

On These Pages: We live a time when human reason fiercely battles against faith on many fronts. Accepting children is one front in which there is need to support and help one another. For that reason, LLC's Home and Family Committee felt the need to draw on previous writings founded upon Scripture that would provide support, comfort, and instruction for all believers regarding the joys of family but also openly acknowledging its trials. The first article, "Accepting Children—A Matter of Faith" establishes the scriptural foundation for the spread extensively quoting older and newer writings. The other two articles written by believing mothers speak from a more personal point of view. The timelessness of the writings and speeches, reaching back to 1945, bring comfort and security.

Accepting Children—A Matter of Faith

We easily forget the innumerable joys that children bring! Once a young expectant mother pushed her baby in a stroller surrounded by little ones. A voice interrupted, "Oh, how God is blessing you so richly with these many children." It was what she needed to hear. This grandpa's joy and sermon of faith uplifted and carried this mother because the sermon of the enemy regarding size of family and birth control is close. Without living faith, we, too, would embrace the enemy's message because believing parents of large families are also tired at times, even weary to the bone, and human reason battles against faith. Nonetheless, for the believer, accepting children, whether few or many, is not a carnal exercise of weighing the pros and cons, but it is ultimately a matter of faith and obedience to God's Word.

God, Our Creator

The believer's position on accepting children has not changed. It remains founded on God's Word. The older and newer writings and speeches of believers bring comfort and security time and time again. At a 2009 summer services press conference in Finland, Seppo Lohi stated how God is the Lord of life. *Do I truly believe that "God has made me and all other creatures, has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still preserves them?" (Small Catechism). If I believe this, it means that man is not born by chance (SL).* God's Word confirms that He is our Creator, He gives and upholds life (Ps. 127:3–5; Isa. 44:24; Jer. 1:4,5; Ps. 139:13–17).

At a ministers and board members meeting in July 2010, Jon Bloomquist spoke of the purpose of marriage: *One of the primary purposes of marriage is procreation. God created man, male and female, and then commanded them to "be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (Gen. 1:27,28). Luther says that this is "more than a command, namely a divine ordinance which it is not our prerogative to hinder or ignore" (JB).*

The Old Testament examples of Rachel, Hannah, and Ruth all show that it is God who gives conception and the fruit of the womb (Gen. 29:30–30:2,6; 1 Sam. 1:5,19,20). Of Ruth is said, "So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the Lord gave her conception, and she bare a son" (Ruth 4:13) – (JB).

Erkki Reinikainen, in his 1980s speeches and writings, stated, however, that living Christianity has not "*prescribed norms of conduct for Laestadian spouses. The rejection of birth control and abortion arises on the part of every believer as a personal matter on the basis of faith*" (ER). Kullervo Hulkko stated at a speakers meeting in 1945, *Controlling the birth of children is against God's Word and good conscience, and the prevention of the birth of a child is in all situations sin.* (SL).

Love Bears All Things

While children bring richness and immeasurable joy to our lives, we must acknowledge, especially for parents of large

families, that childbirth does not happen without pain and burden, and raising a family includes many phases, ups and downs. The immeasurable joy, times of enthusiasm, work, and boundless energy are contrasted with tiredness, stress, sorrow, and trial. These common phases of life naturally affect the relationship of the couple, also intimate relations, which are a deep expression of love and strengthen emotional connectedness. Christ's law of love and also nature guide our actions in mutual respect and love for one another.

In more difficult situations when a mother experiences a serious mental or physical illness, is healing from childbirth, or injury and is not able to have sexual relations, the law of love and nature teach her husband to respect his wife's need to heal, and at those times he does not initiate sexual intercourse. The reverse can also be true when the husband is ill. Often in such situations, there is little need for discussion, rather the husband and wife naturally show mutual love and respect for each other as Scripture teaches: Love is patient and kind...It does not insist on its own way...Love bears all things...endures all things (1 Cor. 13:4).

In childbearing years, a couple in childlike faith must often entrust their cares and worries in the care of God because, as Bloomquist pointed out, *Pregnancy and childbirth always entail some degree of risk for a mother. On occasion there are also health and medical issues that may substantially increase those risks. In such circumstances a couple may face painfully difficult questions caused by the conflict between God's command to be fruitful and multiply and their own concern for the mother's life. Her life, too, is God's gift and undeniably precious. In the face of such difficult issues, we feel our smallness and inadequacy* (JB).

Reinikainen expounds on the same matter: *The ill, whether physically or mentally ill, need expert medical help and rest. In addition, they need, as always, the supportive love of their spouse, children, and friends in faith. So it is in Laestadian Christianity. If there are exceptions, they arise from human reason and not faith. When a wife is ill, recovering, or is physically or mentally exhausted, the commandment of love teaches that during that period the couple mutually refrains from sexual intercourse. This means a period of fasting and prayer according to the Word of God and not birth control*" (ER).

Bloomquist explains the significance of faith and trust in God: *Even in difficult situations, however, God's children do not wish to abandon the perspective of faith for the perspective of science and reason. It does not mean that believing fathers and mothers do not take medical information and advice into account, but rather that they strive to consider it in the light of God's Word, faith, and conscience so that they might hold "the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience"* (1 Tim. 3:9) – (JB).

God's Word teaches us that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding" (Prov. 9:10). Thus, *faced with these kinds of difficult questions, we humbly pray for God's guidance, turn to His Word, and seek counsel and support from God's congregation, which Paul calls the "pillar and ground of the truth"* (1 Tim. 3:15). In the end, however, each must decide according to his or her own conscience (JB).

Support and Understanding

It is important that couples experiencing such trials are not left alone in battle but that they have the support and understanding of those who are close to them. Such matters are very personal and private and not coffee table talk among those who are not close to the situation. Each situation is unique. Difficult decisions made in one situation do not necessarily apply to another. Those struggling in these trials yet endeavoring to keep faith and good conscience have sometimes suffered from insensitive comments questioning their faith. Equally as hurtful are suggestions to a mother who

has given birth to many children close together that she could take an easier path offered by the enemy. Insensitive comments and suggestions of both types erode childlike faith and trust in God.

God Helps

When older parents and grandparents of smaller and larger families visit about their lives, we hear comments like, “God protected; God helped; trust in God’s care; pray to God.” In the throes of much work and toil, even difficult trials, it is hard to remember to cast all our cares upon God. For that reason, let’s remember to preach one to another the sermon of faith and trust in God. Like the grandpa, let’s remember to express joy over what God has given. Encourage parents with a few or many children. Remember and support couples with no children. In faith trust in God’s plan regardless of what life may bring. He knows best and is with us. “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Ps. 46:1). The life of the believer, even a struggling parent, is one of righteousness, joy, and peace in the Holy Spirit. The happiness and joy of a child of God is to be near the Lord, as the psalmist has written (Ps. 73:28).

Reinikainen wrote of the joy and blessing of family and encourages parents: *Mothers have joy not only over birth, but also over the entire gift of life. The duty of a Laestadian mother is not just to give birth. She, with her spouse, during days of grief as well as during days of good fortune, lives a rich life in the midst of growing and maturing children. Thus it is, all the way to old age, if God gives a long life.*

Mothers and fathers, our hearts quieten in prayer on your behalf. May God bless and protect you. May He give you strength to raise your children—together with your spouse—in faith so that they are preserved in the grace covenant of baptism. May He give you skill and wisdom to rear your children for the benefit of our country (ER).

We have much reason for hope and joy. God will take care of us. His thoughts toward us are good and not evil and He promises to give us a future and a hope! (Jer. 29:11).

Keith Waaraniemi

Sources:

ER, *Mothers in Zion*, Adapted from Päivämies editorial, “Rakkaat siionin äidit,” – *Voice of Zion*, August 1989, May 1993, by Erkki Reinikainen

JB, “*God is Lord over Life and Death*” – 2010 LLC Minneapolis Summer Services - Ministers and Board Members Meeting. Adapted version of presentation – November 2012 *Voice of Zion*, by Jon Bloomquist

SL, “*I believe in God, the Father,*” Introduction at SRK Summer Services press conference in Oripää, Finland, June 2009, by Seppo Lohi (In this introduction, Lohi quotes Kullervo Hulkko’s 1945 statement.)

There Is Both Joy and Trial in Accepting Children

I was young, married for perhaps a week. I still remember my thought clearly, “If only I wouldn’t immediately become pregnant!” It would be so easy and pleasant for just the two of us to live together. I could concentrate on my interesting work, which I was just beginning. My husband could advance in his studies, which would still continue for several years. Besides being tempting, the thought was surprising: does the pondering already begin about when would be the acceptable time to have children?

I soon was expecting a baby and quickly found that out. The knowledge made me intensely happy; not even for a moment did I sigh after the easy life of only the two of us. Perhaps in my thoughts I had already imagined how difficult it would have been for me to be left without any children.

When my firstborn was five months old, I became pregnant with twins. Then I had children a year and a half to two years apart, altogether eleven.

A Large Family Demands Both Trust and Faith

Marriage without contraception seems to be a natural way of life to us believers. We can't really even understand why those on the outside are amazed and appalled by it. Still, once in a while I have comprehended the tremendous trust and almost senseless risk taking which is part of the life of a growing family. Without faith in God we wouldn't accept children without considering our life situation. We would not accept yet a tenth or fifteenth child.

On average, a Finnish woman gives birth to slightly fewer than two children. A higher birth rate would be desirable in our nation, but parents consider two or three children as a reasonable number for their family. More children are considered to be a threat to the family's financial situation or to the parents' ability to cope. It is likely considered beneficial, too, for a child to grow up in a small family.

I have sometimes wondered why certain parents I know have wanted seven children, without having any religious conviction. I was giving birth at the same time as the mother of such a family, and I saw how happy she was to have her seventh child. Surely she and her husband had also felt much joy over their older children. They had found their family life to be worthwhile, along with its difficulties.

There is joy over children also in believing families. On the refrigerator door of a certain family with twelve children was written in large letters, "Children are richness." Still believing families aren't large for these reasons. For me accepting children has been, above all, a question of faith. I have simply wanted to believe that God continues to be the Creator of life. He gives some families many children, others few or none at all.

God Knows When our Children Should Be Born

If children are born very close together, doubts awaken nonetheless. There is much work, there is worry about managing with the family. Is it even right to have a new baby very soon, considering the other children?

"May believing couples control their family size using the so-called rhythm method of birth control?" a young *opisto* student asked us adults. The rhythm method wouldn't seem to be the same kind of prevention of pregnancy as, for instance, using the birth control pill. Nevertheless, what else is it but controlling the beginning of life according to one's own conditions? My conscience was tender in this matter, and I also thought that it would be emotionally difficult to live in marriage under this type of regimentation. Although a new pregnancy was sometimes hard to accept, it still felt easier and more right to trust that God knows when our children should be born.

It Is Important to Speak of Our Fears and Worries

Some mothers have told me of their fear of becoming pregnant. The reason for their fear has been previous problems during pregnancy or a difficult labor. A certain mother related how post-partum depression had left her with trauma. It is important to share such experiences with understanding people. At the prenatal clinic, a mother can receive professional help to overcome fears, as well as advice on preventing problems. It helps when considering the matter to remember that anyone at all can experience health problems and fears regardless of how many pregnancies they have.

My last pregnancy was psychologically difficult for me. I had a feeling that this birth would be very risky. The Creator gave a healthy child, and I was able to continue my life after a critical situation. God's intention was, nevertheless, that after this I would not have more children. Hearing this, I was in a way relieved, when the danger accompanying childbirth was over, but for a long time I also felt sadness because my time of having babies came to an end.

After my experience, I have pondered much the significance of being open. We aren't always able to trust in God's protection, and that's why it would be important for us to speak of our worries. Fears borne alone are reflected at home, even in the form of impatience and detachment.

How Are Our Children Faring at Home?

I have often discussed another kind of family concern with my husband. As working parents of a large family, we have often worried whether we notice each child sufficiently. We have also pondered how to deal with our own tiredness before it would begin to govern our home life.

It's clear that family size doesn't determine what kind of fundamental security a child has or what kind of provisions he receives for life. Many matters in the home affect those things. A phrase has remained in my mind from a certain psychologist's lecture, that the home's atmosphere forms the child's internal atmosphere. We see from a child's face, speech, and behavior if things are well with him. Even though there are tears and arguments, even worries at home, it can still be a secure home, if its atmosphere is accepting and merciful.

Surely the children of most believing homes are healthy. At my work and among my acquaintances, I have marveled how well balanced youth from large families can grow up to be. Often I have happily looked at my own children playing together. All the same, I could have used forgiveness as a source of strength and comfort even more for my children.

The gospel of the forgiveness of sins is also fundamentally important between spouses. Through it, we care for the two most influential matters in having energy and in the home's atmosphere: our marital relationship and our faith life.

We Want to Support Parenting

Does my article reach some especially tired father or mother? You're urged from the outside of God's kingdom to take the size of your family into your own hands. In contrast, the believers want to support your parenting.

I have received good instructions and supportive peers' experience from Christian publications, married couples' discussion evenings, and camps. Diaconal work in congregations supports families. Relatives and friends are able to help. Asking for help can feel humbling, but in difficult times of life it is the responsible thing to do.

My own experience has been that trust and obedience have contained a blessing. I have received my precious family as a gift from God. Trusting in His guidance, I have certainly avoided many disappointments, guilt feelings, and dangers to faith. I am not even able to see or comprehend all the blessings which I have received.

Tuuli Hintsala (mother, Opisto teacher)

Translated from *Päivämies*, #40, 2011

At the time of this writing, the Töllli family, of Kajaani, Finland, consisted of Henna, her husband Pekka, and children Elena (8), Viena (7), Selja (6), Saga (4), Aate (3), twins Elja and Neela (22 mo.), and five-week-old twin boys "Aatu and Peetu" (names to be announced at baptism). In this writing, Henna shares thoughts on the blessing of being able to trust in the Heavenly Father's will in her duties as a mother in God's kingdom.

The Heavenly Father has given us a great responsibility and task in raising our children. Though I have often felt overwhelmed, it has been comforting to trust that since my husband and I have been entrusted with this duty, we will also be given strength for each day. As our family has grown, I've felt that through the little ones and the weight of the work involved with caring for them, I've been kept as a child myself and have been able to see what's essential in each moment.

As a younger mother, I found it more difficult to accept the birth of the babies one after the other. I questioned: how will I find the strength to do this? How can we cope with the growing family? How can I care for one baby after another? How can I keep up with the chores and the children's needs? Then, when we have been given a new baby, it gave strength and cleared the prospects for the future, showing us the wonderful blessings that children bring.

More recently, accepting the babies itself has become easier, but I've had worries considering the health challenges I've faced, especially during the first twin pregnancy. It surprised even me, how after plowing through the first year with the twins, I felt delighted and fully trusting to hear of another twin pregnancy! It felt unbelievable, and I felt privileged to be able to again experience something as unique as pregnancy and the wonder of giving birth to two babies. When I told others about the second twin pregnancy, I felt as if they were more concerned about how I could cope than I was. God allowed me to trust, like a child, that all would be fine and would go as it is meant to go. Now, I can look back with a thankful mind and say that everything went better than I could have imagined.

The support of family and friends in the difficult times has been priceless. I can't find words to thank for the support network we've had around us! I've found it difficult to ask for help, but it has felt so good to be helped without asking. Those everyday angels cannot imagine how wonderful it has felt to receive a message: "You are in our thoughts," for example. During difficult days, when I've been tired or ill, I've just sent a heavy sigh to the Heavenly Father. Often the next day has been brighter, or delightful helping hands have appeared from nowhere. It may have been a small task for the one offering help, but for a tired parent it can be the resource to overcome that difficult moment. I recall with great love when local grandmas brought treats when we came home with the twins; friends and neighbors took the babies for a stroll so we could get the other children tucked into bed; or the children's godparents picked up one or several children to go outdoors or to visit with them. It has been heartwarming when neighbors and friends from work have offered their help and been sincerely interested in how everything is going.

Even small moments of time on my own in silence have brought great joy. Other uplifting moments are time with my spouse, evenings with friends, or when I can give special time to just one child. My job outside the home has also brought a welcome change to our home's daily routines.

I like to plan ahead, both smaller and bigger things. But I trust in God having the master plan figured out and that my own plans can suddenly change. Often afterwards I can see that there was a huge blessing in God's plans. It is comforting to know that my life is in the hands of the Almighty. Trusting and being content with the Heavenly Father's will brings peace and the feeling that I can make it through difficult times. I have personally experienced that when trusting in God's

will, it is easier to see how adversities are a part of life, contrary to the picture in which one has trusted in self-planned paths.

Translated and submitted by Nina Vanska

Discussion Points

1. Please share any experiences you have had with the enemy of soul's prompting to use human reason to question God's Word regarding childbearing and family life.
2. What kind of help and support was especially meaningful in battling such attacks?
3. In what specific ways can we support parents struggling with trials and burdens of family?
4. How should a believer deal with the insensitive comments or non-supportive suggestions of others?
5. How might the enemy tempt believing couples who haven't received any children? How can we comfort and support those in this situation?
6. Is there a specific Bible portion or verse in a song of Zion that has helped and comforted you in a time of questioning and doubt?
7. Amid and after raising children, how has God revealed what a blessing children are in life?