

# A Jesus-Heart for Children

## Biblical Womanhood, Part 6

### PART 1: A RIGHT ATTITUDE

All of us at all seasons of life encounter children. They might be your own, or a friends', or nieces and nephews, or your neighbor's kids. So it is important that we have a Biblically-informed view on them.

And while I think a Biblical view of children is important for all believers, it is especially important for women. Our very bodies are designed to care for children: our womb to be the first home a child has and our breasts the first source of nourishment they ever receive. Whether we ever have the privilege to have children, God has wired women to be nurturers.

### CHILDREN ARE AN INCONVENIENCE: The common attitude.

Unfortunately, the pervasive attitude about children is that they are an inconvenience. Below are a few birth control ads that expose this view.



What's the message? That children equal gaining 30 pounds, giving up on your dreams, being less awesome, and not living life your way. Children get in the way of your plans for you.

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An increasingly sexually active culture has fueled this attitude. Years ago, pregnancy was the normal and expected outcome of being sexually active. But thanks to birth control and abortion, children are now only an optional result of sex. The push to divorce pregnancy from sex is happening to appease a shamelessly self-centered lifestyle. Rather than a joyous moment, a positive pregnancy test is often received with fear as if it were a curse, a disease, or a punishment.

And this mindset that children just get in your way continues beyond pregnancy. Career rules all in our culture, and men and women everywhere are finding ways to farm out their parenting responsibilities to day cares, nannies, and grandparents so that they can continue to live their life the way they want. (We'll talk about the place of birth control and childcare later.)

But this attitude isn't just found in the world around us, but also amongst those who follow Christ. We see this happening even among Jesus' disciples in Mark 10:13: "And they were bringing children to Jesus so that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked them."

Imagine that moment. The disciples are sold out to Jesus' mission and have left all to follow Him. They see a bunch of moms with crying babies, busy toddlers, and rambunctious 7-year-old boys coming to Jesus. Likely, they thought they were being incredibly spiritual and Kingdom-minded. "All these kids are just slowing Jesus down. He's got places to be, sermons to preach, people to heal, demons to cast out! Get them out of the way so we can get onto the important stuff."

The disciples considered children to be an inconvenience to Jesus ministry. And very often so do many of His followers today. It might not be a career that cause us to sideline children, it's ministry. "Important, world-changing ministry."

## **CHILDREN ARE A GIFT: The Biblical View of Children**

The Bible gives us no other way to think about children than this: They are a gift. A blessing. A reward. Let's go back to the disciples' rebuke of the children and see how Jesus responded.

*"And they were bringing children to Jesus so that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all." And He took them in His arms and began blessing them, laying His hands on them." Mark 10:13-16*

Here are few things we can learn from Jesus about children:

### **DO NOT HINDER THE CHILDREN**

The disciples were trying to prevent these children from coming to Jesus. But He says, do not hinder them. Literally, don't get in their way! Don't forbid these children to come to me! How often do we stand in the way of the natural curiosity of a child because we are too busy with more important things.

A child may be interested to learn about this Jesus you are talking about with your friend, or understand what is so special about the Bible you are reading. Do we respond like the disciples in

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those moments, rebuking the child "Leave me alone, go play with your toys, I'm busy with important things, like meeting with Jesus or talking about Jesus." Do not hinder the children! Don't stand in their way. Let them interrupt your plans and your day.

## **LEARN FROM CHILDREN**

Jesus tells the disciples that these inconvenient, time-consuming children actually have something to teach them! "The Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all." Wow. What a massive statement. Children have something to teach us about God and about His Kingdom.

Not only should we welcome the interruptions of children in our lives, we should have a heart to learn from them too. Kids have something to teach us about true faith and love for God and His Kingdom. This should make us want to be around kids! Even seek them out, prefer them and be eager to listen to their thoughts.

If Jesus had said, "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a lawyer will not enter it at all," would we not seek out a lawyer? Would we not find a way to spend time with a law student to understand what Jesus meant by that? But Jesus has called us to learn from children what it means to be in His Kingdom. So pay attention to them, value them, and ask them questions. Learn from them.

## **SLOW DOWN FOR CHILDREN**

*"And Jesus took them in His arms and began blessing them, laying His hands on them."  
Mark 10:16*

Jesus slowed down and engaged with these little ones. He got on their level. He spoke words of blessing over them. He stopped what He was doing to spend time with them.

Who are the children in your life? Do you slow down to engage them? They may be your own children. Your grandchildren. Nieces, nephews. Friends' kids. Children running around the lobby of your church. Maybe it's the children you see in the grocery carts while you work as a cashier. Or the ones who come into the doctor's office you work at. Don't let your primary assumption of these little ones be one of inconvenience. They are gifts, blessings, teachers for us on what the Kingdom of God is like. Welcome them. Slow down for them. Engage them. Speak positively to them and about them.

## **CHILDREN ARE ARROWS: Thinking strategically.**

*"Behold, children are a gift of the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are children of one's youth. How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them." Ps 127:3-4*

I love that Psalm 127 calls children arrows in the hand of a warrior. Not only are they a gift, they are an offensive weapon! To be given a place of influence on the next generation is to be given a valuable place of influence. Do you desire to make a difference in this world for the cause of Christ? Then pour into children! An investment in the life of a child pays huge dividends.

Think of your own childhood. Are there adults who took the time to slow down and get to know you? To teach you? To help you? Or adults that didn't value you, but harmed you or spoke negatively to you? How did that impact your life? Think of your parents. The things they did (or sometimes didn't

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do) have likely impacted how you see the world even to this very day. What a massive impact adults have in the life of a child! For better or for worse.

So what if we took the time to pour into the lives of children: preschoolers, elementary age kids, and preteens? If we taught them about God, who He is, what He has done for broken sinners through Christ? If we took every opportunity to listen to them and speak truth to them, to counsel and encourage them? This is an investment that is never wasted! Children are like arrows in the hands of a warrior. And if we point those arrows toward God and His Kingdom, what a mighty army the next generation might become!

Take the time to invest in the life of a child. Serve in your church's preschool or children's ministry. Become a mentor for a teenager through your school district. Do you have young siblings? Invest in them. Does your friend have children? Engage them when you go to their house. And of course, those of us who have our own children, may we allow God's view of children to permeate our homes and our actions.

As Christians, we are no longer of this utterly self-centered world. We are those who follow the Selfless, Cross-Carrying Servant of God who welcomed children. May we do the same.

## **PART 2: WHAT WOULD JESUS SAY TO MOMS?**

While every believe should have a right attitude toward children, being a mother entails a whole other level of interaction with children. What can we learn from Jesus to apply to the day-in-day-out routine of motherhood?

### **YOU CAN'T GIVE WHAT YOU DON'T HAVE**

*"Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, " Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." Luke 10:38-42*

Like no other generation before us, moms today have access to more information and parenting helps than ever. But I'm not sure if that has helped or hindered us. In fact, access to more information has probably created more Marthas, anxious and troubled about many things.

- *What sleep training method should I be doing?*
- *What kind of baby food is the best?*
- *Is my child getting enough sensory play time?*
- *What kind of discipline should I be doing?*
- *Are my kid's friends good influences?*
- *Homeschool or public school?*
- *Music lessons or dance class?*
- *Breast feeding or formula?*

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These are all good questions to ask, but too often they create anxiety and trouble in our hearts and frantic researching. But Jesus told us Marthas, there is one thing that is necessary. ONE THING.

What is that one thing? Sitting still with Jesus. Cultivating intimacy with Jesus, and a listening heart. Isn't this also the one thing we hope to pass on to our children? A desire to know and love Jesus above all else? That one day they would be strong men and women of faith, people who love God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength, who delight to do His will, and who are serving Him with their whole heart and their whole lives?

But how can we cultivate that if we don't model it ourselves? **We cannot give what we do not have.** Let us not be like Martha, frantic and worried with good things and forgetting the best thing. This is the hard part, the things that distract us from Jesus usually aren't bad. Martha was distracted by "much serving." Serving is a good thing. But it distracted her from the BEST thing: Knowing Jesus. Being a good parent is a good thing and it can easily distract us from the best thing.

So how can we be radically dedicated to knowing God in the daily grind of life? I think it means keeping the disciplines of Bible reading and prayer central to your day, not matter what the cost. But it truly is costly. To sit with Jesus while there is a lot to do is a radical thing. And your inner Martha will be screaming the same thing she said to Jesus: "There is so much to do! Tell her to help me!" But remember, Jesus rebukes Martha and says, "only one thing is necessary.

To choose to make space for God in your day might mean making frozen chicken nuggets and mac and cheese for dinner (again!), instead of that awesome recipe you found on pinterest. Or letting a pile of laundry sit unfolded for a day or two, wrinkling all the clothes. Or not being able to hang out with a friend or have that play date you wanted. Or having to welcome someone into a messy, cluttered house because you chose to seek God instead of clean up.

Sitting still with Jesus is costly. It costs you precious time. And usually means you can't get other things done that you want to. But what a testimony this is to your children! To see their mom be radically dedicating to knowing God. I guarantee they will want to know why that book you call the Bible is so important, who this God is they always hear you praying to, and why time on your knees is more important to you than a clean house.

There is no other way to pass on a vibrant faith to your children than to cultivate and model one yourself. Do not let the desire to be a good parent distract you from your highest calling: to know and love Jesus.

## **BE GOD-CENTERED, NOT KID-CENTERED**

*"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."  
Luke 14:26*

This is one of the hardest things Jesus said. A requirement to be a Christian is to love God so much that your love for even your children looks like hate in comparison. This grates against the kid-centered world that we live in.

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I shared yesterday that the majority view of children is that they are an inconvenience. And I think this is true. But this pendulum can swing way to the other side as well where parents dedicate their entire lives to their children. Putting them in the best schools, the best sports programs, getting them the best food, stopping everything in their life to accommodate their children. I do not think this is the answer either.

Children were never meant to be the center of our world. God is. There is a difference between wanting what is best for them and living your life for them. What would those who know you say drives your life? Would they say, "They radically love and serve their kids!" or "They radically love and serve Jesus!" Of course loving Jesus includes loving your kids well. But our loyalty should always be with God first, not our family.

What does this look like? This means the things Jesus asks of us are central in our schedules, not our children's events or schedules. Jesus calls us to be His ambassadors, to be missional in how we live, to be dedicated to His bride the church, to be know and love Him. If your children are keeping you from doing these things, you need to reevaluate how high of a position they have in your life.

For our family, being God-centered means many things. Since Jimmy travels the country to share the Gospel and minister to others, we often tag along so that the kids can see him. This often means undesirable nap and bedtime schedules, unpredictable diets, and stressful travel days. For us to leave space in our schedule to be missional in our neighborhood means we don't have as much time for other extracurriculars that the girls would probably enjoy. But our loyalties should be first to the Kingdom of God, even if that makes our love for our kids look like hate.

Seek the Lord for what it looks like for your family to be radical followers of Jesus. Let your kids grow up in a home centered on God and His Kingdom.

## MODEL REPENTANCE

*"Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. Just so I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents." Luke 15:7, 10*

There is one way to know God: repentance. Every one of us are sinners, who from birth hopelessly love and live for ourselves. We are all separated from God and utterly incapable of gaining access to Him apart from the work of Jesus for us. We can only know Him when we confess our sin and turn from it toward God, trusting that Jesus' righteous life and atoning death cover our sin. This process of confessing our sin and turning to God is what the Bible calls repentance.

*"For thus the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, has said, 'In repentance and rest you will be saved.'" Isaiah 30:15*

And repentance is not just a one time transaction when you are saved. It is the daily, consistent habit of a Christian. "Bear fruit in keeping with repentance." Matthew 3:8 So the question is, are you modeling repentance for your children? How will they know what it looks like if you do not show them?

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One of the best gifts we can give to our kids is repenting before them. When we are sinfully angry with them, we should confess that sin to our kids and ask for their forgiveness. This can be uncomfortable because it can feel like we lose the "upper hand" with our kids. But how else will they see what true humility and repentance looks like if we do not show them?

Mormons, Muslims, and Jews all teach their kids to be good, moral people. Our parenting should be radically different as we have a radically different faith. But too often, Christian parenting boils down to "Be a good kid." But the truth is, they have absolutely no hope to be a good kid apart from God's saving work in their lives. They are hopelessly self-centered sinful people without God, just like us. And it is our job to show them that hopelessness and lead them to a savior! Not give them some false sense of outward morality that convinces them that God is pleased. All that does is create Pharisees, the very people who crucified Jesus.

Help your children see how hopeless they are of being good without Jesus by letting them see your own neediness. Let them see you as a fellow sinner in need of God's grace every single day. One of my favorite questions to ask my kids when they've been disobedient is: "Is it hard to obey?" Usually the response is a resounding and desperate "YES!" And what a beautiful moment to say "It's hard for mommy to obey God too! We cannot obey without God's help because of the sin in our hearts. Let's pray and ask God to help us both today to put our faith in Him, not ourselves."

Disciple your children in repentance. Show them what it looks like to humble yourself before God and others. There is no great thing you can give your children. As Jesus said in Luke 15, heaven rejoices over the repentance of a needy sinner much more than a self-righteous person who doesn't think they need Jesus. Let's give heaven something to rejoice about!

## **PART 3: BIRTH CONTROL AND CHILD CARE**

We could have ended there and that would be great. But I have often found that there are 2 specific topics that come up a lot as I meet with young women and felt were worth tackling: birth control and child care.

These are sensitive topics for sure, controversial even, and there are many factors that play into every individual's decision. But too often, these decisions are made from attitudes and motives that have been shaped by our culture. And since it is so normal, we often don't even notice.

So as we start, let me clarify my goal. I am not trying to create a set of rules, but rather give you a Biblical grid through which to see these issues and the tools to discern the motives of your heart. God is much more concerned about our motives than our actions anyway.

In the first part of this series I established that the Bible only gives us one way to view children: as blessings. This grates against the general attitude of our culture, which operates from the general assumption that children are an inconvenience.

### **BIRTH CONTROL**

The birth control industry's main forerunner was Margret Sanger, the same woman who started planned parenthood. Abortion and birth control have always gone hand in hand. This is an industry that has built its foundation on the belief that children are an inconvenience. So, as Christians, we

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need to make sure our thoughts about this topic are informed by the Bible, not by culture, tradition, or upbringing.

Often, when people hear “birth control,” they think of the hormonal birth control pills (or “the pill”). This is not what I mean. I am defining birth control as the general category for any action used to prevent pregnancy while being sexually active.

So what is the place of birth control in the married Christian’s life?

Nowhere in the Bible is the desire to prevent pregnancy forbid, so I do not think we have the right to say that it is wrong to prevent pregnancy. We should never make laws where God has not made them. The issue here is not *if* you should use birth control as much as it is *why* do you use birth control. Over and over again in the Bible God shows great concern for the motives of His people’s hearts. So it’s worth our time to discern our own.

If you are using, or considering using some kind of birth control, you need to ask the question: Why am I trying to prevent pregnancy? If your answer to that question is not founded in Biblical truth and a heart of faith in that truth, you need to rethink your usage of birth control.

Too often, the main reasons I hear for using birth control are shaped by the world not the Bible. For example:

- A belief that children are an inconvenience to life and even ministry
- Fear
- A desire to be in control
- Selfishness: I want to live life my way and don’t want to be responsible for a little person

Like every decision in our lives, God calls us to be radically motivated for His Kingdom and His glory in everything we do. (1 Cor 10:31). Is your decision to use birth control about God’s glory and His Kingdom? If not, you might reconsider if it is right for you to prevent pregnancy.

Remember: one of the purposes of marriage is to be fruitful and multiply; to raise up the next generation to know and love God! It’s one thing if God has not yet allowed you to become pregnant, it’s another to choose not to have children just to live the way you want to. There is no greater ministry on this planet than raising up the next generation to know God.

## **ABORTIVE BIRTH CONTROL**

If you come to decide, because of God-glorifying reasons, to use birth control, that doesn’t mean you should use any form of birth control. There are several kinds of birth control that are morally unacceptable. They are abortive: actively killing any fertilized eggs within your body. As Jesus-followers, we have an obligation to fight to protect life from conception. And as women, it is our job to be ready to receive and nurture life from the moment it is given to us.

I don’t plan to go into the details of all the different kinds of birth control out there. I only hope to remind you that it is our responsibility, in a culture that willingly murders innocent unborn children, to make sure we are protecting all life that is within our power to protect. And that includes life that might be within our very bodies.

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Therefore, the only birth control methods available to us are ones that prevent conception. For more information on birth control in the life of a Christian, here are some of my favorite resources:

**Does the Birth Control Pill Cause Abortions?** By Randy Alcorn

<http://www.epm.org/static/uploads/downloads/bcpill.pdf>

**The Christian and Birth Control** by Tim Challies

<http://www.challies.com/articles/the-christian-and-birth-control-part-2>

**Does the Bible Permit Birth Control?** By Matt Perman

<http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/does-the-bible-permit-birth-control>

## CHILDCARE

What place does childcare have in the life of a believer? This might be daycare, a nanny, a babysitter or family member. Just like with birth control, we must first consider the motives of our heart. Are your decisions in this area shaped by the faith in the truth that children are a blessing? Or a belief that children are an inconvenience? Do you believe that a ministry or career is more important than raising up the next generation? Asking ourselves why we do something is the best gauge to know if we should do it.

Please hear me that I believe every mom will be greatly benefited by some time away from her kids, especially when they are very young. Getting away to be refreshed and ready to jump back into raising up the next generation is a great thing! Not only that, moms who are married need time away from their kids to be a blessing and support to their husbands as our marriages should be prioritized before our children. We are not our children's saviors, and they can be greatly benefited by other people pouring into their lives as well.

But we live in a culture that does not prefer to be around children. It is often normal to delegate parenting responsibilities to others (nannies, daycares, etc) just because it is easier, or because something else seems more enjoyable. It is this attitude that I hope to challenge.

If you have children, there is no greater impact that you will leave on this planet than your influence on your kids. For better or for worse, they *will* be your greatest legacy. So choose wisely and strategically who you allow to pour into them and how often someone else will care for them.

The issue of childcare will vary greatly in every season of life and will depend on so many factors, but let us not be like the world in thinking children get in the way of bigger and better things. **They are the bigger and better thing!** If we raise them well, if we disciple them, if we pour into them, they will be a mighty force for the Kingdom of God long after we're gone. Children are worth the time, energy, and effort.

## BE AN ADVOCATE FOR CHILDREN

Whether or not you are a mom, be an advocate for kids. Encourage the moms around you that what they do matters, remind them that children are a blessing and a strategic weapon in the Kingdom of God. When you babysit for families, work in the church nursery, or interact with your nephews,

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engage those kids! Pray for them! Ask God to save them, to make them mighty men and women of faith, who will one day change the world in the name of Jesus! Maybe you can volunteer at your local crisis pregnancy center and encourage fearful pregnant women that motherhood is worth it! Pray for the children in your life and follow in the steps of Jesus who took the time to engage them and bless them.

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