>
Psalm 51:5; 58: 3	
Proverbs 22:15	
John 3:36	
Romans 3:9; 10	
Romans 5:12	
I Corinthians 15:22	

2. Read Ephesians 2:3. The Apostle Paul clearly states in his letter to the Ephesians that "we were by nature objects of wrath". What do these passages above say about the spiritual destiny of infants who die? Are infants exempted from the wrath of God when they are born since they are young and "innocent"?

3. Read the following parallel passages from the synoptic Gospels: Matthew 19:14; Mark 10:14 and Luke 18:15-17. Jesus made the statement that "The kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these". We also learn that he was also referring to infants (Luke 18:15-17). Based upon your reading of these passages, answer the following:

- Are all children, regardless of age, automatic members of heaven? Why or why not?

- How do these children get into the Kingdom? Adults must get there through faith in Jesus Christ. How about the child?

- Who are the "little ones who believe" in Jesus in Matthew 18:6? Do you think this might refer to the faith of very young children?

4. In Matthew 18:14 when Jesus said that “Your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.” What did Jesus mean by that statement? Was Jesus teaching a doctrine of universalism (everyone will ultimately be saved)? Why or why not? How does Jesus’ statement implicate the spiritual destiny of infants when they die?

5. Read 2 Samuel 12:23. In this verse, what is your interpretation of David’s response concerning the death of his illegitimate son: “I will go to him, but he will not return to me.” Do you agree that this verse suggests that David’s son was “experiencing a conscious existence in God’s presence” after death and that they will meet again in heaven? (See Zuck, p. 219.) Why or why not?

6. Read Romans 5:18-20. Some believe that “all who die in infancy are saved”? If so, from a theological standpoint, what will “allow” them into heaven? What about the infants of unsaved parents? Discuss. Then see the points made by Roy Zuck in the Case Study below.

■ **Key Insights or Principles:**

■ **Reflection Questions:**

1. Are there babies in heaven? If so, do babies remain in their infancy age when they are resurrected? What is your opinion concerning infants who are in heaven but “still needs to grow to maturity”? (This position is against the idea that there are babies in heaven.) If so, what are the theological implications for resurrected bodies as a whole regardless of their age?

2. Some Christian traditions have viewed children as sinful. How could such a position lead to cruel and harsh treatment of children? Discuss with supporting Scripture references.

3. Read Revelation 7:9. Is it possible for heaven to be populated with adult multitudes only “from every nation, tribe, people and language”? If not, is it then possible that some tribes will then have to be represented in heaven by children who die in infancy of unbelieving parents? Discuss.

■ Case Study:

Roy Zuck presents 8 different perspectives on the question: *By What Means Will Deceased Infants Go to Heaven?*⁵⁴ His premise is that infants who die will go to heaven. (See viewpoint#7). Which viewpoint do you prefer, if any, over all the other viewpoints, and why?

Viewpoint #1: Children who die as infants are taken to heaven because of the doctrine of universalism. The basic premise is that everyone will ultimately be saved and not one will be in hell. Therefore, infants will be in heaven even though they had no opportunity to believe. Consider the following Scriptures: Matt. 25:46; John 3:16, 18; 3:36; Rev. 20:15. Determine whether or not universalism is the basis of their salvation.

Viewpoint#2: Some believe infants will go to heaven because they are born innocent, without sin. Examine Scriptures: I Corinthians 15:22; Proverbs 22:15; Psalm 51:5; Romans 3:10. Discuss the analysis of this viewpoint based upon these Scriptures.

Viewpoint#3: Gregory of Nyssa of the fourth century first proposed the viewpoint that when infants die, they immediately mature and are given opportunity to place their faith in Christ for salvation. Zuck believes that this point of view has no biblical support and that if infants immediately before or after death are given the opportunity to be saved, it could suggest that some will go to heaven and others will not! Discuss.

Viewpoint#4: Zwingli, a Swiss Reformer proposed that infants who die will be in heaven because they are elected by God. This asserts that children of believing parents are among the elect, and will be saved, and that dying infants of non-Christian parents are also among the elect. This discussion is, of course much more rooted in the contexts of “the elect.” Discuss.

⁵⁴ Zuck, pp.220-225.

Viewpoint#5: Infants can be saved by the “baptism of desire,” of the Christian parents who desired it for their children but were unable to obtain it before they died. Discuss the idea of an infant “desiring” baptism, and/or the ideas of Christian parents desiring baptism. What might happen if the parents of the infants do not desire salvation for their infants, due to the fact that they may know nothing of salvation and baptism?

Viewpoint#6: The theologian Warfield believes that infants who die will be regenerated because they haven't rejected Christ. Three points to consider are: 1) Only those who consciously reject Christ are condemned to hell. 2) Infants cannot knowingly turn from Christ. 3) All dying infants will be in heaven even though they were born sinners and do not exercise faith.

Viewpoint#7: Zuck prefers the following view (found on p. 223 of his book): “all infants enjoy heavenly bliss not because they are born sinless or because they mature immediately after death ..., or because they are elect or had a desire for baptism or salvation.... Like everyone, infants need salvation. And salvation is only through Christ. Therefore, even though infants cannot exercise faith in him, he can remove their depravity.”

Viewpoint#8: Infants enter heaven by the fact that they have been baptized. This viewpoint has been supported by the Roman Catholic church and was first proposed by St. Augustine (A.D. 354-430).

What Have We Learned?

The Value of Children in God's Bigger Story

IF INDEED God has planned every child born on our planet as the familiar verses of Psalm 139: 13-16 assure us, then each child, both male and female—including you, the reader—has an important place in God's plan and bigger story. Once again, read these words, as is often taught, by inserting your own name into the passage:

"For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."

This learning will affect not only how we view the children in our midst, but also it will inform how we view our role in the life of those children.

Think about the "children in our midst." Reflect upon the reality that if indeed each child is God's idea, then there is a plan and purpose for every one of us including those children in our lives. If that child doesn't receive the nurture and love of Christ through the people in his/her life context, then the original plans God desired for his beloved children possibly become derailed, due to the fact that we do live in a fallen world.

Because you have children in your life, either through familial or ministerial relationships, you are part of God's plan for that child in your midst! What an awesome calling, what a privilege. In order to grow in "childlike faith", those of you in leadership must continue to nurture and nourish the growth of your relationship with Jesus Christ, in order to not only live out your part in God's bigger story, but also to provide the responsible leadership and call in being part of the children's stories in your context. We learn that the only way that can happen effectively is to keep our life centered in Christ through the core activity of our own spiritual growth and relationship with Christ.

Who is the child in your midst? Ask God to show you your part in that child's story and ultimately His bigger story. You will then, as the Master Storyteller Jesus said, be the person Jesus described as a child of God, the greatest in the Kingdom: "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." (Matthew 10:39). You will find your life, through service to the children in your midst.

As you reflect upon how the Scriptures have opened up to teach you more about the value of every child in God's bigger story of redemption, it is the hope that you, too, will continue to "grow in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and men" (Luke 2:52). That will happen as you abide in Christ, and shore up your own spiritual life as a growing child of God.

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This Workbook will enable you to explore many aspects of ministry to children, including ways to teach them, parental responsibilities, and theological issues related to children. Each Study introduces you to statements in the Scriptures about children, gives you key insights on the topic of that chapter, and asks you “reflection questions” that encourage you to think of the implications of the issues in that lesson. May you be blessed as you study about and minister to children, all of whom are “precious in His sight.”

From the Foreword by Dr Roy B. Zuck

This Workbook contains studies on a specific theme with a variety of Bible verses or reflections about children. The studies are structured as follows:

- **Topic Overview:** A brief introduction to the topic presents real life case studies or scenarios as a backdrop to the Scriptures and reflections of the study.
- **What Does the Bible Say?** Here you will be asked to go to specific Bible passages to explore what the Bible says about children and understand more of God’s heart for them.
- **Key Insights or Principles:** For those Bible passages, you may find new insights or key learning related to the theme.
- **Reflection Questions:** This section asks you to apply the key biblical principles to your **personal life**, the **culture** in which you live, and the **context** of your society and circumstances in your own country.



Dan and his wife Alice

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