

CHILDREN ARE A HERITAGE FROM THE LORD:  
A PROCREATION-CENTRIC APPROACH TO CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE AND FAMILY  
EDUCATION

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A Major Applied Project  
Presented to the Faculty of  
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Doctor of Ministry

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By  
Nicholas Hagerman  
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Approved by:	Dr. Richard Marrs	MAP Advisor
	Dr. Joel Biermann	Reader
	Dr. W. Mart Thompson	Reader

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To Claire and the boys, without whom I could never have written this project credibly, and whose love and support have given me the strength to complete it. I love you all!

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## ABBREVIATIONS

CPH	Concordia Publishing House
CTCR	Commission on Theology and Church Relations
IRB	Institutional Review Board
LCMS	The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer
<i>LW</i>	Luther, Martin. <i>Luther's Works: American Edition</i> . Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehman. 56 vols. St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress, 1955-1986.

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My sons Kenneth James, Martin Lee, and Jonathan Michael are the embodiment of living out God's procreative design for marriage as described in this project. They are all tied as the second greatest earthly gift that God has given me, and raising them has been the single most important and rewarding task that God has entrusted to me in this life. I love you all, and I pray that you remain faithful to your Lord Jesus Christ as long as you live.

Claire, you are the single greatest earthly gift that God has given me. I would say that being your husband is the most important and rewarding task that God has entrusted to me in this life, but being married to you has never felt like a task. It is the greatest joy I have to call you my wife and the mother of my sons, and I thank you for your love, support, and encouragement as I have pursued this degree. Thank you for putting up with my time away, my extra work, and my stress as I have attended class after class and written paper after paper. I will love you always.

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Soli Deo Gloria!

## ABSTRACT

Hagerman, Nicholas L. "Children Are a Heritage from the Lord: A Procreation-Centric Approach to Christian Marriage and Family Education." Doctor of Ministry. Major Applied Project, Concordia Seminary, 2022. 242 pp.

As youth and young adults are being raised in the church, they are often taught about issues related to sex and marriage. However, procreation and raising families are rarely mentioned in such teaching, which tends to focus instead on relational issues between spouses, the avoidance of sexual sins, and the marital institution's reflection of the relationship between Christ and His church. This project seeks to remedy this deficiency by taking a procreation-centric approach to educating young adults about marriage and sex. A Bible study that discussed these issues with a heavy emphasis on God's gifts of procreation and children was conducted with seven recent high school graduates. The participants were interviewed before and after the Bible study to learn what they had learned at church about these issues during their childhood and youth, and to determine whether or not their views and understanding had changed as a result of attending the Bible study. The results demonstrated that procreation-centric teaching can indeed in some cases raise young people's awareness of God's gifts of procreation and children, and encourage them to actively pursue these gifts when they grow older and get married. The results also indicate that more instruction in God's procreative design for marriage is needed in the church, as not everyone will naturally be inclined to understand and accept it.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **THE PROJECT INTRODUCTION**

#### **Research Problem**

Every two years, the Springfield Circuit's chapter of Lutherans for Life hosts an event for junior high students and their parents. This event has gone by many names over the years; when I first began my ministry at my congregation, it was called the "Chastity Banquet," then it became the "Worth the Wait Banquet," and in its last iteration in 2020, it was called the "Healthy Relationships Banquet." Whatever the name, the banquet has always been held near Valentine's Day in February, because the topic of discussion, as one might surmise from the event's various titles, always concerns relationships, romance, marriage, and sex.

The structure of the event typically looks something like this: the families all eat together, they listen to a featured guest speaker, and then the parents and students separate for breakout sessions where they discuss the issues further with facilitators. Usually at this time the junior high boys and girls are also separated for their own sex-specific discussions. Regardless of who the speaker is, however, the emphasis invariably remains the same. The students are taught about the importance of sexual purity and saving oneself for marriage. They are told that it is God's will that they remain chaste until they are married. Sex is a wonderful gift for married couples, because it allows them to draw emotionally closer and gives them physical pleasure, but it is not appropriate for those who have yet to be married. If unmarried people have sex, it is a serious sin that can lead to disastrous results: loss of purity, loss of one's reputation, broken relationships, sexually transmitted diseases, and, of course, unplanned pregnancies. The students are urged to follow God's design for sex and wait until they are married to become sexually active. Showing such restraint is very difficult, but it is the best way to avoid trouble, and it is a good work that is

pleasing to God.

I have been serving as pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church in Springfield, Missouri for almost ten years now, so I have had the opportunity to attend several of these banquets. I have always been appreciative of Lutherans for Life's desire to educate young people about sex and help them to make good decisions for their futures. I have always participated in the banquets whenever I have been asked, and I have been glad to do so. However, from the very beginning of my involvement with these events, I had never been able to shake the feeling that they were missing something. Several years ago, while listening to a speaker offer tips about how to avoid premarital sex (e.g.—don't ever be alone, don't ever get "horizontal"), I began to ask myself, "Is this all there is to the church's teachings about sex? Is purity really the only thing they need to learn about? Or is there something more we should be saying?"

It wasn't until the last few years, after I had been married and begun a family of my own, that the root issue that bothered me about these events became apparent. I realized that the "Chastity Banquet" was merely one small example of a much larger trend that has come to dominate the contemporary Christian church's discourse about sex, especially in speaking to its young people. My watershed moment occurred when I read an article in *First Things* by Dr. Abigail Rine, a professor at George Fox University, an Evangelical Christian institution. In this article, Dr. Rine details her experiences in attempting to explain the biblical view of marriage to her Christian students (in the context of discussions about the legalization of same-sex marriage):

As I tried to explain the reasoning behind the conjugal view of marriage and its attitude toward sex, I received dubious stares in response. I realized, as I listened to the discussion, that the idea of "redefining" marriage was nonsensical to them, because they had never encountered the philosophy behind the conjugal view of marriage...a "revisionist" idea of marriage—marriage as an emotional, romantic, sexual bond between two people—does not seem "new" to my students at all,

because this is the view of marriage they were raised with, albeit with a scriptural, heterosexual gloss.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, the view of marriage espoused by Rine's Christian students looks little different than that of the wider culture, with a heavy focus on emotion and physical pleasure. Rine offers some theories as to why this might be so:

As I considered my own upbringing and the various "sex talks" I encountered in evangelical church settings over the past twenty years, I realized that the view of marital sex presented there was primarily revisionist. While the ideal of raising a family is ever-present in evangelical culture, discussions about sex itself focused almost exclusively on purity, as well as the intense spiritual bond that sexual intimacy brings to a married couple. Pregnancy was mentioned only in passing and often in negative terms, paraded alongside sexually transmitted diseases as possible punishment for those who succumb to temptation. But for those who wait, ah! Pleasures abound!

... the narrative implied that once the "waiting" was over, self-discipline would no longer be necessary. Marriage would be a lifelong pleasure romp. Sex was routinely praised as God's gift to married couples—a "gift" largely due to its orgasmic, unitive properties, rather than its intrinsic capacity to create life.<sup>2</sup>

Reading this article helped me to understand and articulate the unease I had felt in my own participation in these events where sex was discussed with young people. I realized that my own experience was practically identical to Rine's: in all of the church youth events I had ever attended (as a youth or adult) in which the topic of sex was discussed, not once were children ever mentioned as the natural result of sexual union between husband and wife. It was never taught that procreation was the inherently desirable end of sex. Procreation as such was only mentioned as an undesirable consequence of sex outside of marriage: one's life could be completely ruined by having a child in such circumstances, so extramarital sex needed to be avoided. Children, therefore, when they were mentioned at all, were described in primarily

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<sup>1</sup> Abigail Rine, "What Is Marriage to Evangelical Millennials?" *First Things* (May 14, 2015), <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2015/05/what-is-marriage-to-evangelical-millennials>.

<sup>2</sup> Rine, "What is Marriage."

negative terms. Certainly, the presenters did not mean to discourage the youth from having children in the future, but children simply did not seem to be at the forefront of their minds when they thought and taught about sex. The result is that many young people (including me) who participated in discussions such as these were given the impression that sex is a good gift from God only because it facilitates emotional closeness and physical pleasure, rather than because it creates a brand new human being.

This new realization compelled me to do some study of published materials within The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) that discuss sex and marriage, especially in the context of teaching young people about these topics. I wanted to know if the way I was taught about sex and marriage as a youth was officially “sanctioned” by our church body, or if something had become lost in translation between the materials themselves and their actual use on the ground in congregations. In my preliminary research, I found that, by and large, the most significant LCMS resources for teaching young people about sex and marriage take the same basic approach as I had experienced as a youth, and as I had witnessed as a pastor.

The *Explanation of the Small Catechism* published by Concordia Publishing House (CPH) still remains the most commonly used textbook for confirmation instruction within the LCMS. The vast majority of teens and young adults in the LCMS today were catechized using the 1991 edition of this resource. Examining the *Explanation*'s discussion of the Sixth Commandment (“You shall not commit adultery”), I was dismayed, but not particularly surprised, to find that procreation is not mentioned *at all*, in any capacity whatsoever. The questions and answers encourage the reader to remain sexually abstinent until marriage, to remain faithful to one's spouse, and to avoid sexually impure thoughts, words, and deeds. Nothing is said that is doctrinally or morally suspect; the problem is what is *not* said; namely, that God designed sex

specifically so that husbands and wives could procreate and raise a family together. Genesis 1:28, in which God encourages Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply, is not among the many passages of Scripture quoted in this section.<sup>3</sup> Thankfully, the most recent 2017 edition of the *Explanation* has included some material that refers prominently to procreation and children,<sup>4</sup> but the fact remains that most of the youth and young adults in the LCMS today (including in my own congregation) were not taught with that particular version. The majority of those who have already been confirmed would have used the 1991 edition, which means that most of them probably were not taught adequately about the importance of procreation in God’s design for sex and marriage.

I also found that many LCMS Bible study resources on these topics that are directed toward high school youth are similarly deficient in their discussions of procreation. In seeking typical studies for high school students, I visited the *youth eSource* website, which is an official publication of the LCMS Youth Ministry. I searched for Bible studies about marriage, and two of those that were most relevant once again failed to mention procreation at all. The two studies, entitled “What is Marriage?”<sup>5</sup> and “I Pledge You My Faithfulness,”<sup>6</sup> purport to be discussions about marriage from a biblical perspective, yet they completely omit the highly significant aspect of procreation and raising a family. Another study entitled “Sexuality Mentality: Creating a Culture of Biblical Integrity” does in fact mention children and family as positive goods of marriage in several places, which is certainly commendable. However, they are usually

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<sup>3</sup> *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1991), 81–85.

<sup>4</sup> *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2017), 93–104.

<sup>5</sup> Candice Hill, “Bible Study: What Is Marriage?” *youth eSource*, 10, no. 10 (October 2012), <http://www.youthesource.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Bible-Study-What-is-Marriage.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Jim Gimbel, “I Pledge You My Faithfulness,” *youth eSource* 8, no. 3 (March 2011), <http://www.youthesource.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/i-pledge-you-my-faithfulness.pdf>.

mentioned only in passing, and are never heavily emphasized as topics unto themselves.<sup>7</sup> Again, these studies are certainly helpful and faithful as far as they go; nevertheless, they either partially or completely neglect God’s encouragement to His people to be fruitful and multiply.

Finally, I was also interested in seeing what resources were provided for parents in helping them to educate their own children about sex. Perhaps procreation and children would be heavier emphases in those types of resources than in the studies directed toward the youth themselves. In reading one of these resources, CPH’s *How to Talk Confidently with Your Child about Sex: For Parents*, I found that procreation was indeed mentioned more prominently. This book goes into great detail about how to speak with children of all ages about the biological and physical aspects of sex, pregnancy, and childbirth, and it does so in a way that is simple and helpful to parents. I plan on making use of it when I begin teaching my own children about sex. However, even though there is much good in this book, it still does not advance the argument that children and family are inherent aspects of God’s design for marriage that should be pursued if a married couple is able to do so. Statements such as “Sometimes a husband and wife *may* decide they want to have a baby” and “Sooner or later they *may* decide they want to have a baby” (emphases mine) imply that children are purely optional features of marriage, to be procreated only when the parents want them.<sup>8</sup> There is little indication that, under normal circumstances, having children is to be regarded as a normative and intrinsically desirable aspect of marriage and family life. If parents were to use this resource in instructing their own children about sex, they would find much that was good and helpful, but they would not be fully equipped to teach their

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<sup>7</sup> Heather Ruesch, “Sexuality Mentality: Creating a Culture of Biblical Integrity,” *youth eSource*, last modified September 10, 2019, <http://www.youthsource.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Sexuality-Mentality.pdf>, 6, 20, 28–29.

<sup>8</sup> Lenore Buth, *How to Talk Confidently with Your Child about Sex: For Parents* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2008), 74–75.

children about *all* aspects of God's design for sex and marriage.

As a result of my personal experiences as a youth and a pastor and my research into LCMS materials, I came to understand that, in recent history at least, the LCMS has not placed a great emphasis on teaching young people about the importance and desirability of procreation within marriage. Sadly, my own congregation and circuit have not been exempt from this trend. The result is that multiple generations within the LCMS have been raised to believe that procreation and childbearing are merely ancillary features of marriage, and that there is nothing inherently desirable or praiseworthy about having children. Married couples are certainly not *discouraged* from having children, but neither are they explicitly encouraged to do so, unless they themselves have made the decision to start a family. I would imagine that any pastor today who told a married couple that God would want them to have children even if they do not desire them would receive some rather funny looks, or perhaps even a hostile reaction. Our people largely have not been trained to regard children as a blessing from God that He wishes to give to all married couples that are capable of having them. This state of affairs is certainly problematic, for several reasons.

Firstly and most significantly, it is important for the church to encourage Christian spouses to have children because God makes it abundantly clear that He desires them to do this. Multiple passages in the book of Genesis (e.g., Gen. 1:28; 9:1; 35:11) urge God's people to "be fruitful and multiply." Children and descendants are invariably portrayed as blessings from God to His people and a crucial aspect of His promises to the patriarchs. Additionally, passages such as Psa. 127 and 128 describe children as "a heritage from the Lord" and a "reward" (127:3) and describe the fertility of a man's wife as a blessing (128:3-4). There is no indication anywhere in Scripture that God's attitude toward children and families has ever changed; thus, it can be reasonably

stated that God still desires His people today to be fruitful and multiply. As heirs of God's promises to Abraham through Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:29), Christians should want to share in the same blessings that He gave to the patriarchs and to the people of Israel.

Secondly, the church should provide godly guidance on this issue because Christians are often bombarded with messages from the world that oppose God's design for marriage and procreation. Population scientists continue to warn about the dangers of overpopulation, and radical feminists encourage women to forsake childbearing and homemaking for the pursuit of fulfillment through career and leisure. As a result, many people, including Christians, believe that having children is either detrimental to the environment or a disadvantage to one's personal and professional success. Those who do wish to have many children, or who have already done so, face judgment and pressure from many elements of society. I have been told by parents in my congregation who do have larger families that total strangers have approached them in the grocery store, telling them sarcastically that there are ways to "prevent that" now. In my personal experience, when my wife and I announced that we were expecting our first child, a relative of mine stated that she never had children because the world was overpopulated, and that all families should limit themselves to two children. I did not ask her what she thought about my own parents having three children, and I have never asked how she feels about my wife and I having three children of our own now. If these examples are any indication, people with larger families are often made to feel ashamed of their fertility, which is why the church needs intentionally to encourage its members to ignore the naysayers and listen to God's Word instead.

Finally, the church must emphasize God's procreative design for marriage and family because *underpopulation* can cause just as many problems for society and for the church as its opposite. Because of societal pressures, and also because of more sophisticated and effective

methods of contraception, the fertility rate in the United States has plummeted in recent decades. Whereas the total fertility rate in the United States was 3.654 live births per woman in 1960, it plunged to 1.73 live births per woman in 2018.<sup>9</sup> Considering that the replacement fertility rate for any population is 2.1, the population of the United States will eventually begin to shrink if the current trends are not reversed. A declining population can cause societal ills such as a smaller workforce, a contracted economy, and a disproportionately large number of the elderly with fewer young people to care for them.

More significantly from a Christian perspective, a shrinking population in society as a whole usually portends a numerical decline in church membership as well. Although it is certainly critical for Christians to seek the lost and grow the church by bringing in new members, it is also important for Christians to grow the church by having their own children. Failure to do so will inevitably lead to smaller congregations and smaller church bodies, including in the LCMS. In 2016, the *Journal of Lutheran Mission* published an article by social scientist George Hawley entitled “The LCMS in the Face of Demographic and Social Change: A Social Science Perspective,” which discussed declining fertility rates in the LCMS and the potential consequences thereof.<sup>10</sup> While some within the LCMS have criticized Hawley’s article (partially on the grounds that it seems to downplay the importance of mission work to the lost in growing the church),<sup>11</sup> it has certainly brought some much-needed attention to the demographic issues that currently confront the LCMS and American society in general. I hope to add my own voice to

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<sup>9</sup> *World Bank*, “Fertility rate, total (births per woman) – United States,” accessed September 26, 2022, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=US>.

<sup>10</sup> George Hawley, “The LCMS in the Face of Demographic and Social Change: A Social Science Perspective,” *Journal of Lutheran Mission* 3, no. 3 (2016), 7–84.

<sup>11</sup> For example, see William W. Schumacher, “Demography and Mission in the LCMS: A Response to *Journal of Lutheran Mission*, December 2016,” *Lutheran Mission Matters* 25, no. 1 (2017), [https://lsfm.global/uploads/files/LMM\\_5-17\\_Schumacher.pdf](https://lsfm.global/uploads/files/LMM_5-17_Schumacher.pdf).

those who have expressed concern about the future of our church body, and to suggest a possible solution by encouraging the members of my congregation to take seriously God's encouragement to His people to be fruitful and multiply.

### **Research Question**

To this end, I have conducted a major applied project that seeks to answer the question: How will a procreation-centric approach to Christian marriage and family education help college-age young adults to value God's procreative design for marriage and family, and encourage them to make godly decisions about these matters in their own lives in the future? By answering this question, I hope to contribute to the ministry of the church by offering a more complete and Scripturally faithful way of teaching young people about God's design for sex, marriage, and family.

### **Research Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to determine how the participants had been instructed in matters of marriage, sex, and procreation in my congregation. I desired to learn how their attitudes had been shaped by this instruction or lack thereof. I also wished to teach the participants about God's procreative design for marriage and family in such a way that they would come to believe that children are a blessing from God, and that their attitudes about marriage and family planning conform to this understanding. Essentially, I hoped to encourage young adults to have children so that their marriages reflect God's procreative purposes. I wished to counter the world's message that children are burdens that prevent parents from having the standard of living that they deserve. I desired to help the participants understand that forming a godly marriage requires sacrifice, and in many cases having children is one of the primary ways

that husbands and wives sacrifice their personal comfort and luxury to obey the will of God.

I conducted my research with recent high school graduates from my congregation, many of whom will be soon enrolling in college or are already students at a university. College-age young adults are an ideal demographic for participating in this project. Most of those who are older have already made their decisions about their family composition, and there is little purpose in encouraging them to do something that is biologically too late for them to do. I also do not want to cause needless offense to those who have already made their decisions and have reached the point where it is, practically speaking, too late for them to make any changes. College students, however, are as yet unmarried, although they certainly do think quite a bit about dating and romance. My desire was to help them understand the purpose of their future marriages from a Scriptural perspective, and to help them keep this perspective front and center as they seek a future lifelong spouse. In particular, I wished to impress upon them that, under normal circumstances, children are to be regarded as an essential and intrinsically positive aspect of marriage, rather than as an ancillary feature to be enjoyed by a married couple only if they so desire.

The outcomes that I hoped to achieve with this project were as follows:

- To gain a greater understanding of how young adult members of my congregation were educated in issues of marriage and sex at Trinity, and how their beliefs and attitudes had been shaped by those experiences.
- To enable participants in the project to learn about God's procreative design for marriage and sex, with a potential change toward more faithful beliefs and attitudes about these issues.

- To equip participants to make godly decisions about their future plans for marriage and family.
- To produce a procreation-centric Bible study on the topics of marriage and sex directed toward young adults, which would be made available for the church at large.

### **Some Caveats**

With any issue that has the potential to be misunderstood or controversial, as the topic of this Major Applied Project certainly could be, it is important for the writer to be clear about his argument. At the close of this introductory chapter, I wish to clearly state some important aspects of what I do *not* argue in this project. Firstly, I do not argue that a certain family size is optimal, or that Christian parents' faithfulness to God's design for marriage automatically increases with every child they have. Larger than average families certainly can be a sign of faithfulness to God's design for marriage, but they are not necessarily so. Christians should be able to responsibly care for their children out of love for them, and if they are causing their families to become destitute because of their fertility, then they most likely are not loving their families as they should. There is a significant difference between responsibly limiting the size of one's family and having fewer children because one wishes to afford multiple houses, fancy cars, country club memberships, travel opportunities, excessive amounts of leisure time, and the like. In this project, therefore, even though I encourage Christian families to have children, I do not offer any suggestions as to how many children they should have. I wish for them to make those decisions in a godly manner, based on what they know they can truly afford to do in their own individual and unique situations.

Secondly, although with this project I strongly encourage Christian married couples to have children, I wish to distance myself from the idea that artificial means of contraception are

inherently sinful and always thwart God’s design for marriage and sex. Although some chemical contraceptives (such as birth control pills) can lead to the death of an unborn child, and should thus be rejected, many barrier methods (such as condoms and diaphragms) do not cause embryo deaths, and thus do not violate the Fifth Commandment.<sup>12</sup> I do not argue that such barrier methods of contraception are always sinful when they are used, as does the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>13</sup> I will develop this argument more fully in Chapter Three; at this point, however, I simply wish to state that my position does not preclude the responsible use of appropriate methods of contraception by Christian husbands and wives.

Thirdly, I also do not wish to elevate procreation as the primary method of “evangelism” for numerically growing the Christian church on earth, in opposition to seeking the lost and sharing the Gospel with them. Although larger Christian families certainly do lead to larger congregations and church bodies, Christians should not imagine that they have fulfilled their evangelistic obligations simply by having more children and raising them in the faith. I wish to encourage Christians to grow the church *both* by having children *and* by bringing unbelievers to faith in Jesus Christ through the proclamation of the Gospel. These two practices need not be mutually exclusive; it is unnecessary to set them against each other. The topic of this particular project is procreation within Christian marriages; therefore, I obviously give that issue significantly more attention than that of evangelism in the following pages. However, I do not want anyone to gain the impression from this project that I am opposed to evangelism or content for the church to “circle the wagons” and grow solely by procreation among its own members.

Finally, I also wish strongly to state that I am cognizant of the fact that many Christian

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<sup>12</sup> Donna J. Harrison, “Contraception: An Embryo’s Point of View,” in *Ethics of Sex: From Taboo to Delight*, ed. Gifford A. Grobier (St. Louis: Concordia, 2017), 91–103.

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 629–30.

spouses are unable to have children because of infertility, or may choose not to have children for other legitimate reasons (such as age, already having children from previous marriages, or well-founded concerns about bearing children with serious genetic disease). Such Christian husbands and wives should not believe that their marriage is “inferior” to others’ because it does not result in procreation; God uses marriage to accomplish other equally vital works as well. Marriage also provides spouses with lifelong companionship and an environment in which they can satisfy their sexual desires without falling into sin, and these God-given benefits remain even if procreation does not occur. I am aware that for many husbands and wives, the inability to have children causes terrible sadness and heartache, and I do not want this project to contribute to those feelings in any way. Although infertility issues are not the focus of this project, I have included a brief afterward addressing this issue in Appendix One, to provide some encouragement to readers who may be struggling emotionally with their inability to procreate. A fuller discussion of this topic is certainly needed, but it is beyond the scope of what I wish to accomplish with this project.

With these caveats aside, my purpose in this project, once again, is to encourage Christian young people to consider procreation and raising a family to be significant aspects of their future plans for marriage. I wish for them to understand that God will not bless them with their future marriages solely for personal fulfillment; they have obligations to conduct themselves in godly ways within their marriages. For most Christian couples, this will involve being fruitful and multiplying, as God commands and encourages His people to do from the very beginning of creation (Gen. 1:28). Such obedience to God’s design for marriage and sex necessarily requires sacrifices, but these are sacrifices that faithful Christians should be willing and happy to make. It is my hope that this project will encourage Christian married couples to bear children in

accordance with His design, and thus fulfill one of the main purposes of marriage for the benefit of their families, of the church, and of the world at large.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE PROJECT IN THE CONTEXT OF RECENT RESEARCH

In recent years, much has been written in the realm of social science about the issue of procreation. The intense debate in the mid-2010's surrounding the issue of same-sex marriage led to a renewed focus among those who opposed the practice on the importance of procreation as an essential aspect of marriage. Because same-sex marriages inherently cannot naturally produce children, it has been argued that they should not legally be considered marriages at all, since the government has no vested interest in regulating romantic partnerships that do nothing to ensure the continuation of human society into the next generation. I will give this particular line of argumentation some attention in this chapter, as my exploration of the issue of same-sex marriage served as my personal first exposure to the concept of procreation as an essential feature of marriage. I believe that these discussions have opened the door for Christians to speak about God's procreative design for marriage using the language of its secular opponents; that is, in a manner that does not require them to cite theological teachings or passages from Scripture. Such arguments likely will not convince most supporters of a revisionist view of marriage that sees the institution as primarily romantic in nature, but it does at least allow Christians to make arguments that cannot be easily dismissed as "religious."

Scientists and sociologists who discuss issues of human population have also said much about procreation in recent years, both in favor and in opposition to it. Those in favor of increased procreation claim that the world (and Western society in particular) will experience a reduction of population within the next several decades, and that such a demographic collapse will have highly negative effects on society and the global economy. Those who favor reducing procreation claim that the world population is spiraling out of control, and that too many people

will strain already scarce resources, which will lead to widespread poverty, starvation, and death. They also argue that a larger human population will accelerate the ongoing process of climate change and cause great environmental devastation. In this chapter, I will interact with representative voices from both of sides of this debate as I seek to answer the challenges of those who would discourage procreation on scientific grounds.

Finally, much of the sociological literature that discusses procreation does so from the perspective of radical feminism, encouraging women to bear a limited number of children (or none at all) so that they can be free to pursue the careers and lifestyles that they envision for themselves. From this perspective, children are largely seen as a burden, and they are only to be procreated when their parents (especially their mothers) so desire. Children are no longer seen as the essential fruit of marriage; rather, they are regarded as an ancillary feature that can be freely chosen or not, solely depending upon the wishes of the married couple. Such messages run directly counter not only to God's encouragement to His people to be fruitful and multiply, but also against the concept of marriage as an inherently other-focused and self-sacrificial institution. I will address the feminist arguments against procreation in this chapter and demonstrate why they fall short, from a Christian perspective, of providing legitimate reasons for Christian spouses to eschew bearing children.

### **Originality**

A word must be said here about the originality of this project. Although there has been some discussion of procreation and its importance to the church on an academic level in the LCMS in recent years, these discussions have as yet made little impact on the ministry of local

congregations,<sup>1</sup> especially on the level of youth and young adult instruction. As I described in Chapter One, most Lutheran resources that I have encountered say little about God’s procreative design for marriage, focusing instead on sexual purity and the avoidance of various sexual sins. If children are mentioned, they are typically portrayed as either a negative consequence of extramarital sex, or as an option that some married couples *may* wish to pursue. I intend to fill this gap in our education of young people: I wish to heavily emphasize procreation and its importance as I discuss God’s design for sex and marriage with recent high school graduates. To my knowledge, no educational resources exist that take this approach, so it is unlikely that the participants will have ever before been instructed by the church in these matters with this particular emphasis.

## **Literature Review**

### The Context of the Debate Over Same-Sex Marriage

My own personal journey toward realizing that the church’s overall approach to marriage and sex education was lacking began with my dismay at the seemingly inevitable legalization of same-sex marriage on the federal level in the United States (which occurred with the 2015 US Supreme Court decision, *Obergefell v. Hodges*). At first, my perspective was primarily religious: God says that homosexuality is a sin, and therefore same-sex marriage should not be allowed. However, I knew that such arguments could only carry me so far, as most people who disagreed with me did not consider the Bible to be a legitimate authority. In their minds, separation of church and state was a fundamental principle on which our country’s governance was built, and

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<sup>1</sup> Thankfully, one major exception to this trend is found in the Rite of Holy Matrimony of *Lutheran Service Book*, in which the pastor’s address to the bridal party contains the following sentence: “God also established marriage for the procreation of children who are to be brought up in the fear and instruction of the Lord so that they may offer Him their praise” (Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Service Book* [St. Louis: Concordia, 2006], 275). One sentence in this rite, however, cannot substitute for an overall lack of emphasis on procreation when instructing young people about marriage and sex.

bringing religious concerns into the public sphere violated this principle. I knew what I believed about same-sex marriage, but I could not speak in terms that would be accepted by those on the other side of the issue.

Once it became apparent that same-sex marriage would most likely become enshrined in federal law, I realized that I needed to explore some non-religious arguments against same-sex marriage. It was not until perusing the relevant scholarly literature that I realized that a strong case can indeed be made against same-sex marriage from an entirely secular standpoint, and that there are a number of scholars today who have dedicated their work to advancing that exact argument. I also found that one of the most crucial aspects to all of their arguments lay in the importance they placed on procreation and raising families within marriage. Thus, through the process of defending God's design for marriage, I came to realize that, from a purely secular perspective, procreation is the key issue for making that case in the public square. Furthermore, I also realized that procreation needed to more heavily emphasized in the church's teachings about marriage in general, which of course has led to the topic that I am exploring in this Major Applied Project.

In order to understand how exactly these traditionalist scholars influenced my thinking about marriage and procreation, it will be helpful to briefly examine each of them in turn. Although their overall approaches are very similar, subtle differences exist between them that, when taken together, present a well-rounded picture of the importance of upholding traditional marriage and the importance of procreation thereto. To begin, we will consider the work of the Sherif Girgis, Robert P. George, and Ryan T. Anderson, whose article "What Is Marriage?" appeared in the *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy*. This article can be classified as a rational defense of the traditional approach to marriage. Girgis, George, and Anderson logically

present their case for what they describe as the “conjugal view of marriage.” They define this view of marriage as follows: “Marriage is the union of a man and a woman who make a permanent and exclusive commitment to each other of the type that is naturally (inherently) fulfilled by bearing and rearing children together.” According to the authors, it is this natural orientation toward procreation that ultimately determines whether or not a marriage can be validly called such. Same-sex relationships, of course, cannot naturally produce children in the same manner as can those of the opposite sex, which makes them unable to be considered true marriages from the perspective of the conjugal view.<sup>2</sup>

The authors also assert that marriage’s orientation toward children and family is the precise reason why historic marital norms such as permanence and exclusivity have developed. It is in the family’s best interest for the mother and father to remain faithful to each other and not to end their marriage; hence, most cultures have historically frowned upon adultery and divorce. Religious teachings against those practices have certainly played a significant part in developing marital norms; however, one might also argue that those teachings exist because people of all faiths have recognized the importance of preserving intact families. If marriage were not naturally oriented toward procreation and children, there would be no significant benefit to society in encouraging married couples to remain married and faithful to each other. Because children are such an integral aspect of marriage, however, the government does indeed hold a vested interest in strengthening and preserving this institution, as it provides a stable environment in which the next generation of citizens can be raised.<sup>3</sup>

The authors also point out that children who are raised by their biological parents in an

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<sup>2</sup> Sherif Girgis, Robert P. George, and Ryan T. Anderson, “What Is Marriage?” *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy* 34, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 246.

<sup>3</sup> Girgis, George, and Anderson, “What is Marriage,” 259.

intact family tend to exhibit better outcomes across a wide range of measurements of their emotional and physical health, their achievement in school and in the workforce, and their integration into society. The authors cite multiple studies demonstrating that children of such families are more literate, more highly educated, less likely to suffer from depression, less likely to commit suicide, less likely to become pregnant as teenagers, less likely to suffer from attention deficit disorder, and less likely to become incarcerated. By contrast, children of single-parent families, blended families, and cohabiting parents fared measurably worse in all of these categories.<sup>4</sup> Any children raised by same-sex couples would also face the same difficulties as children from other non-ideal family and parenting arrangements. Thus, it is crucial for society to recognize the intrinsic link between marriage and procreation, as it is through the natural process of begetting, birthing, and raising children by their own parents that leads to the best outcomes for them. Allowing for same-sex marriage weakens this link, and as such the authors of “What Is Marriage?” strongly advocate for a return to the conjugal view of marriage.

Another rational defense of traditional marriage can be found in the work of Patrick Lee and Robert George, in their book entitled *Conjugal Union: What Marriage Is and Why It Matters*. Many of the arguments advanced in this book are similar to those from “What Is Marriage?” (and since both works share an author, one might expect this to be so). However, Lee and George are less concerned with the consequences for children and society of redefining marriage than they are with the philosophical bases on which the institution of marriage is constructed. As such, their argument against same-sex marriage is firmly grounded in the tradition of natural law philosophy. Basing their argument upon Aristotelian and Thomistic philosophical concepts, the authors argue that an act is morally right if it fulfills the natural

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<sup>4</sup> Girgis, George, and Anderson, “What is Marriage,” 257–58.

function of the actor. For a human being, this would involve behaving in a manner that is consistent with the purposes for which humans are naturally oriented. Since the human reproductive system is designed for procreation, it follows that the proper use of that system would be toward a procreative end. Because same-sex relationships eliminate the ability of the participants to procreate, they cannot be considered to fulfill the natural end of the human reproductive system, and they are thus morally wrong.<sup>5</sup>

Lee and George also explore the concept of “basic human goods” in their philosophical defense of the conjugal view of marriage. According to the authors, a basic human good is an aspect of human flourishing that is irreducible; that is, the benefits that derive from pursuing this good cannot be found in other goods. For example, knowledge of truth is a distinct good from physical health, which is furthermore distinct from friendship. All of these goods can be pursued simultaneously, but the pursuit of one cannot be substituted for the pursuit of another if both are desired. Lee and George identify marriage as a basic human good, an institution that is distinct from all others in that it allows a sexually complementary male and female pair to come together and produce children for the continuation of society and the human race. Although other goods such as companionship and romantic attachment can be derived from marriage, its procreative element is what makes it truly distinctive. Thus, to extend the institution of marriage to same-sex couples fundamentally alters the nature of marriage and prevents it from serving as a basic good that provides unique benefits to humanity.<sup>6</sup>

Again, one can see that Lee and George’s rational argument in defense of traditional marriage centers heavily on its quality as an inherently procreative institution. Their arguments,

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<sup>5</sup> Patrick Lee and Robert P. George, *Conjugal Union: What Marriage Is and Why It Matters* (New York: Cambridge, 2014), 16–20.

<sup>6</sup> Lee and George, *Conjugal Union*, 27–30.

and those of the scholars previously considered, establish the fundamental procreative purpose of marriage from the point of view of social science and philosophy. As such, any attempt to sever the connection between marriage and procreation ultimately destroys the integrity of the marital estate. Not only can this understanding of marriage assist in combating the practice of same-sex marriage, but it can also help married couples to view procreation as an integral aspect of their own marriages. Using these rational defenses of traditional marriage, from either the perspective of social science or of philosophy, will provide a rational foundation to supplement the church's teachings on the importance of procreation to marriage.

In contrast to the sober, logical appeals of the works already considered stands Anthony Esolen's *Defending Marriage: Twelve Arguments for Sanity*. Whereas the previous two books primarily based their arguments upon rationality, Esolen adds a deeply emotional component to his discussion of the issue of marriage. However, procreation and children continue to serve as central foci in his defense of traditional marital norms. One of Esolen's chapters begins with the story of a childhood acquaintance of his (whom Esolen calls "Jimmy") who was raised by two women. Esolen describes Jimmy as a sullen, foul-tempered child who had poor relationships with adults and with his peers. He had no father in his home to help him channel his aggressive tendencies in constructive ways, or to teach him how to do typically "manly" things. Jimmy eventually settled down, became a police officer, and got married, but Esolen's description of his youth is that it was not a "rousing success." As it turns out, the two women who raised him were his mother and his grandmother, as his father had died of a heart attack while he was still young. Esolen compares this unfortunate situation to those who would seek to intentionally deprive children of their father or mother by placing them in families with same-sex "parents." The natural, ideal situation in which to raise a child is with his or her biological parents, and only in

circumstances where this arrangement is impossible would it be responsible to consider other options. In telling the story of Jimmy, Esolen places a human face upon the costs of redefining marriage, and reiterates the importance of considering children and their welfare as an essential aspect of the marital institution.<sup>7</sup>

Esolen also uses an emotional appeal in his final chapter by describing a fantastical “Land of Marriage” in which traditional marital norms are widely respected and contemporary society’s sexual revolution has been fully rejected. Although this description is admittedly hyperbolic and idyllic, it certainly succeeds in creating an appealing image of a place where marriage is taken seriously. One of the features of the Land of Marriage is the prominence of children and families. Esolen writes:

Children are welcomed in the Land of Marriage. Why should they not be? To marry but not to want children would be like planting a tree and cutting off its leaves, or lopping the heads off the roses when they bloom. It would be like seeking a life without friends. It would be like saying, “No, thank you, I am afraid that joy would disrupt my settled routine.” For people in the Land of Marriage do not take themselves so seriously. They don’t limit the number of their children so that they can devote themselves more assiduously to their labor, like shuffling papers from one tray to another, or scraping plaque from the teeth of strangers with bad breath.<sup>8</sup>

Esolen thus not only portrays marriage as a beautiful institution that greatly benefits those who participate in it, but he also depicts children as one of the primary blessings of marriage. Esolen’s appeals on behalf of traditional marriage offer a powerful rebuttal of the emotional appeals made by those who seek to redefine marriage (i.e., homosexual couples are being deprived of their rights and have been greatly hurt by traditionalists). Because children factor so prominently into these emotional appeals for traditional marriage, they help establish that marriage and procreation are intrinsically connected, and to sever the two is to undermine the very purpose of

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<sup>7</sup> Anthony Esolen, *Defending Marriage: Twelve Arguments for Sanity* (Charlotte, NC: Saint Benedict, 2014), 135–37.

<sup>8</sup> Esolen, *Defending Marriage*, 167.

the marital institution.

Finally, one more scholar whose work deserves consideration in this discussion is Douglas Farrow, who authored *Nation of Bastards: Essays On the End of Marriage*. Unlike the previous authors here discussed, Farrow is Canadian, and thus he wrote in a societal situation in which the cause of same-sex marriage was further advanced at the time than it was in the United States. As such, his perspective is that of one who already has been forced to face the realities that legalized same-sex marriage has brought upon his country. Farrow is highly concerned with the effects that this new legal situation will have on children and the legal status of their parentage. Because Canada legally redefined marriage from the union of “one man and one woman” to “two persons,” the link between marriage and procreation was completely dissolved, which raised serious questions about the issue of legal parenthood. Farrow describes a case that appeared before the Court of Appeals of Ontario which legally settled the parentage of a child whose lesbian mother and her partner had been raising him after their mutual male friend donated sperm for the child’s conception. The court ruled that all three individuals were the child’s legal parents, and thus all of them possessed parental rights to raise him as they believed appropriate. This type of confusion would have been impossible in a society that still recognized the procreative purpose of marriage and understood that the ideal parenting situation for a child is to be raised by his or her biological mother and father. Eventually, such developments could lead to the collapse of biological parenthood entirely, which could have devastating consequences for the welfare of children.<sup>9</sup>

Ultimately, redefining marriage in a way that completely divorces it from children and procreation disrupts the natural order of the family in a way that renders the concept of biological

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<sup>9</sup> Douglas Farrow, *Nation of Bastards: Essays on the End of Marriage* (Toronto: BPS, 2007), 43–48.

mothers and fathers meaningless. It creates a situation in which the state has ultimate control over the parentage and rearing of children, making children essentially orphans in need of care from the government (hence the title of Farrow's book, *Nation of Bastards*). Farrow demonstrates convincingly that the legalization of same-sex marriage will eventually lead to greater and greater controversy about the rights of parents vis-à-vis their children, and the state will become the ultimate arbiter of these disputes. Of course, in so doing the state will appropriate for itself greater powers and responsibilities in raising the children who live within its borders, which renders them susceptible to being indoctrinated in state-approved ideologies, regardless of how their actual parents feel about such issues. Thus, redefining marriage not only destroys the link between marriage and procreation, but it also deprives parents of the ability to raise their children as they see fit.<sup>10</sup> At the time he wrote his book, Farrow could already see such developments progressing in Canada, and thus those of us who live elsewhere should heed his warnings on these matters. The link between marriage, procreation, and children must remain strong in order for marriage to remain the uniquely beneficial institution that it is, and so that children may be protected from the chaos that results when marital norms are weakened.

This brief survey of the relevant scholarly literature has shown that in making a non-religious case against same-sex marriage, many researchers have advocated for a conjugal understanding of marriage that places procreation and children in a highly important role. Marriage itself exists as an institution because of its intrinsic link to procreation, and should the link between the two be severed, marriage ceases to perform its unique function in society. Children are also harmed when these developments occur, as they are often deprived of one of their biological parents or placed in distressing legal situations with regard to their parentage.

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<sup>10</sup> Farrow, *Nation*, 63–69.

Some scholars argue this case on rational grounds, and some do so through emotional appeal. Some write from the perspective of anticipating developments that will most likely occur, while others do as they witness them happen in real time. All of them, however, are united in their understanding of marriage as a fundamentally procreative institution of society. Their arguments, therefore, have been very helpful to me as I uphold the rationality and necessity of procreation for Christian husbands and wives. Procreation thus is more than a matter of simply obeying God's commands: it also helps to maintain a practice of marriage that benefits children, spouses, and the world as a whole.

### The Challenge of Population and Environmental Science

In addition to serving as a topic of interest and discussion in sociology, the issue of procreation has become prominent in recent decades in the hard sciences as well. Specifically, much discussion has been held about the wisdom or lack thereof of limiting human fertility for the health of society and of the earth as a whole. Such concerns about overpopulation are not completely new; in fact, they can be traced back to the late eighteenth century, when the material conditions of Western society began to noticeably improve and populations began to rise dramatically. It was during this time that the desirability of large-scale reproduction within families was first called into question.<sup>11</sup> The first influential voice to raise concerns about overpopulation is widely recognized to be the Anglican clergyman Thomas Malthus, who based his approach to the issue of procreation not on Scripture, but rather on his own observations and theories. Malthus became alarmed by the rapid population growth he witnessed in England during his lifetime, and he speculated that continued unfettered human reproduction would prove to be disastrous for society. In his *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798), Malthus posited

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<sup>11</sup> Philippa Levine, *Eugenics: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford, 2017), 3.

that, when left unchecked, human population would double in size every twenty-five years, which represents a geometric rate of growth. Food supplies, however, would be unable to keep pace with this rapid rate of population expansion, which would lead to great scarcity and hardship in society, especially amongst the lower classes.<sup>12</sup> Malthus himself, being a devout clergyman, was by and large unwilling to advocate for intentional population control; rather, he considered the problem of population to be a hardship sent from God to stimulate people to greater industry and charity. The need to support oneself and one's family would cause humans to work hard and employ their talents properly, while the suffering of others would move them to share their resources with those who had few or none.<sup>13</sup> Others, however, did not perceive any benefit to the problem of population, and instead focused solely on alleviating and preventing the hardships that would result from unchecked population growth. The Malthusian League, for example, was founded in Britain in 1877 to advance the cause of intentional population control.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, although Malthus himself viewed the problem of population as an inevitable aspect of life in this world, many of his followers did not share his views, and they dedicated their lives and work to ensuring that his pessimistic predictions of widespread hardship and scarcity would not be fulfilled.

Since the publication of Malthus' work, the issue of overpopulation has received much attention in the scientific community, mostly from a perspective of concern over the negative impacts it could potentially have on society and on the environment. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Malthus' ideas, combined with Charles Darwin's theory of evolution as posited in *The Origin of Species* (1859), led to the development of eugenics as a legitimate

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (New York: Oxford, 2008), 15–19.

<sup>13</sup> Malthus, *Essay*, 141–58.

<sup>14</sup> Levine, *Eugenics*, 3.

scientific field.<sup>15</sup> The purpose of eugenic science was to engage in the “cultivation of race” or “improvement of stock” in the human population, so that the human race would eventually become stronger, fitter, and more intelligent.<sup>16</sup> Obviously, this eugenic endeavor could only be accomplished by carefully controlling human reproduction, so that the desired qualities would be passed on to successive generations and the less advantageous traits would be minimized or eliminated entirely. Francis Galton, widely recognized as the founder of modern eugenics, in his *Inquiries Into Human Faculty and Its Development* (1883), openly advocated for the discouragement of fertility among the “less fitted” classes of people, and even stated that such individuals who voluntarily decide to refrain from marriage and sex would be performing a great service for their society.<sup>17</sup> From the perspective of evolutionary science, the argument possesses some merit, but it certainly contradicts the Christian view of marriage and children as God’s good gifts to those who are physically capable of procreation.<sup>18</sup>

Although eugenic science originated in the late nineteenth century, it was not until the first half of the twentieth century that its ideas and practices were granted widespread acceptance in the scientific and sociological communities. The decades preceding World War II proved to be the apex of eugenic influence in Western society. One of the most well known advocates of population control measures from this period was Margaret Sanger, who in 1916 founded a birth

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<sup>15</sup> Levine, *Eugenics*, 2.

<sup>16</sup> Francis Galton, *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its Development* (Burlington, IA: Ostara, 2012), 17.

<sup>17</sup> Galton, *Inquiries*, 218–19.

<sup>18</sup> Galton’s desire to “improve” humanity by controlling fertility certainly contradicts God’s design for marriage and sex; however, there are certain cases in which his ideas can be accepted from a Christian perspective. For example, advances in genetic science have allowed humans to predict whether or not their offspring would inherit certain genetic diseases that would limit life and cause great pain for those who suffer from them. In such cases, it might be advisable for a couple (even a married couple) not to procreate. Again, however, the potential for misuse of this knowledge is great: women who are pregnant with children who are “tainted” by genetic diseases might choose to abort rather than give birth to them. Certain aspects of Galton’s ideas *can* be employed responsibly by Christians, but great caution must be taken when applying eugenic science to the question of procreation.

control clinic in Brooklyn, the first of its kind in the United States.<sup>19</sup> In *The Pivot of Civilization* (1922), Sanger describes what she sees as the problem with unrestrained fertility in her society: “It is a curious fact that a civilization devoted to mother-worship ... should close its eyes to the appalling waste of human life and human energy resulting from those dire consequences of leaving the whole problem of child-bearing to chance and blind instinct.”<sup>20</sup> She then proceeds to detail a number of specific cases in which poor and unintelligent mothers gave birth to large numbers of children, many of whom died and all of whom suffered greatly.<sup>21</sup> Anticipating the argument that greater charity from others and governmental assistance might be able to help these families, Sanger rejects this solution outright, contending that it would be inadequate to truly address the problem at hand.<sup>22</sup>

The true solution to the problem of overpopulation, according to Sanger, is to limit the fertility of those who would produce too many children, rather than structuring society and government so that the children of these families might have their needs met. Sanger certainly makes a legitimate point about the burdens (physical, emotional, and financial) of large families upon the mother, but she completely dismisses the prospect of governmental and charitable aid to such families as a legitimate solution to their ills. Sanger, and other advocates of birth control, preferred to limit family size and prevent such children from being born at all, rather than encourage the rest of society to care for these families and help to provide for their needs. Unrestrained human fertility was thus seen as the enemy of societal prosperity and stability, and as such strict limits should be imposed upon the procreation of children within families.

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<sup>19</sup> Levine, *Eugenics*, 57. This single clinic would eventually evolve into the organization known today as Planned Parenthood.

<sup>20</sup> Margaret Sanger, *The Pivot of Civilization* (Lexington, KY: CreateSpace Independent, 2017), 32.

<sup>21</sup> Sanger, *Pivot*, 34–44.

<sup>22</sup> Sanger, *Pivot*, 46–48.

Although eugenic science flourished in the first half of the twentieth century, the horrors of World War II and the Holocaust altered public opinion regarding eugenics almost overnight. The Nazis' obsession with racial purity and eliminating undesirable people (such as racial minorities and the mentally handicapped) from German society ultimately led to the greatest program of mass murder in history, which shocked and appalled the rest of the world when its existence was discovered. Eugenic science thus became intimately connected with Nazism in the public mind after 1945, which led to its largely being discredited and denounced as cruel and racist.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, the scientific interest in population control in general remained strong, particularly as ever-evolving technology allowed for greater numbers of people to be supported.

One scientist who was greatly concerned about the massive growth in human population during this period was Paul R. Ehrlich, whose 1968 book *The Population Bomb* became a New York Times bestseller and stoked public fears about the sustainability of the human race's standard of living in the face of unchecked reproduction. Ehrlich's work began with the startling assertion that hundreds of millions of people would die from famine in the 1970s, and that it was too late to prevent most of those deaths from occurring.<sup>24</sup> He did, however, believe that population control could ease the burden on society and avoid similar problems in the future:

Basically, then, there are only two kinds of solutions to the population problem. One is a 'birth rate solution,' in which we find ways to lower the birth rate. The other is a 'death rate solution,' in which ways to raise the death rate—wars, pestilence, famine—find *us*. The problem could have been avoided by *population control*, in which mankind consciously adjusted the birth rate so that a 'death rate solution' did not have to occur.<sup>25</sup>

Ehrlich's potential solutions to the problem of overpopulation included tax penalties imposed on families with children (especially those with more than two), the disconnection of sex from

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<sup>23</sup> Levine. *Eugenics*, 97–100.

<sup>24</sup> Paul R. Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb* (New York: Ballantine, 1968), xi.

<sup>25</sup> Ehrlich, *Population Bomb*, 34–35.

reproduction and focus on its pleasurable aspects in sex education, moral pressure on organizations that resisted population control (such as the Roman Catholic Church), and the promotion of abortion.<sup>26</sup> Ehrlich's ideas and those of other like-minded scientists have been quite influential in Western society's views of overpopulation. In general, unchecked reproduction is seen as a great danger to the human race, and population control is seen as a necessity to prevent the terrible repercussions resulting from it.

In more recent years, discussions about overpopulation within the scientific community have shifted from expressing concerns about food supplies and natural resources to sounding the alarm about the human population's contribution to the ongoing process of climate change. It is widely known that many scientists have expressed grave concerns about rising global temperatures due to carbon emissions produced by humans.<sup>27</sup> Such scientists contend that rising global temperatures will cause the ice caps at the earth's poles to melt, causing ocean levels to rise and reducing the amount of habitable land on the planet. Climate change has also been blamed for an increased number of destructive weather events (such as tornados, hurricanes, droughts, and wildfires),<sup>28</sup> and it is posited that climate change also will lead to mass human migration and displacement as already hot regions of the earth become essentially uninhabitable.<sup>29</sup> As I myself am not a scientist, I am not remotely qualified to debate the merits or shortcomings of these hypotheses, and so I will not attempt to do so in this project. My

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<sup>26</sup> Ehrlich, *Population Bomb*, 135–48.

<sup>27</sup> “Scientific Consensus: Earth’s Climate is Warming,” Global Climate Change: Vital Signs of the Planet, NASA, last modified September 22, 2022, <https://climate.nasa.gov/scientific-consensus/>.

<sup>28</sup> D.J. Wuebbels, et. al, “Executive Summary,” *Climate Science Special Report: Fourth National Climate Assessment, Volume 1* (2017), ed. David J. Dokken, David W. Fahey, Kathy A. Hibbard, Thomas K. Maycock, Brooke C. Stewart, and Donald J. Wuebbles, accessed September 27, 2022, <https://science2017.globalchange.gov/chapter/executive-summary/>.

<sup>29</sup> The White House, *Report on the Impact of Climate Change on Migration* (October 2021), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Report-on-the-Impact-of-Climate-Change-on-Migration.pdf>, 4-6.

interest in the science of climate change stems from the claims it makes regarding the effects of human reproduction on the process of global warming.

Many scientists today argue that human beings throughout their lives inherently cause the production of certain amounts of carbon emissions, not necessarily from their own bodies, but by their use and consumption of fossil fuels and other resources. Each individual in a developed society produces more carbon, on average, than do individuals from developing or agrarian societies. Paul A. Murtaugh and Michael G. Schlax argue that each individual person is responsible not only for the carbon emissions that they themselves produce, but also for those produced by each one of their descendants. In other words, simply by having children, a person will add far more carbon to the air than if he or she had not reproduced at all, and will thus contribute more to the process of climate change by several factors for each child born.<sup>30</sup> The authors conclude their article by stating that “ignoring the consequences of reproduction can lead to serious underestimation of an individual’s long-term impact on the global environment,”<sup>31</sup> heavily implying that prospective parents should consider environmental factors before making the (irresponsible?) decision to have children.

Similarly, Jenna C. Dodson et al. argue that population growth is one of the primary (and often overlooked) impetuses for rising global temperatures. They contend that none of the public policy changes (such as investing in alternative energy sources) implemented through national climate change pledges will be sufficient to stem the tide of climate change before great damage is done to the global environment.<sup>32</sup> The authors condemn coercive measures aimed at population

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<sup>30</sup> Paul A. Murtaugh and Michael G. Schlax, “Reproduction and the Carbon Legacies of Individuals,” *Global Environmental Change* 19 (2009): 14–15, [https://www.biologicaldiversity.org/programs/population\\_and\\_sustainability/pdfs/OSUCarbonStudy.pdf](https://www.biologicaldiversity.org/programs/population_and_sustainability/pdfs/OSUCarbonStudy.pdf).

<sup>31</sup> Murtaugh and Schlax, “Reproduction,” 19.

<sup>32</sup> Jenna C. Dodson, Patricia Dérer, Philip Cafaro, and Frank Götmark, “Population Growth and Climate Change: Addressing the Overlooked Threat Multiplier,” *Science of the Total Environment* 748 (2020): 1–2,

control (such as China’s former “One-Child Policy”), but they do advocate for what they describe as “rights-based family planning.” The goal of such a program would be to encourage families to have fewer children through measures such as investments in girls’ education, provision of opportunities for women to join the workforce, promotion of small family sizes, and general education about contraceptives and their use.<sup>33</sup> The authors cite countries such as South Korea, Iran, and Japan as examples of societies that implemented such measures and experienced drastic drops in their total fertility rates, with corresponding decreases in carbon emissions.<sup>34</sup> In the minds of the authors, discussions about such policies have been sorely lacking in the ongoing debate about the proper response to climate change, and they wish to encourage policymakers across the world to seriously consider implementing rights-based population control measures. By so doing, they may be able to stem the tide of global warming or reverse it outright, which would lead to a healthier planet and positive results for human society.

As I stated above, I myself am not a scientist, so I do not possess the knowledge or expertise to confirm or refute the claims made by scientists. If global temperatures are indeed rising, then they very well could have the dire effects predicted by the scientific community, and increased human reproduction could indeed be a significant cause. However, I would urge some caution against wholeheartedly accepting the narratives advanced by the scientific community, not for scientific reasons per se, but rather for historical ones. The fact of the matter is that many of the most disturbing predictions regarding human overpopulation have simply not come true. Paul Ehrlich’s book (published in 1968) claimed that widespread deaths from famine would occur in the 1970s due to overpopulation; in fact, the death rate from famine during the 1970s

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[https://overpopulation-project.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Dodson\\_etal2020.pdf](https://overpopulation-project.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Dodson_etal2020.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> Dodson et. al, “Population Growth,” 9.

<sup>34</sup> Dodson et. al, “Population Growth,” 4.

*decreased* from that during the 1960s by over eighty percent, and by the 2000s, famine deaths were only 0.6% of what they had been during the 1960s.<sup>35</sup> This drastic decline in famine-related deaths occurred as the world population almost doubled during the same period.<sup>36</sup> The reasons for the complete opposite of Ehrlich's prediction actually occurring are complex, and adequately exploring them is beyond the scope of this project. Nonetheless, the failure of his analysis should serve as a cautionary tale to anyone who might be tempted to uncritically accept the claims of population scientists, as many of their most serious predictions have been simply wrong.

Even the claims of climate scientists who fear rising global temperatures should be tested against the track record of similarly dire environmental predictions. For example, in the 1970s, some scientists predicted that the world would soon experience not global warming, but rather global *cooling*. These predictions were sensationalized in the media, with many articles claiming that a new ice age would soon be descending upon the planet. As in today's debate over climate change, human activity was thought to be a cause of a rapidly cooling earth, as emissions of soot and dust were preventing sunlight from reaching the earth and causing temperatures to drop.<sup>37</sup> This trend could cause glaciers to form over vast parts of the world, including Europe, the Soviet Union, Canada, and a third of the United States.<sup>38</sup> One article cited a team of scientists who claimed that there was "no end in sight" to the cooling trend in the northern hemisphere, even as

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<sup>35</sup> "Number of deaths resulting from famine per 100,000 people worldwide from 1900 to 2010," Statista: The Statistics Portal, accessed September 27, 2022, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/259827/global-famine-death-rate/>.

<sup>36</sup> "World Population By Year," *Worldometer*, accessed September 27, 2022, <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/world-population-by-year/>.

<sup>37</sup> Walter Sullivan, "Scientists Ask Why World's Climate Is Changing; Major Cooling May Be Ahead," *New York Times*, May 21, 1975, <http://www.wmconolley.org.uk/sci/iceage/ny-times-1975-05-21.pdf>. This same article also contained speculation that increased carbon emissions could cause a warming trend rather than cooling, with the *fortuitous* effect of warding off the predicted catastrophic ice age.

<sup>38</sup> Steven S. Ross, "The Ice Age Cometh ... Or Is It Just Another Lousy Winter?" *New York Magazine*, January 31, 1977, <https://books.google.com/books?id=PuQCAAAMBAJ&pg=PA32&hl=en#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

one might have expected temperatures to rise due to carbon emissions from fuel burning.<sup>39</sup> One newspaper editorial, in response to these apparent cooling trends, cited a policy proposal by Dr. Arnold Reitze from Case Western Reserve University that encouraged, among other actions, “**population controls**, the number of children per family prescribed and punishment for exceeding the limit [emphasis original].”<sup>40</sup> Limiting procreation thus has been proposed as a solution both for global warming *and* for global cooling, demonstrating that whatever disagreements environmental scientists may have, they often are united in their opposition to increased human fertility.

I must again stress that I am not a scientist, and therefore not equipped to debate the merits or lack thereof of any of these scientific claims. The broad consensus of the scientific community today is indeed that global warming is a threat to our environment, and that humans are a significant cause of this trend. The fact that scientists were wrong in the past does not mean that they are wrong in this particular case. I simply urge that their predictions be viewed with a critical eye and not be accepted unquestioningly, especially when they propose policies that conflict with God’s clear desire and will for His people. However, even if human procreation is indeed a cause of the ills that plague the environment, then perhaps humanity should be willing to weather the potential consequences (which may or may not occur) of faithfulness to God’s design for marriage. Failure to do so would place the hypothetical wellbeing of the planet above God’s clear commands, which is a path that faithful Christians should not tread.

Moreover, emphasizing the potential negative effects of increased human procreation

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<sup>39</sup> Walter Sullivan, “International Team of Specialists Finds No End in Sight to 30-Year Cooling Trend in Northern Hemisphere,” *New York Times*, January 5, 1978, <https://www.nytimes.com/1978/01/05/archives/international-team-of-specialists-finds-no-end-in-sight-to-30year.html>.

<sup>40</sup> “New Ice Age May Descend on Man,” *Sumter Daily Item*, editorial, January 26, 1970, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=QIQiAAAAIABAJ&sjid=4akFAAAAIAAJ&pg=1453,2230019&hl=en>.

ignores the potential negative effects of *decreased* human procreation on national and global economics. Jonathan Last, in *What to Expect When No One's Expecting*, describes some of the consequences of falling fertility rates in developed countries (such as the United States). He identifies an aging population as a major demographic challenge that occurs in such situations.<sup>41</sup> This trend can cause significant problems at the economic level. An older population means that society is comprised of a disproportionate number of senior citizens who are no longer economically productive (due to retirement) and are partially supported by government entitlement programs such as Social Security. Because such programs depend on productive workers to fund them through taxes, a smaller number of workers relative to retirees leads to an increasingly unstable system that could eventually become insolvent.<sup>42</sup> Additionally, the vast majority of innovation and economic investment comes at the hands of younger workers, rather than older retirees, which means that a smaller proportion of younger workers causes less economic growth and dynamism overall.<sup>43</sup> Although immigration of people from cultures with higher fertility rates can help to slow the decline, Last contends that the cultural friction it can create, as well as the assimilation of the new immigrants into the dominant fertility-averse ethos, makes large-scale immigration an impractical long-term solution.<sup>44</sup> Thus, even if declining fertility rates are beneficial for the environment, they are decidedly not so for the economy, especially that of developed countries with extensive social welfare programs.

Low fertility rates can also cause significant political and cultural problems, in addition to economic ones. Firstly, if a culture's fertility rate plummets, one can legitimately question

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<sup>41</sup> Jonathan Last, *What to Expect When No One's Expecting: America's Coming Demographic Disaster* (New York: Encounter, 2013), 98.

<sup>42</sup> Last, *What to Expect*, 106–9.

<sup>43</sup> Last, *What to Expect*, 100–2.

<sup>44</sup> Last, *What to Expect*, 113–18.

whether or not that culture can survive in the long term. Darrell Bricker and John Ibbitson, in *Empty Planet: The Shock of Global Population Decline*, tell the stories of a number of cultures (mostly indigenous) whose populations are declining perilously close to the point of extinction.<sup>45</sup> Without a native population to sustain these cultures' heritage, customs, and language, there is a very real danger that they will be lost to the world forever, preserved only in history books. Western (especially American) cultural imperialism reigns over a vast portion of the globe, and when populations become too small to resist it, the uniqueness of different peoples and nations disappears at an accelerating rate. Those cultures (including localities in the United States) that desire to maintain their heritage and traditions would do well to consider having more children to stem the homogenizing tide of globalization.

Population decline, and its attendant economic effects, can lead to significant political (and sometimes geopolitical) consequences as well. In China and India, for example, deeply patriarchal societies in which male children are preferred to females have combined with falling birth rates, a situation which has led to a disproportionate number of men in the population of both countries. By some estimates, between China and India combined, there are roughly seventy million more men than women in both countries.<sup>46</sup> Last, Bricker, and Ibbitson all express concern about such a situation combined with an aging population that places more economic stress upon the younger workers to care for the elderly. Countries whose populations are experiencing such pressures are rarely stable, and the potential for internal unrest or war as an outlet for citizens' frustrations is significantly higher than in societies where populations are growing or holding steady. Should the governments of China, India, or other countries with similar demographic

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<sup>45</sup> Darrell Bricker and John Ibbitson, *Empty Planet: The Shock of Global Population Decline* (New York: Crown, 2019), 194–206.

<sup>46</sup> Simon Denyer and Annie Gowen, "Too Many Men," *Washington Post*, April 18, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/world/too-many-men/>.

patterns become desperate, they could turn to war as a distraction from the economic problems their societies are experiencing.<sup>47</sup> Such cases are clearly extreme, and are not necessarily analogous to the situation in the United States and other developed Western countries. They do, however, serve as a cautionary tale of the potential challenges that can beset a society when its population ages and declines.

Finally, one must also consider the psychological aspects of a smaller population upon the individuals in society who are most affected by it. In her article for the *City Journal*, “Alone,” Kay S. Hymowitz laments the decline of the family (i.e.—fewer marriages and children, more divorces) in the Western world and the corresponding epidemic of loneliness it has caused. She tells the story of a 74 year-old New York man whose body was found in his apartment days after his death because of the foul smell emanating from behind the door. The man had no wife, children, or other relatives, and properly disposing of his assets proved to be a difficult ordeal because of his lack of kin. Hymowitz contends that this was no isolated incident: many people in developed countries are experiencing similar isolation, with entire industries developing in Japan, for example, to clean up the remains of kinless people whose deaths went unnoticed for long periods of time.<sup>48</sup> When people fail to form families and have children, they become socially isolated and have no one to care for them, which prevents people from experiencing the many social and psychological benefits of having children. Bricker and Ibbitson agree, describing these benefits for parents and their communities in glowing terms: “Children are wonderful. They bring joy to their parents and life to their neighborhoods. They renew and inspire and reward. There is nothing, absolutely nothing, more powerful than the love of a parent

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<sup>47</sup> Last, *What to Expect*, 134–36 and Bricker and Ibbitson, *Empty Planet*, 231–32.

<sup>48</sup> Kay S. Hymowitz, “Alone,” *City Journal*, Spring 2019, <https://www.city-journal.org/decline-of-family-loneliness-epidemic>.

for a child. That love is literally written into our DNA.”<sup>49</sup> A society with few children is one that is intrinsically lonelier and less hopeful, as its prospects for the future are significantly bleaker than in societies where children are embraced and having them is encouraged. There is little more one can do for the psychological and social good of individuals and the societies they inhabit than to encourage and enable them to start families of their own.

In general, therefore, it can be said that the scientific and sociological cases regarding the advisability of procreation in today’s world are decidedly mixed. On the one hand, population and environmental scientists tend to discourage prospective parents from having children, as overpopulation could potentially strain the supply of food and resources, and it could also potentially accelerate the ongoing process of climate change. As I have noted, however, the historical track record of the predictions of this school of thought is rather dubious in several cases. On the other hand, some sociologists warn of a coming demographic collapse in which the world’s population decreases, which causes aging and shrinking societies with smaller workforces, larger elderly cohorts that must receive governmental support, and less economic dynamism overall. This potential future also has yet to occur, which makes the ultimate effects of world population changes unknown at this time. Christian married couples must, therefore, be extremely cautious about ignoring the clear Word of God on the matter of procreation for the sake of preventing disasters that may or may not happen. As I have described, the consequences of doing this could potentially be just as bad or even worse than the possible consequences of being fruitful and multiplying. The predictions of scientists may be true or false, but the Word of God remains true forever. Christians would do well to remember which authority is ultimately the highest, and to make their plans for marriage and family accordingly.

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<sup>49</sup> Bricker and Ibbitson, *Empty Planet*, 94.

## The Challenge of the Feminist Movement

Although population and environmental science have over the last several centuries provided intellectual ammunition against “excessive” human procreation, the more popular and widely accessible case against it has originated from within the Western feminist movement. Feminism has existed in Western society in some respects for many centuries; however, it was not until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that a large number of feminist writers, both male and female, began to make a noticeable impact on public opinion. These early feminists focused on issues of women’s legal and social equality with men, tackling subjects such as equal pay for equal work, women’s property rights, the right to vote, the right to initiate divorce proceedings, and child custody laws.<sup>50</sup> This stage of the feminist movement held a largely positive view of women’s role as mothers, and one of its main goals was to prevent fathers from having absolute and total control over the fate of their children, especially in situations of divorce. For example, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, in her “Address to the New York State Legislature” (1854), argued that the contemporary laws regarding custody of children were cruel to mothers, who could be completely deprived of all contact with their children at the whim of their husbands.<sup>51</sup> As the feminist movement grew and evolved, however, its view of the role of childbearing and raising families in the lives of women became progressively more negative.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, feminist writings that criticized the traditional roles of women as wives and mothers began to appear. Some of the earliest examples of such literature were actually written by men sympathetic to the plight of women in Western society. One male writer who challenged the domestic ideal during this time was Friedrich Engels, who is

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<sup>50</sup> Margaret Walters, *Feminism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford, 2005), 26–55.

<sup>51</sup> Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “Address to the New York State Legislature, 1854,” in *Feminism: The Essential Historical Writings*, ed. Miriam Schneir (New York: Vintage, 1994), 114.

typically known mostly as the co-founder, with Karl Marx, of communist philosophy and economic theory. However, Engels also wrote extensively on the subject of gender relations in Western society from a Marxist perspective, and he concluded that the traditional familial system served only as a tool used by bourgeois men to maintain their property and ensure that their sons were able to inherit it. Women, specifically the wives of bourgeois capitalists, had no rights of their own, but were simply men's vehicle for attaining these goals. In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884), Engels summarizes his view of the development of the marital institution in Western society, the problematic developments within which he believed had their origins in classical Greco-Roman society: "The man took command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude, she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument in the production of children ... [The monogamous family] is based on the supremacy of the man, the express purpose being to produce children of undisputed paternity."<sup>52</sup>

In this understanding of traditional monogamous marriage, women are regarded as slaves of their husbands, and the production of children for the husband's economic gain serves as the main purpose of this degrading domestic servitude. The Industrial Revolution only served to exacerbate this problem, as it offered women the opportunity to work in factories, but in such a way as to prevent them from advancing in their careers *and* to prevent them from being able to work and carry out their domestic duties simultaneously.<sup>53</sup> Engels posited that once a communist revolution had occurred and property was equitably divided amongst all people, there would no longer be any need for the traditional family structure, and a woman would be free to take

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<sup>52</sup> Friedrich Engels, "The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State," in *Feminism: The Essential Historical Writings*, ed. Miriam Schneir (New York: Vintage, 1994), 189–90.

<sup>53</sup> Engels, "Origin" in Schneir, *Feminism*, 200. Engels draws an analogy between the relationship of husband and wife in his contemporary world and the historical relationship between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Compare his analysis with Paul's analogy in Ephesians 5 comparing the relationship of husband and wife to that of Christ and His church!

whichever lovers she desired whenever she chose to take them, without being shackled to her husband or even her own children.<sup>54</sup> According to Engels, therefore, the traditional Western domestic ideal served to enslave women to their husbands, and a more just system would allow them the freedom to make their own sexual choices and not be reduced to an existence whose only purpose is bearing children. Engels may have been essentially correct in his diagnosis of the plight of wives in the nineteenth century West; however, his solution of destroying the traditional family system certainly is incompatible with Christian marital and familial practices.

It was not until the close of World War I in 1918 that a truly organized Western feminist movement can be said to have emerged from the ideas of a small number of isolated intellectuals. World War I brought great changes to the lives of women in Western countries, as their work was needed to support the war effort and maintain the economy back home. As a result, new movements to gain additional rights and liberties for women flourished in the post-war years.<sup>55</sup> While most of these efforts focused on legal issues such as women's suffrage, a few feminists called for a more fundamental reevaluation of the traditional family structure in the Western world, much as Friedrich Engels had done several decades before. Some of the challengers of society's consensus on this issue did so from the standpoint of a positive appraisal of motherhood and its role in a woman's life. Among feminists who wrote from this particular perspective was the anarchist activist Emma Goldman, who relentlessly portrayed marriage as an institution that oppressed women and stifled all feelings of love, both between spouses and between parents and their children. Goldman believed that motherhood out of wedlock was preferable to having "legitimate" children within a marriage:

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<sup>54</sup> Engels, "Origin," in Schneir, *Feminism*, 201–3.

<sup>55</sup> Walters, *Feminism*, 86.

The institution of marriage makes a parasite of woman, an absolute dependent. It incapacitates her for life's struggle, annihilates her social consciousness, paralyzes her imagination, and then imposes its gracious protection, which is in reality a snare, a travesty on human character. If motherhood is the highest fulfillment of woman's nature, what other protection does it need save love and freedom? Marriage but defiles, outrages, and corrupts her fulfillment. Does it not say to a woman, Only when you follow me shall you bring forth life? Does it not condemn her to the block, does it not degrade and shame her if she refuses to buy her right to motherhood by selling herself? Does not marriage only sanction motherhood, even though conceived in hatred, in compulsion? Yet, if motherhood be of free choice, of love, of ecstasy, of defiant passion, does it not place a crown of thorns upon an innocent head and carve in letters of blood the hideous epithet, Bastard? Were marriage to contain all the virtues claimed for it, its crimes against motherhood would exclude it forever from the realm of love...

Love needs no protection; it is its own protection. So long as love begets life no child is deserted, or hungry, or famished for the want of affection. I know this to be true. I know women who became mothers in freedom by the men they loved. Few children in wedlock enjoy the care, the protection, the devotion free motherhood is capable of bestowing.<sup>56</sup>

Although Goldman clearly had positive views of children in the life of a woman, it should be noted that her positive appraisal of motherhood is rooted in the feelings of "love" it produces, rather than in God's command to be fruitful and multiply or in society's need to produce the next generation of people. Motherhood is thus portrayed as a woman's free choice, to be exercised by any woman whenever (or if ever) she pleases. This disconnection between marriage, sex, and fertility would have profound implications for Western's society's views on these issues.

Another prominent feminist of the early twentieth century was Margaret Sanger, whose interest in population control sprang from sources additional to her belief that overpopulation constituted a significant public health crisis. Sanger also advocated for birth control because having fewer children meant that women would be liberated from the burden of caring for large families, and thus would be able to exercise more freedom to make their own choices in life.

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<sup>56</sup> Emma Goldman, "Marriage and Love," in *Feminism: The Essential Historical Writings*, ed. Miriam Schneir (New York: Vintage, 1994), 322–23.

According to Sanger, birth control was necessary for allowing women to enjoy sexual intercourse without the fear of conceiving a child, and to enable them to fully benefit from the positive physical and emotional aspects of sex.<sup>57</sup> Sanger considered contraception to be an ethical imperative for women: “Even as birth control is the means by which woman attains basic freedom, so it is the means by which she must and will uproot the evil she has wrought through her submission. As she has unconsciously and ignorantly brought about social disaster, so must and will she consciously and intelligently *undo* that disaster and create a new and better order.”<sup>58</sup> In contrast to Emma Goldman, Sanger held a positive view of marriage overall; however, her views on motherhood as an optional choice for women were quite similar to Goldman’s, and contraception was the means by which this choice could be responsibly exercised. Birth control, thought Sanger, was the key to better marriages, more economically sound families, and happier women in general:

Women who have a knowledge of contraceptives are not compelled to make the choice between a maternal experience and a married love life; they are not forced to balance motherhood against social and spiritual activities. Motherhood is for them to choose, as it should be for every woman to choose. Choosing to become mothers, they do not thereby shut themselves away from thorough companionship with their husbands, from friends, from culture, from all those manifold experiences which are necessary to the completeness and the joy of life.<sup>59</sup>

Sanger, therefore, valued birth control for multiple reasons: not only because of its prevention of overpopulation, but also because of its ability to grant greater freedom, independence, and

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<sup>57</sup> Walters, *Feminism*, 91. The development of the latex condom and its mass production in the 1920s certainly allowed women (and men) much greater freedom to experience sex without the consequences of conception. Sanger’s ideas became much more realistic and feasible when this technological development occurred.

<sup>58</sup> Margaret Sanger, “Woman and the New Race,” in *Feminism: The Essential Historical Writings*, ed. Miriam Schneir (New York: Vintage, 1994), 327. Also potentially motivating Sanger’s thoughts was the radical difference in how men and women were treated when they conceived children together out of wedlock. Men were typically able to escape the situation rather easily, while women were given the responsibility of raising the children (in addition to a tarnished reputation). More responsible behavior by men (e.g., refraining from sex until marriage, remaining faithful to their wives and children) could be just as helpful in preventing women from experiencing some of the negative consequences of pregnancies as the use of contraceptives.

<sup>59</sup> Sanger, “Woman and the New Race,” in Schneir, *Feminism*, 329.

happiness to women. As such, Margaret Sanger serves as the quintessential example of how the concerns of both population science and feminism intersected and sought to achieve the same goal of limiting human fertility.

The end of World War II brought more changes to the lives of women in the Western world, especially in the United States. Whereas women after World War I were able to parlay their contribution to the war effort into improved legal and social status, the years immediately following World War II proved to be quite different. Although women certainly did not lose any of the legal gains they had made earlier in the twentieth century, the end of the Second World War brought with it a renewed promotion of stereotypically feminine virtues such as housewifery, submission to husbands, and devotion to children. During the late 1940s and 1950s, women began to leave the workforce, marry younger, and have more children (the post-war “Baby Boom”).<sup>60</sup> These developments contributed to the launch of the so-called “Second Wave” of feminism, in which a new generation of feminists arose to encourage women to resist the prevailing trends. Chief among these Second Wave feminists was Betty Friedan, who founded the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966 and wrote *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963.<sup>61</sup> In this highly influential work, Friedan argued that the traditional expressions of femininity and domesticity (which she dubbed “the feminine mystique”) that had enjoyed a resurgence in the post-war years were harmful to women professionally, socially, and psychologically. If they desired to reach their full potential, women needed to overcome the expectations of this feminine mystique, define their own identities separately from their husbands and children, and engage in meaningful professional work for themselves.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 2001), 15–18.

<sup>61</sup> Walters, *Feminism*, 102.

<sup>62</sup> Friedan, *Feminine Mystique*, 338–54.

Although Friedan certainly was not opposed to childbearing per se, she believed that the recent changing patterns of marriage and fertility in America were a serious problem, as they were symptomatic of the American woman's victimization by the feminine mystique. She writes: "By the end of the fifties, the United States birthrate was overtaking India's. ... Statisticians were especially astounded at the fantastic increase in the number of babies among college women. Where once they had two children, now they had four, five, six. Women who had once wanted careers were now making careers out of having babies."<sup>63</sup> Friedan considered it her mission to encourage women to have fewer children as a means of gaining more control over their lives and livelihoods. In a retrospective epilogue published in the second edition of *The Feminine Mystique* (1974), Friedan described the task she believed had needed to be undertaken:

Women also had to confront their sexual nature, not deny or ignore it as earlier feminists had done. Society had to be restructured so that women, who happen to be the people who give birth, could make a human, responsible choice whether or not—and when—to have children, and not be barred thereby from participating in society in their own right. This meant the right to birth control and safe abortion ... it seemed to me that most women would still choose to have children, though not so many if child rearing was no longer their only road to status and economic support—a vicarious participation in life.<sup>64</sup>

Large families stood as one of the major roadblocks in the way of women's full investment in society and in themselves, and as such the number of children would need to be reduced in order to liberate mothers from a lifetime of domestic drudgery. In this same epilogue, Friedan rejoices that a sharp decline in the birth rate had occurred, which she believed was due not only to the ready availability of birth control, but also to her efforts and those of other feminists to awaken women to their plight and the means of escaping it.<sup>65</sup> Friedan's pleas to women had been quite successful: many women heeded her encouragement to procreate less, and thus appeared to be

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<sup>63</sup> Friedan, *Feminine Mystique*, 17.

<sup>64</sup> Friedan, *Feminine Mystique*, 385–86.

<sup>65</sup> Friedan, *Feminine Mystique*, 393.

taking greater control of their familial, social, and professional lives.

Many other feminists rallied in support of Friedan's cause in the 1960s and 1970s, among whom was the highly influential Gloria Steinem, who co-founded *Ms.* magazine in 1972.<sup>66</sup> Steinem championed women's "reproductive freedom," which she defined as "a basic human right" and "the right of the individual to decide to have or not to have a child."<sup>67</sup> Steinem agreed with Sanger and Friedan that a woman's control of her own fertility was the key to her ability to live life as she so chose. Whereas Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* was reluctant to cast aspersions upon those she perceived to be standing in the way of greater freedom for women, Steinem held no qualms against attacking her political enemies. She blamed conservatives, especially religious ones, for forcing reproduction upon unwilling women and advancing the narrative that only procreative sex within marriage was a permissible use of one's sexuality. Conservative men, Steinem argued, sought to use reproduction to control women and prevent them from achieving their goals:

Obviously, this reproductive veto power on the part of women is exactly what male supremacists fear most. That's why their authoritarian impulse is so clearly against any sexuality not directed toward childbirth within the patriarchal family (that is, against extramarital sex, homosexuality and lesbianism, as well as contraception and abortion). This understanding helped feminists to see why the adversaries of such apparently contradictory concerns as contraception and homosexuality are always the same. It also helped us to stand together on the side of any consenting, freely chosen sexuality as a rightful form of human expression.<sup>68</sup>

Steinem, therefore, considered the conservative and religious elements of American society to be intrinsically opposed to her goal of women's liberation, and as such these opponents of equality needed to be opposed and legally defeated.

One of Steinem's major goals was to reduce sex to its pleasurable and emotionally

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<sup>66</sup> Walters, *Feminism*, 105.

<sup>67</sup> Gloria Steinem, *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions* (New York: Henry Holt, 1995), 164.

<sup>68</sup> Steinem, *Outrageous Acts*, 165.

fulfilling aspects and deemphasize its role as a reproductive act (unless, of course, the woman participating desired to have children). In an essay entitled “Erotica vs. Pornography,” Steinem makes the case for considering non-violent and non-exploitative sexually explicit images and videos as healthy expressions of human sexuality that should be produced and consumed without guilt or shame. Steinem argues that humans have always used sexuality for purposes other than procreation, and in fact this non-reproductive use of sexuality serves to distinguish humans from animals: “we have explored our sexuality as separable from conception: a pleasurable, empathetic, important bridge to others of our species. We have even invented contraception ... in order to extend and protect this uniquely human gift for sexuality as a means of expression.”<sup>69</sup> Again, Steinem continued to decry the misogynistic and repressive elements of American society that would prevent women from enjoying their sexuality without the fear of its natural consequences:

Such gross condemnation of all sexuality that isn’t harnessed to childbirth (and to patriarchal marriage so that all children are properly “owned”) has been increased by the current backlash against women’s independence. Out of fear that the whole patriarchal structure will be upset if we as women really have the autonomous power to decide our sexual and reproductive features (that is, if we can control our own bodies, and thus the means of reproduction), anti-equality groups are not only denouncing sex education and family planning as “pornographic,” but have tried to use obscenity laws to stop the sending of all contraceptive information through the mails. Any sex or nudity outside the context of patriarchal marriage and childbirth is their target.<sup>70</sup>

In Steinem’s estimation, sex serves as a positive aspect of a woman’s life in its ability to grant her pleasure and emotional fulfillment, rather than because it allows her to bring forth new life (unless, of course, she desires to do this). Religious conservatives who would emphasize the procreative aspects of sex above others, therefore, oppress women and prevent them from fully

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<sup>69</sup> Steinem, *Outrageous Acts*, 245.

<sup>70</sup> Steinem, *Outrageous Acts*, 245.

enjoying all facets of their sexuality.

Clearly, the feminist movement has sought to heavily influence the discussion about fertility and family size in the Western world. Throughout the course of the movement's history, feminists have steadily become increasingly opposed to unfettered female fertility, as they believe that such unchecked reproduction has served as a major source of repression for women. According to these feminists, producing too many children shackles women to a life of domesticity that is devoid of higher purpose or meaning beyond caring for one's children and pleasing one's husband. Some feminist writers, such as Margaret Sanger and Betty Friedan, focused on the professional opportunities that women lost when they were forced to care for too many children, and advocated birth control as a means of allowing women to continue to find meaningful work outside the home. Others, such as Friedrich Engels, Emma Goldman, and Gloria Steinem, saw the patriarchal family structure as inherently oppressive, and demanded that it be dismantled so that women would be free to choose lovers for themselves and enjoy sex for its pleasurable aspects, without having to worry about their traditional familial obligations. All of these feminist writers were united in their view that childrearing was a free choice, and that women need not feel obligated to anyone to give birth to children, especially a large number of them. These ideas, of course, run contrary to God's command in Genesis 1 to man and woman to be fruitful and multiply, and to the Scriptures' praise of all children as gifts from God. As such, the feminist movement, along with population science and eugenics, has done much to reshape Western thought on issues of fertility and the desirability of large families, and has actively sought to undermine biblical teachings on these subjects in Western society.

The results of the influence of population science and feminism have been predictable: birth rates in Western countries have plunged over the last half-century. According to data from

the World Bank, the fertility rate (number of lifetime births per woman) in the United States alone dropped from 3.654 in 1960 to 1.705 in 2019. Most of this decline, however, did not occur recently: the data from the World Bank indicate that the steepest drop in female fertility occurred between 1960 and 1976, in which the fertility rate plunged from 3.654 to 1.738. Fertility rates in the U.S. have remained relatively stable since that time.<sup>71</sup> The data show that a major shift in American reproductive behavior occurred during the seventeen years from 1960 to 1976, and the reasons for this shift are not difficult to identify. The oral contraceptive pill was first approved for widespread use in the United States in 1960, a development that had a predictably dramatic effect on Americans' sex lives.<sup>72</sup> No longer did couples who wished to avoid pregnancy need to abstain from sex, time their sexual activity against the woman's fertility cycle, or fiddle awkwardly with barrier contraceptives during the heat of the moment: now the woman could simply take a small pill every day and have sex whenever she and her partner desired, without the fear of unwanted pregnancy. As one might imagine, such a change would allow men and women to almost completely divorce the sexual act from its procreative end: now sexually active couples no longer even needed to consider the *possibility* of pregnancy and take any inconvenient or intentional steps to avoid it. Sex, effectively, became a vehicle for pure physical pleasure and emotional closeness for the couple, with any other purposes relegated to the backs of their minds.

One might also expect such a change in attitudes toward sex to affect people's attitudes toward marriage as well. Childbearing and raising a family, until 1960, were regarded as integral aspects of marriage in most cases. The data regarding the pre-1960 fertility rates in the U.S. indicate that such considerations were inevitable. Unless a married couple was infertile, had

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<sup>71</sup> *World Bank*, "Fertility Rate."

<sup>72</sup> Last, *What to Expect*, 55.

medical issues preventing pregnancy, or was too old to conceive children, pregnancy and childbirth in marriage were almost unavoidable. One could barely conceive of marriage under normal circumstances without them. The birth control pill, however, changed all of that. Now it was possible for a couple to conveniently have sex any time they desired and avoid the burdens of pregnancy and childrearing. They were able to enjoy each other and their lives together without experiencing any of the physical, financial, or emotional stresses of raising a family. If children were wanted, then a couple could certainly have them, but they were now an optional feature of the marital experience. Children were now a commodity, much like a new car or a box of cereal at the grocery store, rather than an essential and inevitable aspect of marriage. Statistics from the Center for Disease Control show that such attitudes about marriage and procreation certainly extend to married couples as well. A report about contraceptive use in the second half of the 2000s indicates that 99.1% of sexually experienced women in the United States (many if not most of whom were presumably married) had used some form of contraception at some point in their lives.<sup>73</sup> Pregnancy avoidance, therefore, has become a common feature of marriage in the United States, and the widespread availability of convenient and inexpensive contraceptives has facilitated this drastic shift in the marital landscape.

This trend of decreased fertility in many of the most developed societies worldwide has become so noticed by the scientific and sociological community that it has received the label of “demographic transition.” Several models of demographic transition have been used to describe the various ebbs and flows of human population over the millennia. In his book, Last introduces a model that recognizes two stages of demographic transition. The First Demographic Transition occurred in most Western countries in the latter half of the nineteenth and first half of the

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<sup>73</sup> Jo Jones, William Mosher, and Kimberly Daniels, “Current Contraceptive Use in the United States, 2006-2010, and Changes in Patterns of Use Since 1995,” *National Health Statistics Reports*, no. 60 (October 18, 2012): 2, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhsr/nhsr060.pdf>.

twentieth centuries. In response to falling mortality rates due to better sanitation, nutrition, and health care, the fertility rate of these societies also decreased. Before these technological advances, families needed to have higher numbers of children in order to ensure that at least some of them would reach adulthood, but with most of their children now surviving, fewer of them were needed. According to Last, smaller numbers of children resulted in more child-centric parents; that is, they spent much more time and effort taking care of and doting on their children, whereas before the First Demographic Transition, children were “somewhat disposable.”<sup>74</sup>

In the second half of the twentieth century, however, developed countries began to experience the Second Demographic Transition, which consisted of plunging fertility rates without a corresponding change in the death rate. The reasons for this change are identified to be primarily value-based, exactly what one would expect in a society that has been heavily influenced by the feminist movement. Because contraception is now readily available to everyone who wants to use it, women (and their male partners) are able to control their fertility to the degree that, in most cases, they will only have children if they desire them. Childbearing thus becomes an “act of self-actualization,” rather than of necessity. It is an expression of individual (some might say selfish) desire, rather than the self-sacrificial act of loving children and raising them as productive citizens of the world (and for Christians, as members of the church).<sup>75</sup> Of course, the high costs of raising a child in the developed world also contribute to parental reluctance to bear children,<sup>76</sup> as does increased participation of women in higher

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<sup>74</sup> Last, *What to Expect*, 91–92.

<sup>75</sup> Last, *What to Expect*, 93.

<sup>76</sup> Last, *What to Expect*, 38–47. Last lists such factors as Social Security and Medicare taxes, rising costs of college education, childcare expenses, and the foregone salaries of mothers who choose to stay home and raise their children as additional costs on parents that can make raising children financially prohibitive.

education and the workforce.<sup>77</sup> However, those who sincerely desired to be fruitful and multiply according to God's design would be willing to bear those costs for the sake of faithfulness to Him, as well as for their own desire to procreate. The ongoing Second Demographic transition thus demonstrates the powerful effect that changing societal mores regarding procreation can have on the fertility rate of a modern, developed society.

Bricker and Ibbitson also describe a model of demographic transition, but instead of two stages, they identify five. The first stage encompasses most of human history, in which birth rates were high to compensate for high death rates, and the world population grew at a very slow rate. The second stage, at least in the Western world, began to occur several centuries ago in response to the technological advances mentioned in the previous paragraphs, which caused the death rates to dramatically drop, even as birth rates remained steady. This caused an explosive growth in population that only slowed as the process of urbanization began. As more and more people moved into the cities, they began to have fewer children, as urban housing was more expensive and less spacious, and since children can contribute less to the household economy than they can in rural settings. In this third demographic stage, population continues to grow, but at a much slower rate. Eventually, society reached the fourth demographic stage, in which the birth and death rates roughly equaled each other, creating a stable or slowly growing population. Bricker and Ibbitson contend that most Western societies have been in this fourth stage since the early twentieth century, notwithstanding the post-World War II baby boom that they argue should be seen as an anomaly.<sup>78</sup>

In recent decades, however, developed societies have begun to transition to the fifth stage of demographics, in which death rates remain constant, but birth rates fall below replacement

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<sup>77</sup> Last, *What to Expect*, 47–51.

<sup>78</sup> Bricker and Ibbitson, *Empty Planet*, 7–20.

level. As does Last, Bricker and Ibbitson credit changes in societal mores and policies for the bulk of this shift. These changes include the liberation and greater independence of women, the declining influence of religion, and the legalization of contraception and abortion. The authors contend that men no longer have the same power over women's reproductive decisions as they once did, and that has caused women to have fewer children as a form of empowerment.<sup>79</sup> Again, one can easily perceive the influence that feminist thought has exerted on these demographic patterns, with significant consequences for the future of developed societies such as the United States.

In responding to the case against procreation from a feminist perspective, one must recognize that feminist arguments are value-laden; that is, they originate from views and opinions about what is most important and what should be prioritized in life. There is no way to “prove” that feminist arguments about procreation are wrong, especially when some of those arguments do indeed identify injustices in how women have been treated historically. In response to the concerns of the feminist movement, Christians should admit that women have often been treated unfairly and cruelly in all societies throughout history. Religious teachings have indeed been co-opted in support of the oppression of women, and it should also be recognized that having large families can in fact place a heavy burden upon wives and mothers. Women desire to participate in meaningful and fulfilling work as much as men do, and many children in the home can prevent them from attaining their professional goals. Christian husbands are called to support their wives in their work as homemakers, and to help them find fulfillment in other areas of life as well. Women need not serve exclusively as housewives for their entire adult lives:

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<sup>79</sup> Bricker and Ibbitson, *Empty Planet*, 47–54. One might respond that men also are “empowered” by these developments to have sexual relationships with women without having to fear the consequences of unplanned pregnancies or unwanted children. Children also place burdens upon the men who father them, and those men who are uninterested in being fathers may welcome ready access to contraception and abortion just as much as do their female sexual partners.

professional opportunities now exist for them, which is a positive development in Western society.

However, because feminist arguments are value-laden, it is appropriate to examine those values to see if they comport with Christian teachings. When such an evaluation is done, it is clear that the anti-procreative aspects of feminism clearly stand in opposition to God's Word. A fuller examination of Christian teaching regarding procreation is forthcoming in Chapter Three; however, some words can be said here responding specifically to feminist arguments from a Christian perspective. Christian women should understand that living according to God's design and accepting the blessings He desires to give His people (such as children) requires a person to take up one's cross and follow Him (Matt. 16:24–26), which involves self-sacrifice and commitment to the welfare of others. Christian women (and men who are also motivated by these concerns) cannot allow their understandable desire for social and professional fulfillment to prevent them from serving their families and receiving God's blessing of children. The procreative aspects of sex also cannot be jettisoned for an exclusive focus on physical pleasure and emotional gratification. God created the human reproductive system primarily for the purpose of producing other human beings; therefore, to repeatedly, deliberately, and permanently thwart the procreative aspect of sex within a marriage is to flout God's design for marriage and sexuality. To remain childless as a married couple if such a situation can be easily avoided is thus (in most cases) to succumb to the desires of the sinful flesh, which seeks to avoid the hardship and self-sacrifice that can result from living according to God's design. Although women can rightfully expect their husbands to share the burdens of raising children as much as possible and to help them find reasonable professional opportunities, they ordinarily should not forsake procreation entirely. God's encouragement to married couples to be fruitful and multiply

still stands, even in a culture that has been heavily influenced by feminist thought.

Ultimately, the root issue behind contemporary Western society's reluctance to embrace fertility is one of trust: not only trust that God has actually commanded married couples to procreate, but also trust that He will provide for His people. Feminists desire to maintain a certain level of physical pleasure, emotional fulfillment, and professional success for women, and many of them believe that preventing women from having children is the best means of achieving this goal. The Christian, however, understands that all things are in God's control, and knows that human beings' efforts to create the lives for themselves that they might desire can only achieve so much. Christians simply receive the blessings God has given them and trust that He will preserve their lives and livelihoods and grant them physical and emotional fulfillment. Even during difficult times that might have been avoided had a family simply had fewer children, Christian parents trust that God will help them overcome the adversities that they may encounter. The promises of forgiveness of sins and eternal life in Christ grant Christians the willingness to trust in God's provision for them, and as such they are able to receive His blessings to them, including the blessing of marital fertility and children, with confidence and without fear. The influence of feminism in modern Western culture is powerful, but the Word of God stands forever, and it has the capability to change the mindsets of all who trust in what it says. The church's task in this cultural climate, therefore, is to proclaim boldly what the Word of God says regarding procreation and children: that they are blessings from God and are not to be intentionally avoided in most circumstances.

### **Conclusion**

This review of the relevant scholarly literature concerning the issue of procreation suggests that the church faces a largely uphill battle in advocating for God's design for marriage and

sexuality in the Western world today. Population and environmental scientists largely have been very effective in expressing their concerns that overpopulation will consume resources and destroy the planet. Feminists have likewise been equally effective in reducing marriage, sex, and parenthood to their romantic, pleasurable, and self-fulfilling aspects, with a corresponding decrease in society's understanding of marriage as a fundamentally other-focused and self-sacrificial institution. However, some developments in sociology have occurred can assist the church in articulating a case for marital procreation as a supplement to the teachings of Christian theology. In particular, the warnings of demographers who are concerned with the potential negative effects of population decline on politics and economics can be effectively employed to counter the message that population growth will cause catastrophic effects on the environment. Additionally, the philosophical and sociological writings that have been produced in response to the debate over same-sex marriage can indirectly be used to support the concept of marriage as a fundamentally procreative institution. Most of these arguments against same-sex marriage ultimately stem from its historical association with procreation, which also serves to counter the feminist conception of marriage as primarily concerned with the spouses' emotional connection and physical pleasure. Thus, although it may seem at first glance that the scientific and sociological consensus is squarely against encouraging procreation, there are still many significant voices that argue the opposite.

Ultimately, however, the views of Christians toward procreation can only rightly be determined by the teachings of the Word of God and Christ's church. Arguments from science and sociology are helpful, but they cannot serve as the main authority for Christians on these matters. If Christians are to encourage married couples to procreate, then they must do so with a solid foundation in Christian theology as their source of authority. Therefore, in the following

chapter, we turn to the theological foundation of this project.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THE PROJECT IN THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

As already stated in Chapter One, it is abundantly clear from the witness of the Holy Scriptures that God desires His people to be fruitful and multiply in accordance with the encouragement He first gave to Adam and Eve at their creation. In this chapter examining my project in theological perspective, I will therefore discuss the scriptural aspects of the project at great length, using an exegesis of relevant verses from the book of Genesis as a foundation. I will then explore the topic of procreation as it has been discussed in systematic theology throughout the last five centuries, beginning first and foremost with the Lutheran confessions. From there, I will move to an examination of the systematic theological writings of selected church fathers (both from the early church and from the historic Lutheran church) on this topic, as many of them wrote extensively about the issues of marriage and family. I will conclude with some attention to the relevant discussions within contemporary Lutheranism, especially within the LCMS.

One of the most common reactions I have received when describing this project to others is the almost reflexive statement that such a focus on procreation “sounds Catholic” or is “too Catholic.” In the popular mind, it appears that any religious teaching that would uphold the value of procreation within marriage is automatically associated with Roman Catholicism. This view is understandable, given the Roman Catholic Church’s well-known prohibition of all artificial methods of birth control; however, it fails to recognize that the Lutheran Church has historically been just as pro-natal as its Roman Catholic counterpart. It is true that most Lutherans (including me) do not condemn responsible family planning or artificial birth control methods, and as such it is important that I distinguish my own position on these matters from that of Roman

Catholicism. Therefore, in a section of this chapter, I will address the charge that a focus on procreation within marriage is “too Catholic,” and seek to faithfully articulate a procreation-centric Lutheran teaching that does not veer into unscriptural absolute prohibitions on birth control.

## **Biblical and Theological Foundation**

### The Witness of the Holy Scriptures

The book of Genesis, as both its Hebrew and Greek names imply, is decidedly concerned with *beginnings*. Most obviously, Genesis presents the narratives of God’s creation of the earth and the whole universe, as well as the plant, animal, and human life that exists therein. Genesis also contains the accounts of the growth and development of human civilization from a single family to multiple tribes, peoples, and nations. From a Jewish or Christian perspective, Genesis serves as the foundational text that describes the origins of the people of God, as its stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob’s twelve sons recount the beginning of the nation of Israel as God’s chosen people. Crucial to all of these developments in early human history was God’s blessing, encouragement, and command to the people He created to “be fruitful and multiply.” God repeats this exhortation to humanity several times throughout the book of Genesis, and without exception He does so at highly significant turning points in the biblical narrative. Although the issue of human fertility is often overlooked in studies of Genesis, it is clear that human procreation plays an important role in the narrative of this book, and of that of the Scriptures as a whole. An examination, therefore, of the grammar and contexts of God’s encouragements to humanity to be fruitful and multiply in Genesis will help determine how fertility factors into God’s design for His people and humankind in general, both in the narrative of Scripture and in the life of His church today.

The first (and most well-known) instance of God’s command to humanity “be fruitful and multiply” is found in Gen. 1:28, at the conclusion of the six-day creation narrative.<sup>1</sup> The Masoretic text of the first half of this verse can be translated as follows: “And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.’” The words most relevant to this particular study are פָּרֹו (peru) and וַרְבוּ (urevu), which are commonly translated as “be fruitful” and “and multiply,” a dual command from God to the first man and woman. According to Brown-Driver-Briggs, these typical translations are accurate and adequately convey the sense of the Hebrew terms. Indeed, the primary definition given for פָּרָה (parah) in BDB concerns the fruitfulness (i.e., the fertility) “of men and animals,” and that of vines or crops is relegated to a secondary definition.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, the primary definition for רָבָה (rabah) in BDB concerns the multiplication of “of a people,” as opposed to animals or inanimate objects.<sup>3</sup>

In this particular case, the recipients of this command from God are also encouraged to “fill the earth and subdue it,” further emphasizing God’s desire for them to procreate and become numerous enough to govern the earth He has created. It is important to note that these verb forms are all second person imperatives, having the force of true direct commandments from God. However, Joüon also observes that the imperative form, like the jussive, can express all “shades of the will” (such as command, but also exhortation, invitation, etc.).<sup>4</sup> These imperatives, therefore, may perhaps be best understood not as harsh, demanding orders, but rather as a gracious invitation from God to participate in His will for His creation.

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<sup>1</sup> These commands had also previously been given to the newly created fish and birds in v. 22.

<sup>2</sup> BDB s.v. פָּרָה, a 1,2.

<sup>3</sup> BDB s.v. רָבָה, .1a

<sup>4</sup> Paul Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, trans. T. Muraoka (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2005), 2: 373–78.

Although Gen. 1:28 certainly stands as the best-known instance where God encourages humanity to reproduce, it is not the only biblical passage in which similar language can be found. Indeed, these same imperatives appear directed toward humanity several more times in the book of Genesis alone. They are found first in Gen. 9:1, 7, in the immediate aftermath of the flood and God’s rescuing of Noah and his family from destruction.<sup>5</sup> The Masoretic text of Gen. 9:1 can be translated as follows: “And God blessed Noah and his sons. And He said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.’” The language of this text is practically identical to that of Gen. 1:28, although it ends at “fill the earth,” whereas the earlier text continues with further imperatives. Finally, the command to be fruitful and multiply also appears in Gen. 35:11, in which God is in the process of blessing Jacob and renaming him. The Masoretic text of this verse can be translated as follows: “And God said to him, ‘I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations will be from within you, and kings from your loins will come out.’” Although the wording and concepts of this verse differ significantly from the passages previously considered, the same two verbs (פָּרָה and רָבָה) are present in the imperative form, albeit in the masculine singular rather than the plural. As this exhortation from God to humanity specifically to be fruitful and multiply is given three separate times in the Genesis narrative, it is clear that human fertility plays an important role in His design for His creation, and particularly for the people whom He chose to receive His promises.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In Gen. 8:17, God also gives Noah and all of the animals together the command to be fruitful and multiply as they are leaving the ark after the flood. This study will focus only on the verses in which God addresses human beings and human beings alone with these words.

<sup>6</sup> It should also be noted that the themes of procreation and its desirability can be found in many other passages in Genesis (let alone throughout the rest of the Scriptures), even when the direct command to be fruitful and multiply is absent. Eve rejoices when her son Cain is born (4:1). God promises to bless Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by making a great nation of them and multiplying their descendants (12:2; 15:1–6; 17:4–8; 26:3–5; 28:13–14). Genesis 47:27 triumphantly recounts Israel’s family’s multiplication after their settlement in Egypt. The genealogies of Genesis also emphasize the importance of family and its lineage (which, of course, is impossible without procreation). Thus, even when God does not directly encourage human beings to procreate, human fertility is

From ancient times, the majority of Christian commentators have expressed the view that the first of God's commands to humanity to be fruitful and multiply (in Gen. 1:28) play a fundamental role in God's establishment of the institution of marriage. Although many of the early church fathers certainly expressed negative opinions of the sexual act itself, they generally also held marriage and fertility in high regard. Augustine in particular was very careful to distinguish what he saw as excessive, immoderate sex between married couples and making proper use of the nuptial blessing for the procreation of children. In *On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis*, Augustine asserts that human reproduction was the very purpose for which God created human beings male and female:

If one should ask why it was necessary that a helper be made for man, the answer that seems most probable is that it was for the procreation of children ... This purpose was declared in the original creation of the world: "Male and female he made them. And God blessed them and said, 'Increase and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.'" This reason for creation and union of male and female, as well as this blessing, was not abrogated after the sin and punishment of man. It is by virtue of this blessing that the earth is now filled with human beings who subdue it. Although it was after the expulsion of the man and the woman from paradise that they came together in sexual intercourse and begot children, according to Scripture, nevertheless I do not see what could have prohibited them from honorable nuptial union and "the bed undefiled" even in paradise. God could have granted them this if they had lived in a faithful and just manner in obedient and holy service to him, so that without the tumultuous ardor of passion and without any labor and pain of childbirth, offspring would be born from their seed.<sup>7</sup>

In *City of God*, Augustine again emphasizes that God intended sexual intercourse and human reproduction to serve as an essential feature of the marital estate, even before the fall into sin: "The nuptial blessing ... whereby the pair, joined in marriage, were to increase and multiply and fill the earth, remained in force even when they sinned. Yet it was given before they sinned,

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uniformly held in positive regard in the book of Genesis, and this theme plays a significant role throughout the book's entire narrative.

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Louth and Thomas C. Oden, eds., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament*, vol. 1, *Genesis 1–11* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 39.

for its purpose was to make clear that the procreation of children is a part of the glory of marriage and not of the punishment of sin.”<sup>8</sup> Clearly, Augustine considered God’s blessing of fertility for Adam and Eve to be foundational for marriage not only for the first two human beings, but also for all those who would descend from them.

Augustine’s interpretation of Gen. 1:28 has remained quite influential in the church throughout the centuries since his life and ministry. Of the many theologians who shared his views on this passage, Martin Luther stands as one of the most prominent. Like Augustine, Luther lamented the effects of the fall on marriage and specifically on the act of sexual intercourse: “[To be fruitful] is a command of God added for the creature. But, good God, what has been lost for us here through sin! ... Now the flesh is so overwhelmed by the leprosy of lust that in the act of procreation the body becomes downright brutish and cannot beget in the knowledge of God.”<sup>9</sup> However, Luther still considered God’s command to be fruitful and multiply to be a blessing for humanity even after the fall had occurred: “Therefore the blessing, which remains till now in nature, is, as it were, a cursed and debased blessing if you compare it with that first one; nevertheless, God established it and preserves it. So let us gratefully acknowledge this ‘marred blessing.’”<sup>10</sup>

Luther clearly believed that God’s blessing and command of fertility for Adam and Eve remained in force even to his present day. As such, he excoriates those who refuse to take advantage of this blessing from God and obey His commands:

Today you find many people who do not want to have children. Moreover, this callousness and inhuman attitude, which is worse than barbarous, is met with chiefly among the nobility and princes, who often refrain from marriage for this one single

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<sup>8</sup> Louth and Oden, *Commentary*, 39.

<sup>9</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 1, *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 1-5*, trans. George V. Schlick (St. Louis: Concordia, 1960), 71.

<sup>10</sup> *LW* 1:71.

reason, that they might have no offspring. It is even more disgraceful that you find princes who allow themselves to be forced not to marry, for fear that the members of their house would increase beyond a definite limit. Surely such men deserve that their memory be blotted out from the land of the living. Who is there who would not detest these swinish monsters? But these facts, too, serve to emphasize original sin. Otherwise we would marvel at procreation as the greatest work of God, and as a most outstanding gift we would honor it with the praises it deserves.<sup>11</sup>

According to Luther, therefore, refusal to participate in the procreative act, and refraining from marriage to do so, stands as an act of sinful rebellion against God and His design for humanity. Luther thus viewed God's encouragement to Adam and Eve in Gen. 1:28 as a commandment as well as a blessing, one that has continued to remain in force throughout all of human history, even after the fall into sin has caused it to lose its original innocence and perfection.

Many modern commentators, like Augustine and Luther, also emphasize the importance of God's blessing of fertility for the human race, although they do not always automatically assume that this blessing establishes the estate of marriage. One contemporary commentator who does explicitly make this connection between fertility and marriage is Gordon J. Wenham, whose commentary on Gen. 1:28 mirrors that of the passage's earlier interpreters. Wenham emphasizes God's role in not only commanding human fertility, but in blessing humanity with it as well: "Like the animals man is to 'be fruitful and multiply' ... the focus in Genesis is on the fulfillment of the blessing of fruitfulness. This command, like others in Scripture, carries with it an implicit promise that God will enable man to fulfill it."<sup>12</sup> Wenham proceeds to connect this blessing with the marital estate, positing that it also serves as a repudiation of ancient Near Eastern pagan religions: "Here, then, we have a clear statement of the divine purpose of marriage: positively, it is for the procreation of children; negatively, it is a rejection of the

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<sup>11</sup> *LW* 1:118.

<sup>12</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 33.

ancient oriental fertility cults. God desires his people to be fruitful. His promise makes any participation in such cults or the use of other devices to secure fertility not only redundant, but a mark of unbelief.”<sup>13</sup> Other commentators who do not explicitly address the institution of marriage, but who also affirm that human fertility serves as an intrinsic aspect of God’s blessing in Gen. 1:28 include John Skinner,<sup>14</sup> C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch,<sup>15</sup> and Walter Brueggemann.<sup>16</sup> Brueggemann also asserts that God’s making of humanity as male and female and giving them the blessing of fertility demonstrates that “sexuality is good and ordained by God as part of creation.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, biblical interpreters throughout the history of the church—ancient, Reformation-era, and modern—have agreed that Gen. 1:28 teaches that human fertility is a blessing from God that applies to all of humanity, and that it is His will that the people He has created make good use of this gift.

The benediction of Gen. 1:28 is repeated to Noah and his family in Gen. 9:1, 7, after the great flood has devastated the earth and left them as the only human survivors. One might expect that a small group of people in their position would need encouragement and comfort from the God who had saved them, and that is exactly what they receive at the beginning of Genesis 9. As Luther comments,

These words were truly a necessary comfort after the entire human race had perished by the Flood and only eight souls were saved. Noah realized that God is indeed favorably inclined toward him; for He is not satisfied with that first blessing with which He blessed the human race at the creation of the world, but He adds this new

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<sup>13</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 33.

<sup>14</sup> John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1930), 33.

<sup>15</sup> C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament Scriptures in Ten Volumes*, Vol. 1, *The Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 65.

<sup>16</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, ed. James Luther Mays and Patrick D. Miller Jr. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1982), 37.

<sup>17</sup> Brueggeman, *Genesis*, 33.

one in order that Noah may have no doubt whatever concerning the future increase of his progeny.<sup>18</sup>

As before, Luther also makes the connection between this blessing and the estate of marriage:

For one thing, this chapter confirms marriage; for through His Word and command God joins the male and the female, and that for the definite purpose of filling the earth with human beings...it was necessary, on account of this awful expression of wrath, to show now that God does not hate or condemn the lawful union of a man and a woman but wants the human race to be propagated by it ... He wants human beings to be propagated through the union of a man and a woman ... This passage, therefore, deals with the honorableness of marriage, which is the source of both the family and the state, and the nursery of the church.<sup>19</sup>

Luther also once again establishes the universal application of this command and blessing to all of humanity, rather than to its original recipients only: “this promise was made, not to Noah alone but also to his sons, likewise to the entire human race ... This passage, moreover, leads us to believe that children are a gift of God and come solely through the blessing of God.”<sup>20</sup> Finally, commenting specifically on 9:7, Luther asserts that God’s desire for people to increase in number demonstrates His love for human life and explains why He despises anger and murder.<sup>21</sup> Altogether, Luther’s comments highlight the fact that the flood changed nothing about God’s will for human procreation: He still desires the people He has created to be fruitful and multiply, and He will not allow even the cataclysm of the flood and the great sin that precipitated it to alter His design for the creation.

Modern commentators, like Luther, also highlight the repetition in Genesis 9 of God’s blessing of fertility in the face of His great judgment against humanity that has just occurred through the flood. Wenham calls attention to the similarities between these verses and God’s words in Gen. 1:28: “God’s blessing is now verbalized. His blessing on the new humanity

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<sup>18</sup> *LW* 2:131.

<sup>19</sup> *LW* 2:131.

<sup>20</sup> *LW* 2:132.

<sup>21</sup> *LW* 2:142–43.

repeats almost verbatim his blessing on the old pre-flood humanity... This section closes with an inclusion... repeating God's basic injunction to mankind."<sup>22</sup> Brueggemann states that God, by renewing the blessing of Gen. 1:28, "announces that the intent and mandates of creation... are operative in this new creation."<sup>23</sup> Similar thoughts are also expressed by Skinner<sup>24</sup> and Mark Boda.<sup>25</sup> Keil and Delitzsch, also drawing attention to the similarities between the two passages, further argue that the repetition of these blessings helps to "lay the foundation for a well-ordered civil development of humanity ... showing the intention and goal of this new historical beginning."<sup>26</sup> Thus, not only does God desire for people to continue to make use of His blessing of fertility even after He has severely punished them, but He also intends that this blessing itself be the means by which they rebuild civilization as a more just and righteous society.

The final appearance of God's command to "be fruitful and multiply" in Genesis occurs in 35:11, as God is recapitulating His covenant promises to Jacob and giving Jacob the new name of Israel. Most scholars who comment directly on this verse presuppose a level of familiarity with the Abrahamic covenant, regarding this particular exhortation from God as an extension and review of the blessings He had previously pronounced upon Abraham and Isaac, and also earlier upon Jacob himself.<sup>27</sup> This command and blessing from God, therefore, builds upon the words He has already spoken to the family of patriarchs throughout the book of Genesis. In Gen. 12:2–3; 15:5; 17:1–6, God appears to Abraham and promises that He will make a great nation of him

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<sup>22</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 192.

<sup>23</sup> Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 82.

<sup>24</sup> Skinner, *Genesis*, 169–71.

<sup>25</sup> Mark Boda, *The Heartbeat of Old Testament Theology: Three Creedal Expressions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 99.

<sup>26</sup> Keil and Delitzsch, *Pentateuch*, 151–53.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Keil and Delitzsch, *Pentateuch*, 317; Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: IVP Academic, 1967), 186; *LW* 6: 263–64; Skinner, *Genesis*, 425; and Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 325.

and greatly multiply his descendants, so that in him “all the families of the earth shall be blessed (12:3). God begins to fulfill His word by granting to Abraham his son Isaac while Abraham and his wife are in extreme old age, thus proving His ability to defy the odds to keep His promises. The same covenant promise of fruitfulness and many descendants is given to Isaac in Gen. 26:4.

Finally, Isaac’s son Jacob also receives this promise in Gen. 28:13–14, and in the text currently under consideration, Gen. 35:11. It is perhaps significant that only Jacob receives the direct command from God to be fruitful and multiply, as *all* of his descendants were to be counted among God’s chosen people of Israel (as opposed to the families of Abraham and Isaac, from whom only one of two sons was chosen). The Pentateuchal account shows that Jacob indeed was fruitful and multiplied: he himself fathered twelve sons and a daughter (Gen. 29:31–30:24; 35:16–18), and his children in turn reproduced prodigiously after they settled in Egypt (Gen. 47:27–28; Exod. 1:1–7). God’s commandment to be fruitful and multiply thus holds special significance for His chosen people beyond the universality of its application to humanity as a whole. God used His blessing of fertility to increase the number of the people of Israel specifically, ensuring that they were able to serve as His representatives on earth and in so doing bless all the families of the world by bearing His light to the nations (and ultimately, of course, by producing the Savior of the entire world, Jesus Christ).

Overall, therefore, God’s commands throughout Genesis to “be fruitful and multiply” reveal much about God’s design and plan for His creation, and for His chosen people on earth specifically. First and foremost, God’s blessing of fertility proclaims the desirability of human procreation and establishes its role in allowing human life to expand and flourish. God desired His people to procreate not only when His creation and humanity were innocent and perfect, but also after Adam and Eve’s fall into sin had greatly damaged human beings’ relationship with

Him. Not even the mass sin and apostasy that led to the great flood was able to change God's original blessing of fertility upon humanity, as evidenced by His repetition of it to Noah and his family after they left the ark. The appropriate institution in which procreation was to take place was that of marriage, which many commentators argue was established by God's blessing and mandate to humanity in Gen. 1:28. God desired (and still does desire) that the estate of marriage be a permanent feature of human society, and thus His blessings upon Adam, Eve, and Noah remain normative for humanity today.

Christians also should recognize the importance of procreation to the people of God specifically and understand its contribution to what God has done for the world through them. Throughout the Old Testament, God enabled His people to be fruitful and multiply, which eventually allowed them to become a great nation and build a powerful and prosperous society, however temporary it turned out to be, in the Promised Land of Canaan. Most importantly, Jesus of Nazareth, the promised Christ, descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in fulfillment of God's promises to them, and His conception and birth would have been impossible had it not been for His ancestors' procreation. God's work through human procreation among His people did not end there, however. Although the ethnic nation of Israel is no longer God's chosen people, it has been replaced by the Christian Church in the New Testament age (cf. Gal. 3:29), and as such the church inherits all of the blessings and mandates that God originally spoke upon ancient Israel. God still desires His faithful people to be fruitful and multiply, as by so doing they will help His reign to grow and expand, producing more believers to inhabit the earth and proclaim His name to the world.

#### The Witness of the Lutheran Confessions

Because the above teachings about procreation are indeed scriptural, the Lutheran Church

has historically upheld them. In order to establish the Lutheran foundation of the procreative purpose of marriage, we must look to the Lutheran Confessions as found in the *Book of Concord* as our guide. Although the subject of marriage is addressed many times in the Confessions, it most often appears in the context of clerical celibacy and the allowance of marriage for priests within the churches of the Lutheran faith. As such, many of the discussions about marriage in the Confessions do not identify the purpose of marriage per se.

However, several key passages in the *Book of Concord* do point to the Lutheran confessors' understanding of the importance of procreation within the marital estate. The Latin text of the Augsburg Confession, in its discussion of the marriage of priests, makes this claim about marriage: "Christ says, 'Not everyone can accept this teaching,' where he teaches that not everyone is fit for celibacy, because God created the human being for procreation ... no human law can nullify a command or institution of God".<sup>28</sup> Although procreation is mentioned only in passing in this passage, it is clear that the Augsburg Confession teaches that God intended human beings to beget children and raise families. The medieval church's prohibition on marriage for priests was, therefore, a violation of the natural law of God, as it prevented priests from accomplishing what God had specifically created them to do.

The topic of marriage is also addressed in Luther's Large Catechism, specifically in its discussion of the Sixth Commandment ("You shall not commit adultery"). Luther asserts that the estate of marriage is endorsed not only by this particular commandment, but also by the Fourth Commandment ("Honor your father and your mother"). In so doing, Luther explicitly draws a connection between marriage and parenthood, indicating that procreation and raising a family

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<sup>28</sup> Augsburg Confession XXIII.5–8 in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2000), 63.

occupied a central position in his theology of marriage. He also lists the divinely ordained purposes of marriage as follows: “to be true to each other, to be fruitful, to beget children, and to nurture and bring them up to the glory of God.”<sup>29</sup> Three of those four listed functions of marriage explicitly involve procreation and children, which again indicates the importance to him of these aspects of the marital estate.

Thus, although the institution and purposes of marriage receive relatively little discussion in the Lutheran Confessions, what is found therein is solidly supportive of the biblical understanding of marriage as a fundamentally procreative institution. The Lutheran confessors believed that marriage should not be withheld from the church’s ministers, as this would deny them access to one of the most fundamental aspects of life in God’s creation. Human beings were made to procreate, and it was unbiblical and sinful to bar them from the institution in which they could raise families in a manner pleasing to God. The Fourth and Sixth Commandments together also upheld procreation as one of God’s fundamental purposes for marriage. These are very brief and basic teachings, yet they clearly reflect the biblical emphasis on the importance of procreation within the marital estate. For a more detailed and systematic treatment of this issue within the history of Christian theology, however, we will need to turn to the relevant doctrinal writings of the church’s chief theologians.

#### The Witness of Selected Church Fathers

Although we have already examined some of the writings of the church fathers (especially Augustine and Martin Luther) in this chapter, those particular works were exegetical in nature; that is, they served primarily as commentaries on the Scriptures and dealt with the topics of marriage and sex only secondarily. However, the church fathers also addressed marriage and sex

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<sup>29</sup> Large Catechism I.206–7, in Kolb and Wengert, 414.

in a more systematic manner in many of their doctrinal writings. In this section of the chapter, therefore, we will explore some of the most prominent examples of the writings of the church fathers specifically dedicated to these topics.

The early church fathers consistently taught that God instituted marriage for the primary purpose of the procreation of children. The *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, an ancient document that defines basic Christian teaching and practice, affirm this procreative purpose of marriage and sex:

For the conjunction of man and wife, if it be with righteousness, is agreeable to the mind of God... If, therefore, the difference of sexes was made by the will of God for the generation of multitudes, then must the conjunction of male and female be also acceptable to His mind ... And fornication is the destruction of one's own flesh, not being made use of for the procreation of children, but entirely for the sake of pleasure, which is a mark of incontinency, and not a sign of virtue ... Wherefore, marriage is honorable and comely, and the begetting of children pure, for there is no evil in that which is good.<sup>30</sup>

Even those fathers who championed virginity as a holier state than marriage affirmed marriage's basic goodness as an institution. Tertullian, whose restrictive attitudes toward sex and marriage are well known, still condemned the heretic Marcion's rejection of the marital estate:

For [God] bestowed His blessing on matrimony also, as on an honorable estate, for the increase of the human race ... To put a complete stop, however, to the sowing of the human race, may, for aught I know, be quite consistent with Marcion's most good and excellent god. For how could he desire the salvation of man, whom he forbids to be born, when he takes away that institution from which his birth arises?<sup>31</sup>

As indeed for Marcion's god, who is an enemy to marriage, how can he possibly seem to be a lover of little children, which are simply the issue of marriage? He who hates the seed, must needs also detest the fruit ... And how much more credible it is, that kindness to little children should be attributed to [God] who blessed matrimony

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<sup>30</sup> "Constitutions of the Holy Apostles," in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 7, *Lactantius, Venantius, Asterius, Victorinus, Dionysius, Apostolic Teachings and Constitutions, 2 Clement, Early Liturgies*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2012), 462–63.

<sup>31</sup> Tertullian, *The Five Books Against Marcion*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian: I. Apologetic; II. Anti-Marcion; III. Ethical*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2012), 294.

for the creation of mankind, and in such benediction included also the promise of connubial fruit itself, the first of which is that of infancy!<sup>32</sup>

St. Augustine, who also is known for his less than positive outlook on sex, likewise affirms marriage's inherent goodness and procreative purpose in his treatise *On the Good of Marriage*: "Therefore the first natural bond of human society is man and wife ... Then follows the connection of fellowship in children, which is the one alone worthy fruit, not of the union of male and female, but of the sexual intercourse."<sup>33</sup> Therefore, even those church fathers who believed that sex was an intrinsically sinful act even within marriage (because it involved lust) still regarded it as necessary for the purpose of procreation, and thus upheld marriage as a good and praiseworthy institution of God *precisely for that reason*. In their thinking, sex itself may have been a sin, but in the context of marriage and procreation it became a far less sinful act and even served a necessary purpose in human society. Regardless of what Christians today may think about the fathers' negative attitudes toward sex even within marriage, it is undeniable that the fathers considered procreation and childrearing to be essential aspects of the marital institution, and as such they faithfully articulated the clear teachings of Scripture on these issues.

The church's emphasis on the importance of childbearing and raising a family for Christian spouses continued beyond the patristic era and through the medieval period, and remained a fundamental Christian teaching within the churches of the Reformation, including the Lutheran Church. Lutheranism has traditionally upheld the necessity of procreating for those married couples that are capable of doing so. Even in the early days of the Lutheran Church, in which this aspect of marriage was rarely called into question, the Reformers took pains to point out that God had established marriage for the purpose of procreation. Martin Luther (who shared

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<sup>32</sup> Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 386.

<sup>33</sup> Augustine, "On the Good of Marriage," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series 1*, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 3, *Augustine: On the Holy Trinity, Doctrinal Treatises, Moral Treatises* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2012), 399.

Augustine’s opinion that lust and sex were sinful even within marriage), in his treatise entitled “The Estate of Marriage,” describes the purpose of marriage in this way:

After God made man and woman he blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply.’ From this passage we may be assured that man and woman should and must come together in order to multiply...For this word which God speaks, ‘Be fruitful and multiply,’ is not a command. It is more than a command, namely, a divine ordinance which it is not our prerogative to hinder or ignore.”<sup>34</sup>

Similarly, Martin Chemnitz, in his defense of the Lutheran doctrine of marriage, has this to say on the matter:

Scripture also explains for what causes God instituted this conjugal union.... He willed according to His sure counsel that the preservation and multiplication of the human race should take place through propagation by generation, that in it we might perceive His presence, wisdom, and goodness. He willed also that the first nursery of the church should be in the pious rearing of children, wherefore churches in Paul are called households. He willed that the exercise of faith, prayer, love, patience, and all godliness should in their beginnings be practices in the family circle, and be from there propagated more widely.

This also is certain, and known from Scripture, that in a chaste and godly marriage God is present with His blessing and with various gifts of grace.... This blessing embraces first fruitfulness and generating.<sup>35</sup>

Although the heavy emphasis on procreation in marriage is commonly believed to be unique to Roman Catholicism, these examples demonstrate that Lutherans have historically shared the Roman Catholic doctrine that marriage was instituted specifically for this purpose. The Lutheran Church has been stressing the same points ever since it came into existence, and it thus stands within the historic, orthodox Christian tradition regarding the importance of childbearing for Christian spouses.

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<sup>34</sup> *LW* 45:18. Thus, Luther remained squarely in the tradition of many of the early church fathers who saw lust and sex as intrinsically sinful, yet viewed them as pardonable offenses within the context of marriage and procreation.

<sup>35</sup> Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent: Part II*, trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia, 1978), 720–21.

## The Witness of Contemporary Lutheran Theology

As described in the previous chapter, attitudes toward marriage, sex, and childrearing have significantly changed in the Western world over the past century. The widespread availability of artificial contraceptives, along with the almost ubiquitous use of them, has changed the popular perception of marriage as a procreative institution to that of a primarily romantic, physical, and emotional connection between spouses. However, even in this environment, many recent and contemporary Lutheran theologians have remained steadfast in their confession that procreation is fundamental to God's design for marriage. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his *Ethics*, while affirming the right of married couples to use birth control in certain situations, still regards procreation as an important aspect of the marital relationship: "The right of nascent life is violated also in the case of a marriage in which the emergence of new life is consistently prevented, a marriage in which the desire for a child is consistently excluded. Such an attitude is in contradiction to the meaning of marriage itself and to the blessing which God has bestowed upon marriage through the birth of a child."<sup>36</sup>

Lutheran theologians in the twenty-first century have continued to stress the intrinsic connection between marriage and childbearing. Robert Benne includes the "joyful obligation to have children" as an element of the traditional understanding of marriage that has been lost in the decades since the 1950s.<sup>37</sup> And D. Richard Stuckwisch, while again affirming the Lutheran Church's teaching that contraception in and of itself is neutral and allowable, makes the case that its use should not be the "default" practice of a married couple:

Again, it needs to be stated clearly and unequivocally: contraception is not the rule but the exception. It should not be regarded as the norm or the standard. The true norm, the starting point, the baseline and default position ... is that a husband and

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<sup>36</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, trans. Neville Horton Smith (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 174.

<sup>37</sup> Robert Benne, *Reasonable Ethics* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2005), 266.

wife will be open and receptive to children as they go about their normal marital relations. That perspective and priority has been the Church's teaching...for almost her entire history.<sup>38</sup>

Another perspective is offered by John Kleinig in his recent work on the theology of the body, entitled *Wonderfully Made*. In this book, Kleinig describes humans, including their bodies, as creatures of God, whom He intends to care for the creation in which He has placed them. Clearly, humans need their bodies in order to do any of this type of work, as disembodied souls are not capable of manipulating a physical environment to care for or improve it. One of the chief ways in which humans accomplish this work, according to Kleinig, is through procreation. Bearing and raising children creates more human beings who are capable of "subduing" the earth and "having dominion" over its plant and animal life (Gen. 1:28). One section of Kleinig's chapter on the created body, entitled "The Privilege of Procreation," is worth quoting at length:

Procreation goes hand in hand with God's creation of us as male and female persons. As our Creator, God commissions human beings to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:28). In this way, he shares some of his own life-giving power with them. Like the commission to care for the earth and rule over the animals on it, he gives this mandate to humanity as a whole. It is not exercised individually by each person but by married couples as they are blessed by him. By sexual intercourse and bearing children, they work with God in his creation of new people, preserving human life on earth. By procreation and the nurture of children they serve God physically. So, a married couple who can have children but deliberately refuses to do so commits an unnatural, life-denying act of defiance that rejects the blessings God wishes to bestow on them and the whole human race. On the other hand, by choosing to have children, Christians, most obviously and counterculturally, confess their faith in God as the Creator of humankind and so contradict the prevalent secular notion that we are not creatures but our own creators. They acknowledge God as their Creator and put their trust in his providence.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, in Kleinig's estimation, Christian married couples who procreate not only obey God's

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<sup>38</sup> D. Richard Stuckwisch, "Pastoral Considerations of Contraception," in *From Taboo to Delight: Ethics of Sex*, ed. Gifford A. Grobrien (St. Louis: Concordia, 2017), 111. Stuckwisch perhaps states his point more strongly here than I would. I am not opposed to regular contraceptive use by married couples in the majority of their discreet sex acts; nevertheless, his point that husbands and wives should generally be "open and receptive" to children is well taken.

<sup>39</sup> John W. Kleinig, *Wonderfully Made: A Protestant Theology of the Body* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2021), 52.

commands, but also show their trust in His provision for them. He will enable them to handle any hardships that occur as they are raising their family, and in so doing He will grant them the strength to abide by His design for their bodies and for their marriage.

In recent decades, the LCMS as an institution, as opposed to its affiliated theologians and their writings, has also affirmed the procreative aspects of God’s design for marriage. The LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) has produced several documents discussing the issues of marriage, sex, and the relationships between man and woman. The earliest of these, entitled *Human Sexuality: A Theological Perspective* (1981), offers the most comprehensive explanation of the intrinsic connection between marriage and procreation. While recognizing that procreation is not the sole purpose of marriage, the document asserts that, in ordinary circumstances, married couples should desire and plan to have children. Their union “is to be a fruitful union, and “they are privileged to give life to future generations.”<sup>40</sup> Although involuntary childlessness does not invalidate God’s purpose for marriage, voluntary childlessness is not ordinarily to be regarded as a legitimate alternative lifestyle for married couples.<sup>41</sup> The document specifically mentions the temptation for couples to refuse to procreate because of the “sorry state of the world,” and encourages Christian couples not to allow themselves to succumb to it.<sup>42</sup> Christians are people of hope for the future because of God’s promises to them in Christ, and thus they will not allow fear (of overpopulation, climate change, violence, etc.) to prevent them from fulfilling their purpose as husband and wife.

Similarly, the CTCR document entitled *Christians & Procreative Choices: How Do God’s*

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<sup>40</sup> Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Human Sexuality: A Theological Perspective* (1981), 17.

<sup>41</sup> CTCR, *Human Sexuality*, 19. The document lists several situations in which voluntary childlessness might be allowable, such as hazards to the health of the mother, age, physical disability, or illness.

<sup>42</sup> CTCR, *Human Sexuality*, 20.

*Chosen Choose?* (1996) also addresses the subject of intentional childlessness among married couples. Like the earlier document, it asserts that under ordinary circumstances, Christian husbands and wives should expect to procreate and raise a family together, as this is the will of God for marriage in general.<sup>43</sup> It also contains an interesting exegetical analysis of Matt. 19 and Mark 10, in which Jesus is confronted by the Pharisees about the matter of divorce, and in which He subsequently rebukes His disciples for refusing to allow children to come to Him. The document posits that the placement within the Gospel narratives of these two episodes in Jesus' ministry is not coincidental; rather, they are placed one after the other in order to strengthen the connection between marriage and children in the minds of the readers. Although the document cautions the reader against drawing sweeping conclusions from this sequencing of events in the Gospels, it does strongly suggest that the placement of these accounts at least indicates an implicit understanding of marriage as an institution that intrinsically involves children.<sup>44</sup> As such, the document concludes: "for men and women joined in marriage voluntary childlessness is not a choice to be made lightly. In marriage the sexual joining of a man and a woman also joins them in a relationship as potential parents. Christians who believe that they are called to married life will listen closely to God's guidance concerning what they are doing."<sup>45</sup>

Another CTCR document entitled *What Child is This? Marriage, Family, and Human Cloning* discusses God's procreative design for marriage in the context of the ethical considerations related to the cloning of human beings. Although establishing a comprehensive theology of marriage and sex is not the purpose of this particular document, it still contains some significant insights into the relationship between marriage and procreation. In the view of the

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<sup>43</sup> Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Christians & Procreative Choices: How Do God's Chosen Choose?* (1996), 24–26.

<sup>44</sup> CTCR, *Christians & Procreative Choices*, 26–29.

<sup>45</sup> CTCR, *Christians & Procreative Choices*, 31.

document's authors, children serve a significant purpose within a marriage to help husbands and wives "look beyond themselves to someone else, someone to whom they together can give themselves in a love resembling God's love for us."<sup>46</sup> In other words, children can prevent the relationship between a husband and wife from becoming self-serving, as they must devote their time, energy, and love to caring for others who cannot care for themselves. Having children thus is a sacrifice that married couples ordinarily will make, and God will sanctify them through it to make them less selfish and more other-oriented.

In the context of concerns about human cloning, the document upholds procreation as a self-sacrificial act in order to combat the view that children are "commodities" that can and should be produced technologically. Children are not to be manufactured or exploited as fulfillments of their parents' desires, but are rather to be welcomed as gifts from God with which He ordinarily blesses husbands and wives. Christian spouses should not seek to thwart God's will either by refusing to have children or by producing them artificially; rather, they should follow His design and allow Him to bless them with children as He sees fit.<sup>47</sup>

Finally, the most recent (2009) CTCR document addressing the topic of marriage is entitled *The Creator's Tapestry: Scriptural Perspectives on Man-Woman Relationships in Marriage and in the Church*. This document is mostly concerned with the relationship between husband and wife as a reflection of the head-helper relationship between Christ and His church, and the practical implications thereof for the service of women in the church. As such, the topic of procreation is mostly relegated to the background, which is a slightly disappointing decision for a document that ostensibly addresses Christian marriage. However, toward the end of the

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<sup>46</sup> Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *What Child Is This? Marriage, Family, and Human Cloning* (2002), 15–16.

<sup>47</sup> CTCR, *What Child Is This?*, 16–17.

document, some space is dedicated to discussing the “procreative paradigm,” in which the begetting and bearing of children is described as an example of humanity’s individuality within community. Human beings in general are blessed by individuals coming together and forming communities, in which they edify each other by their strengths and support each other in their weaknesses. Individuals joining together complement each other and create a new community, much as a husband and wife do the same in their marriage. The fruit of their joining together is a child, who is an individual human being, yet is composed of genetic material from two different people. The “one flesh” union of husband and wife produce another person who is “one flesh;” that is, he or she is the individual produced by the two-person community of their marriage.<sup>48</sup> Thus, even in a document in which the topic of procreation is not featured prominently, the authors still recognize its importance to the institution of marriage, and see children as the natural fulfillment of the joining together of husband and wife.

In general, it is clear that the emphasis on procreation as an essential aspect of God’s design for marriage has been central to the Lutheran Church’s teachings about marriage all throughout its existence. The original Lutheran reformers all upheld this teaching, and many Lutheran theologians since that time, both historical and contemporary, have done the same. Given this history, it should not be controversial to claim in Lutheran settings that God desires husbands and wives to have children under normal circumstances; yet, when this assertion is made, it is often met with the charge of being “too Catholic.” It appears that Roman Catholicism has more heavily emphasized the importance of procreation within marriage, at least in the popular imagination. The above evidence is sufficient to disprove any idea that Lutherans do not recognize marriage as a fundamentally procreative institution; nevertheless, some discussion of

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<sup>48</sup> Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *The Creator’s Tapestry: Scriptural Perspectives on Man-Woman Relationships in Marriage and the Church* (2009), 42–43.

the Lutheran position relative to that of Roman Catholicism is necessary. There are indeed significant differences between the two churches' teachings on these issues, and they should be recognized and clearly distinguished. We turn, therefore, to this task in the next section of this chapter.

#### A Lutheran Approach vs. the Roman Catholic Approach

As noted earlier, the Roman Catholic Church still officially holds the position that the usage of technological means of contraception, even by husbands and wives, intrinsically thwart God's design for sex and for marriage. Catholics are encouraged not to use any type of technological birth control and to have as many children with whom God blesses them through their normal sexual relations. On the one hand, the encouragement to married couples to procreate is commendable, and it certainly takes seriously God's command to His people to be fruitful and multiply. On the other hand, the absolute prohibition of the usage of technological contraceptives, even those that do not result in the death of a human embryo, is not supported by Scripture and goes beyond what the church can firmly claim on the basis of God's written Word. Thus, Lutherans must approach the writings of Roman Catholic theologians concerning these issues with a receptive, but also critical, eye.

When Roman Catholics encourage Christian husbands and wives to have children and uphold procreation as a key purpose of marriage, Lutherans can certainly celebrate their faithfulness and even cite them as support for God's design for the marital estate. For example, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* asserts that the fruitfulness of marriage in procreation contributes to humanity's work in caring for God's creation, a concept with which John Kleinig would certainly agree.<sup>49</sup> The *Catechism* also lists "openness to fertility" as an essential feature of

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<sup>49</sup> U.S. Catholic Church, *Catechism*, 447.

marriage, thereby precluding the possibility of intentional childlessness for self-serving reasons.<sup>50</sup>

Lutherans can give thanks to God that the Roman Catholic Church has maintained its position that marriage and procreation are inextricably linked, as both churches would find common ground in this matter.

Similarly, Pope John Paul II, in his exhaustive work on the theology of the body, also upholds God's procreative design for marriage. He argues that the "image of God" in humanity is found precisely in man and woman's bodily communion with each other, mirroring the communion of persons in the Holy Trinity:

The account of the creation in Genesis 1 affirms from the beginning and directly that man was created in the image of God inasmuch as he is male and female. The account in Genesis 2 ... reveals ... that the complete and definitive creation of "man" (subject first to the experience of original solitude) expresses itself in giving life to the "*communium personarum*" that man and woman form ... we can deduce that *man became the image of God not only through his own humanity, but also through the communion of persons*, which man and woman form from the very beginning. The functioning of the image is the one of mirroring the one who is the model, of reproducing its own prototype... On all this, right from the beginning, the blessing of fruitfulness descended, linked with human procreation.<sup>51</sup>

Procreation, therefore, was perhaps *the* essential aspect of humanity and marriage as God originally created them at the beginning of time.

In his analysis of Genesis 1, the pope speaks similarly to the statements of Lutheran theologians: "Uniting so closely with each other that they become 'one flesh,' they place their humanity in some way under the blessing of fruitfulness, that is, of 'procreation,' about which the first account speaks (Gen. 1:28). Man enters 'into being' with the consciousness that his own masculinity-femininity, that is his own sexuality, is ordered to an end."<sup>52</sup> Sex, rather than being

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<sup>50</sup> U.S. Catholic Church, *Catechism*, 458–61.

<sup>51</sup> John Paul II, *Man and Woman as He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006), 163–64.

<sup>52</sup> John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, 184.

God's gift to Adam and Eve because of its physical pleasure and emotional closeness, is God's gift to them because it enables them to procreate; that is, to create new life. It is also an important responsibility that He has laid upon them, as they are meant to make liberal use of this gift and produce more human beings to fill and subdue the earth. Their sexuality is indeed "ordered to an end:" the end of creating the next generation of human beings to carry on the commission God has given them. Again, Lutherans would find much to commend in these assertions.

Unfortunately, however, Roman Catholic theologians typically do not stop at this juncture; they continue to press their points toward conclusions that do not necessarily follow logically from the general principle that marriage is a fundamentally procreative institution. Instead of simply encouraging Christian husbands and wives to be fruitful and multiply, the Catholic Church teaches that every single discreet act of sex between spouses must in theory be open to procreation. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* uses such language, even going so far as to describe any type of contraception that makes procreation impossible as "intrinsically evil." Although the *Catechism* recognizes that Christian parents may have legitimate reasons for spacing the birth of their children or limiting the size of their families, it refuses to recognize technological forms of contraception as acceptable means to this end. According to the *Catechism*, in using contraception, spouses are not fully giving themselves to each other in the conjugal act as they should, and they are thereby offending against the dignity of marriage.<sup>53</sup>

In the same way, John Paul II strongly argues against the usage of any non-natural contraception (i.e.—anything except for the "rhythm method") in order to regulate human fertility. He describes technological contraception as an "evil"<sup>54</sup> that intrinsically robs the conjugal act of its "inner truth," in that it prevents sex from accomplishing the purpose for which

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<sup>53</sup> U.S. Catholic Church, *Catechism*, 629–30.

<sup>54</sup> John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, 630.

God designed it. In situations in which birth control is used, sex “ceases to be an act of love.”<sup>55</sup> However, the pope agrees with the *Catechism* in its assertion that the responsible regulation of fertility is not inherently sinful, as long as it is done by natural, rather than artificial, means. Technological contraception impedes the natural process of human fertility, while the “rhythm method” works within the natural cycles of a woman’s body. As such, only artificial contraception intrinsically offends against the natural order that God has created. John Paul also asserts that morally acceptable versions of fertility regulation can also themselves become sinful when used to avoid children and family entirely, rather than for responsibly spacing children to assure adequate and responsible care for them.<sup>56</sup> Thus, it is clear that Roman Catholic attitudes toward birth control are quite hostile, and they have done much to shape the general perception that a procreation-centric theology of marriage is unique to Roman Catholicism.

In responding to the Roman Catholic prohibition against birth control, Lutherans should first and foremost recognize that the Scriptures themselves do not address the topic of contraception at all. Although the Scriptures clearly teach that procreation is a natural end and purpose of marriage, they do not prescribe a certain number of children that each family should have, nor do they speak against the use of technological means to responsibly limit family size. This fact alone should make Lutherans, as Christians who confess *sola Scriptura*, cautious in making sweeping conclusions about the immorality of technologies whose effects (the prevention of pregnancy) are not intrinsically sinful. Some birth control methods do kill human embryos or prevent their implantation into the mother’s uterus, but others do not, and as such they do not violate any explicit commandment of God. Great care must be taken that Christians not make moral pronouncements beyond the clear teachings of Scripture.

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<sup>55</sup> John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, 633.

<sup>56</sup> John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, 629.

Secondly, one must also ask exactly how the use of artificial contraception always causes sex to cease to be an act of love, as Roman Catholic theologians teach. The justification for this assertion appears to be that sex finds its natural end in openness to procreation, and depriving it of this end makes a mockery of the gift God has given to married couples. It is unclear, however, why the “rhythm method” of birth control, according to this standard, is any less objectionable than the use of technological contraceptives. Couples who are actively seeking in any way to avoid getting pregnant are still, in some sense, attempting to thwart God’s design for sex. They wish to enjoy the physical pleasures of sex without having to concern themselves with its potential fruit: a child. Keeping a calendar, checking dates, and refraining from sex except during infertile periods seems to be just as artificial and labor-intensive of a process as taking a pill or wearing a condom, all to achieve the same result. One might argue that the natural regulation of fertility shows a greater openness to pregnancy than the usage of technological contraceptives, but this is not necessarily the case either. The “rhythm method” can be unreliable, but so can other methods of birth control. Condoms can break, and the birth control pill is not (and does not claim to be) one hundred percent effective. Any act of sex carries some potential of causing fertilization, and if couples employ contraceptive measures, the method they use does not change the basic intent of preventing pregnancy. Thus, it is difficult to see how artificial birth control methods change the nature of the sexual act any more than natural fertility management done intentionally.

Finally, Lutherans must also answer the charge from Roman Catholics that technological contraception is intrinsically wrong because of its interference with the natural processes of sex and fertility. According to this standard, natural family planning is acceptable because it does not introduce artificial elements into the conjugal act, while other means of birth control are morally

wrong because they are enabled by human technology rather than by God's natural order in creation. However, Roman Catholic theologians admit that there are appropriate situations in which Christian spouses might choose to space the births of their children in order to better care for each of them individually. If such an act is righteous and responsible, then it is not readily apparent why using human technology to accomplish it makes it morally unacceptable.

Technology is used in a wide variety of settings to improve the lives of humans and enable them to do good things that they otherwise could not. Food production, transportation, and medical care all rely heavily on human invention and ingenuity, and there is no reason why responsible family planning could not also do the same. In a sense, all human technology interferes with the "natural" processes of this world, which is the creation of God, yet has become corrupted by sin. Large families of children that are very close to each other in age can create hardships for their parents beyond the normal sacrifices of raising children, and such a situation occurs only because of the fallen nature of the world. If artificial contraception can be used to lessen the negative impact of unrestrained human fertility, then it can be properly and discerningly employed by Christians, just as medical science can be used to bring healing and comfort to those who are physically ill or injured. Especially when Scripture does not forbid the use of such technologies, it would appear that Christians could safely use them to accomplish an end that might help them to better care for their families and children.

Further insight into a Lutheran perspective on the appropriate use of contraception by Christians can be found in some of the reports of the CTCR discussed earlier. Although birth control as such is not the main focus of these documents (they are more concerned with artificial reproductive technologies), they do nevertheless address the issue to an extent. *Christians and Procreative Choices* assures the reader that its authors do not mean to suggest that contraception

and family planning are sinful, despite their assertion that procreation and marriage are intrinsically connected. They do not make any claim that a specific number of children is optimum, that a married couple could never appropriately choose to cease having children, or even that a young, newly married couple could not delay childbearing for a few years.<sup>57</sup> In so doing, the authors are careful to uphold God’s procreative design for marriage, while at the same time not allowing themselves to speak beyond what Scripture has explicitly taught.

In addition, *Human Sexuality* explicitly states that there need be no objection to the use of contraceptives within a marriage that is “as a whole, fruitful.” In other words, not every discreet act of sex by husbands and wives must be open to procreation, as long as their sexual relationship in general is so. Contraceptives can be used in good conscience to appropriately limit family size or space out the births of children, but not to prevent parents from having children entirely.<sup>58</sup> The document also addresses the issue of Roman Catholicism’s prohibition of birth control, and makes the claim that a singular focus on the procreative aspects of sex draws attention away from God’s other purposes in sex; namely, the forging of a closer physical, emotional, and spiritual relationship within a marriage. Sex does not only beget children; it also serves as a means of deepening the connection between husbands and wives.<sup>59</sup> Because I myself am not attempting to develop a comprehensive theology of marriage and sex with this project, I have not addressed these relational issues thus far, and I do not plan to do so in detail. Suffice it to say, however, that I agree with the CTCR’s analysis of this issue. Procreation is a significant purpose of marriage and sex, but it is not the only purpose, and any doctrine or moral prohibition that focuses on procreation to the exclusion of other aspects of God’s design should not be taught

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<sup>57</sup> CTCR, *Christians and Procreative Choices*, 32.

<sup>58</sup> CTCR, *Human Sexuality*, 19.

<sup>59</sup> CTCR, *Human Sexuality*, 19.

in the Lutheran Church.

When the Lutheran position on the procreative aspects of marriage is compared with that of Roman Catholicism, a clear distinction emerges. In general, Lutherans uphold God's procreative design for marriage and teach that Christian married couples should be fruitful and multiply, as God commanded and encouraged Adam and Eve to do. However, Lutherans are typically reluctant to pursue the issue further and absolutely prohibit all forms of technological birth control, for the primary reason that Scripture does not explicitly do so. The Lutheran Church has always been reluctant to speak where Scripture does not, and Lutheran theologians today remain strong in this tradition. Lutherans theology is content to assert that all sexual relationships within marriage should, under ordinary circumstances, be open to begetting and bearing children, even though every individual act of sex between husband and wife does not need to be so. I wish to make it clear that I stand within the standard Lutheran position on this issue. Not only do I believe that it is acceptable for husbands and wives to use birth control, but my wife and I have frequently used it ourselves. However, our marriage has been fruitful as a whole, with three sons as the proof. My concern is that Lutherans do not use our church's general acceptance of contraception as justification for rejecting children entirely, or for limiting the size of their family for self-centered reasons when God may wish to bless them with more children. A balanced approach is key for Lutherans who address this issue, and I have sought to maintain that proper balance in this section of my project. Rejecting Roman Catholicism's absolute prohibition upon birth control on the one hand, and also our contemporary culture's aversion to children and family on the other, I encourage all Christian families to embrace God's gifts of fertility and children while responsibly making use of contraceptive technologies in appropriate circumstances.

## Historical Context

Historically speaking, it would appear that procreation-centric teaching about marriage could claim a significant place in Lutheran theology. All of the Lutheran theologians surveyed in this chapter (not to mention the Scriptures, Confessions, and early church Fathers), are united in their confession that marriage, under ordinary circumstances, should be seen as an inherently procreative institution. God's commands are followed when married couples have children, and marriage reaches its natural end in the "one flesh" of the child that is created by the union of his or her parents. However, even though this teaching is certainly not alien to Lutheran theology in an academic sense, it does not appear to have become very prominent in popular expressions of Lutheranism in the Western world. As I described in Chapter One, discussions of procreation were completely absent from the church's teachings about marriage and sex when I was being raised in the faith, and I have seen the same dynamic at work in the church throughout my time as a pastor. My search for Bible study resources that focused on the procreative aspects of marriage, especially resources aimed at young people, largely were fruitless. I found little mention of God's design for married couples to procreate in any popular Lutheran resource that had been produced over the last several decades.

It is difficult not to notice that this development has occurred in conjunction with some of the societal trends described in Chapter Two, especially the rise of the feminist movement and the widespread availability of contraceptives. Although I have no way of proving it, I would assume that the church has been influenced by these trends, and that some decisions (whether conscious or not) were made to downplay procreation in material designed to teach lay audiences about God's design for marriage and sex. The church is not immune to pressure from the wider society, and I believe that many Christians today have absorbed, to a greater or lesser degree, modern Western culture's suspicion of fertility. These values have been reflected in the materials

the church has produced to educate its people about marriage and sex, with the result that many Lutherans do not even realize that God would want them to procreate under normal circumstances. They believe that such an emphasis on procreation and raising families is “too Catholic.”

Yet there are some hopeful signs that the situation may be changing. As I mentioned in Chapter One, the newest version of *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation*, published in 2017, is a great improvement upon its predecessor in its discussion of these issues. Whereas the 1991 edition of the Catechism failed to mention procreation *at all* in its discussion of the Sixth Commandment, the new edition does so quite frequently. In answer to the first question about the Sixth Commandment, “What is marriage?,” the *Explanation* lists the procreation and nurturing of children as one of God’s purposes for marriage.<sup>60</sup> One of the reasons given for why Christians should respect God’s institution of marriage and the fact that He created us male and female is so “families, societies, and creation as a whole may flourish through the procreation and raising of children.” The text of the *Explanation* even implies, without actually stating it outright, that Christian young people should avoid postponing marriage and accumulating debt, as doing these things may prevent them from having as many children as they would want.<sup>61</sup> Finally, the *Explanation* also uses the procreative capacity of men and women to argue for a traditional understanding of marriage as a union between opposite sexes (thus excluding same-sex marriage), as two men and two women are unable to come together and produce children as

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<sup>60</sup> *Luther’s Small Catechism* (2017), 93.

<sup>61</sup> *Luther’s Small Catechism* (2017), 97. The *Explanation* states that it does not wish to “burden consciences,” which signals that the authors are unwilling to *command* young Christians to marry early and avoid accumulating debt, even though they appear to believe that these practices are good and salutary. In my opinion, they strike a good balance here in calling attention to potential problems with society’s “normal” way of doing things while refusing to put commandments in God’s mouth that He has not explicitly spoken.

God has designed married couples to do.<sup>62</sup> These encouraging inclusions in the *Explanation* perhaps point to a changed mentality within the LCMS, in which God's procreative design for marriage will be more heavily emphasized in the instruction of its young people.

Similarly, another recently published book (2021) from Concordia Publishing House (CPH) entitled *Male and Female: Embracing Your Role in God's Design* by Jonathan and Christa Petzold is directed toward a popular audience, but contains some significant references to God's procreative purposes in marriage. Unlike my project, this book does intend to be a comprehensive discussion of marriage, sexuality, and male/female relationships (at a lay level). As such, procreation is not the sole focus of the book, but it is one of many topics the authors discuss. Particularly in the first chapter, in which the authors describe God's institution of marriage, the topic of procreation is given great importance. Analyzing Genesis 1:26-28, the authors describe the task that God gave Adam and Eve as "to increase in number (literally to have babies) and to rule over and care for all other living things on earth."<sup>63</sup> Thus, these popular authors also make the connection between procreation and God's command to humanity to care for the earth, as do the academic theologians mentioned earlier.

The Petzolds also explore the ramifications of the fall of humanity into sin upon husbands and wives and their relationships with each other. They affirm that God's basic command to Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply remains in effect; the fall has not changed that. However, they do discuss some of the effects of the fall on humanity's accomplishment of this task. In particular, they highlight the pain and hardship associated with procreation (especially for women) and the raising of children (for both sexes) that have now become intrinsic to family

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<sup>62</sup> *Luther's Small Catechism* (2017), 102.

<sup>63</sup> Jonathan and Christa Petzold, *Male and Female: Embracing Your Role in God's Design* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2021), 15.

formation because of sin.<sup>64</sup> The authors also briefly discuss how women have often been devalued and abused throughout history, because of distortions of the biblical concept of husbands being the head of their relationship and wives being the helper. Many Christians over the centuries have taken this biblical framework to the extreme and relegated women mainly to the role of childbearing, without taking into account their other gifts and potential contributions to society. The authors rightly reject this practice as a distortion of Christian truth, but they also condemn the solution advanced by elements of the feminist movement, which is to devalue procreation itself as degrading and oppressive to women. They insist that God's design for marriage, including its procreative aspects, should be upheld against both male chauvinism and radical feminism. Husbands and wives should work together, not only in procreation itself (which obviously is a biological necessity), but also in raising the children they beget to be productive people who contribute to the task God has given human beings to care for His creation.<sup>65</sup> These small inclusions in this book, which serves as a popular introduction to a Lutheran theology of marriage and sex, greatly help to highlight the importance of procreation in God's design for married couples. Perhaps they are part of an encouraging trend in which Lutheran organizations will take more seriously this important aspect of the biblical teachings on marriage.

More controversially, a major study conducted by demographer George Hawley and published by the *Journal of Lutheran Mission* in 2016 also addresses the issue of procreation from a social science perspective. Hawley's study, rather than addressing trends in Western society in general as do many of the sources examined in Chapter Two, specifically focuses on demographics within the LCMS. The basic conclusion of this study is that much of the decline in

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<sup>64</sup> Petzold and Petzold, *Male and Female*, 23.

<sup>65</sup> Petzold and Petzold, *Male and Female*, 36–38.

membership experienced by the LCMS in the last several decades can be attributed to declining fertility among its members, which is reflective of broader demographic trends in the United States. As the overall fertility rate of the country as a whole continues its decline, one would expect LCMS membership to do the same.<sup>66</sup>

When attempting to identify the reasons why fertility has decreased within the United States and within the LCMS specifically, Hawley addresses several factors that have caused families to have fewer children, primarily because they have led to delayed marriage and family formation by today's young people. Fertility (especially for women) dramatically decreases after age 35, and thus anything that might cause people to get married and have children later in life will certainly play a large role in the number of children they are able to have.<sup>67</sup> Hawley argues that expensive homes, expensive college degrees, high costs of childcare, and declining career prospects for women after they have children all contribute to the delay of marriage and family formation, which in turn lowers the overall fertility rate. Higher education itself also is a factor in declining fertility, as it grants more independence to women and allows them to pursue career options apart from marriage and children if they so desire.<sup>68</sup> These economic issues, combined with the changes in social mores described in Chapter Two of this project, have led to our society's plunging fertility rates, and to a corresponding decrease in membership in the LCMS as well.

Thus, Hawley urges leaders in the LCMS to focus on this issue if they wish to arrest the membership decline of their denomination, and to adopt certain policies that might help to increase fertility among its members. Hawley's recommendations, broadly speaking, are directed

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<sup>66</sup> Hawley, "LCMS in the Face," 7–8.

<sup>67</sup> Hawley, "LCMS in the Face," 8–10.

<sup>68</sup> Hawley, "LCMS in the Face," 13–23.

toward encouraging young people in the LCMS to marry and have children earlier. His specific policy proposals include encouraging less expensive weddings (to make marriage more affordable), encouraging “responsible higher education” (essentially, avoiding huge amounts of educational debt and not delaying marriage to pursue degrees), financially assisting young families in purchasing homes, providing childcare for young families, and educating everyone within the denomination about issues of fertility.<sup>69</sup> In so doing, LCMS leadership may be able to stem the tide of denominational membership decline and even reverse it to a degree. Hawley assures his readers that he is not arguing that these policies should be enacted as a substitute for evangelism or for retention efforts toward existing members; rather, all of these endeavors should be pursued simultaneously.<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, he is clear in his belief that the greatest single cause for membership decline in the LCMS is lower fertility rates among its members, and any action that seeks to arrest or reverse the decline must take this significant factor into account.

As one might expect, there were many within the LCMS who took issue with the conclusions of Hawley’s study. One such representative criticism is found in a 2017 article in *Lutheran Mission Matters* written by Dr. William Schumacher, who raises significant concerns about the study’s sociological and theological implications. Schumacher critiques Hawley’s work from a missiological perspective, arguing that it advocates changing the demographic outlook of the LCMS by simply encouraging greater fertility among its members, thus displaying little concern for reaching the lost and the mission of the church.<sup>71</sup> He also accuses Hawley of devaluing the contributions of women to the church and to society beyond their ability to make babies, and of displaying a noticeable bias against any higher education that leads to decreased

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<sup>69</sup> Hawley, “LCMS in the Face,” 80–81.

<sup>70</sup> Hawley, “LCMS in the Face,” 37.

<sup>71</sup> Schumacher, “Response,” 23–25.

fertility prospects among students and graduates.<sup>72</sup> Finally, Schumacher objects to Hawley's focus on the LCMS as an institution, contending that Hawley is concerned merely with saving the denomination as such rather than growing God's church wherever the Word may be sown and bear fruit. According to Schumacher, Hawley's article rejects the prospect of finding new membership among ethnic and geographic communities not typically associated with the LCMS in favor of trying to bolster the white, German-American population that has historically comprised the bulk of its membership.<sup>73</sup>

Many of Schumacher's criticisms of Hawley's article are well taken and should be carefully considered. He is correct in arguing that an exclusive focus on growing the church through increased fertility among its members neglects the importance of evangelism and reaching the lost. As I have already stated in Chapter One, the church cannot fulfill its evangelistic obligations by encouraging its members to have more babies. It is also true that women have much more to contribute to their families, to the church, and to society than simply having babies. Women should not be regarded primarily as "baby-makers," and anyone who portrays them as such should indeed be rebuked. Thus, increasing fertility should not be viewed as a cure-all solution to the problem of declining denominational membership; there are many other issues to consider as well.

However, we dare not use these legitimate concerns to justify dismissing Hawley's argument out of hand. Insofar as he discourages evangelism or devalues women, he should not be taken seriously, but his basic point remains: Decreasing fertility is a significant factor in the decline of membership in the LCMS, as it is a factor in demographic trends all throughout the United States. For the reasons given in Chapter Two of this project, I have argued that decreased

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<sup>72</sup> Schumacher, "Response," 22.

<sup>73</sup> Schumacher, "Response," 21–22.

fertility could potentially cause significant problems in our society, and the LCMS and its churches are not exempt from those. We should take these issues seriously and recognize the potential problems for our society and churches they create. It is not misogynistic or anti-evangelistic to call attention to these, or to identify selfish considerations such as the desire for more wealth, better career opportunities, and increased leisure time as reasons that married couples have fewer children. I argue that we should strike a balance between encouraging fertility on the one hand and recognizing economic and social realities on the other. It is certainly possible to do both, just as it is possible to increase church membership by reaching the lost *and* by having more children. God commands Christians in His Word to do both, and thus I believe we should do whatever we can to fulfill both of these important tasks.

Thus, I have conducted this project at a time when there seems to be a growing awareness within the LCMS that God's design for marriage as a procreative institution needs to be discussed. From both theological and sociological perspectives, significant voices within the Synod are arguing for a greater focus on procreation and fertility, and this trend is becoming manifest in popular, rather than only academic, literature. However, the fact remains that very few Bible study resources are available (especially for young adults) that address these issues in any meaningful way. Children and adults have been targeted for such instruction with some of the recent literature, but youth and young adults have not. With this project, I intend to move toward rectifying this significant oversight in how the church has taught its members about marriage, family, and sex. I have developed a Bible study resource for young adults that discusses marriage from a procreation-centric perspective, and I have used it in my congregation with research participants chosen from Trinity's membership. The process by which I developed and implemented this project will be the subject of the following chapter.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THE PROJECT DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

As I stated in Chapter One, the research question I sought to answer in this project was this: How will a procreation-centric approach to Christian marriage and family education help college-age young adults to value God’s procreative design for marriage and family, and encourage them to make godly decisions about these matters in their own lives in the future? In order to answer this question, I conducted my project in the manner described in the following text of this chapter.

#### **Research Design**

##### **Population Sampling**

For this study, I took a purposive approach to population sampling. I wished to recruit several (ideally eight, four male and four female) young adult members of my congregation who had recently graduated from high school to serve as my research participants. I made sure to choose participants whose families had been members of my congregation for a number of years, so that they had undergone confirmation instruction at my congregation. I also wanted to choose participants who had been at least somewhat active in Divine Services and in junior and senior high youth group over the previous several years. Because I implemented this project during the summer of 2022, I focused specifically on youth who graduated from high school that year. I also knew that the participants needed to be at least eighteen years of age before I could include them in my research; therefore, I waited until each of them turned eighteen before making contact with them. I had a list in my office of all of the youth from the high school class of 2022, complete with each of their birthdays, and I waited until the appropriate date had passed before making contact with them. In one case, I called one of the potential participants on her eighteenth

birthday to ask if she would like to be included.

In some cases, I made the initial contact with the participants by phone, and in other cases I first spoke with them in person, usually after a church service. If I spoke with the participants initially in person, I took them aside to make sure that no one else was able to hear what I was asking them to do (to guard their confidentiality). I told them that the project was designed to learn what they had been taught about marriage and sex during their time as youth at Trinity, and to see if they learned anything new from a Bible study about those topics that they would attend. In my initial description of the project to the participants, I did not mention the central role that the topics of procreation and raising families would play, for reasons that I will explain below. I also explained to them that they would need to sign a consent form approved by the seminary's IRB if they did indeed participate. I also asked them about their personal and family schedules for the summer of that year, so that I was able to find dates that worked for all of the participants.

Because of confidentiality concerns, I myself did not speak to anyone else about the participants' involvement in the project, but I did encourage the participants themselves to speak to their families about it if they so desired. They were not discouraged from sharing information about their participation or showing anyone the consent forms that I asked them to sign. I explained to them that while I could not speak with anyone else about their participation, they were welcome to speak about it to whomever they liked (several times I told them they could take out a full-page ad in the Springfield News-Leader and tell the world if they were so inclined). I encouraged them to consider not participating if their families felt uncomfortable with any aspect of the process. Several of the participants told me that they did indeed speak with their families about the project, and that their parents and other relatives were overall very supportive of their participation. Even though I never spoke directly to any of the parents, I do

believe that their support was helpful in encouraging their children to keep their appointments with me and attend all of the project events.

When I made my initial contact with the participants, I explained to them that they would be asked to do the following:

1. Participate in an initial 60-minute interview with me so that I could learn about their current understanding of Christian teachings about marriage and sex, and learn how they had been taught and what they retained from instruction on these matters at my congregation.

2. Attend a two-session Bible study on the topics of marriage, sex, and procreation that would be held on two consecutive Sunday afternoon youth group meetings sometime during the summer of 2022.

3. Participate in a second 60-minute interview with me so that I could learn how their perspective, understanding, and attitudes were affected by their participation in the Bible study.

Of the eight members of my congregation I asked to participate in the project, only one of them declined to be included. He cited concerns with his work schedule as the reason why he would be unable to commit to the project. The other seven members I contacted (three male and four female) were all willing to participate.

Overall, I believe that my pool of participants accurately represented several different demographics of my congregation. Although all of them were roughly the same age and in the same station in life (recent high school graduates), there was greater diversity between them in several significant ways. Firstly, the ratio of men to women was roughly even (3:4). Secondly, they did not all come from similar families of origin. Three of the participants came from what I would consider to be small families (two or fewer children), two came from what I would consider to be medium-sized families (three to four children), and two came from what I would

consider to be large families (five or more children). [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] These differences between the participants could potentially have a significant impact on their respective views of marriage and procreation. As such, this study could provide some insight as to the effects of these factors on people's opinions about marriage and procreation in general (with the caveat, of course, that seven participants is a very small sample size).

Finally, although all of the participants had been confirmed at Trinity in eighth grade, their level of involvement in the congregation (and in other faith-based activities) during their high school years differed somewhat. Some of the participants had faithfully attended Divine Services, Sunday school, and youth group activities almost weekly, while others had been less involved because of work, sports, travel schedules, and other factors. Additionally, two of the participants had received their elementary and high school education in explicitly Christian settings (either in private school or home school), while the others were educated at public school. The participants' respective level of involvement with church and other Christian activities could also have been a factor in their views of the topics at hand, and perhaps some general insights could be gleaned from this situation as well.

### Implementation

To ensure that my project abided by all ethical guidelines, I did not begin any part of my field research until it was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Concordia Seminary. I employed consent documents that were approved by the IRB. Immediately before conducting my first interviews with the participants, I read the documents with them and confirmed that they understood the documents before they signed them. The consent form I

employed can be found in Appendix Two of this document.

I have taken significant steps to guard the confidentiality of the participants. The consent forms are currently stored in a locked closet in my office at my congregation, and only I possess a key to this cabinet. I have stored the audio recordings of the interviews on a USB drive that is kept in the same locked closet as the consent forms. I had the audio files stored on my computer only for as long as it took them to be transcribed.

The interviews were conducted in my office at my congregation. I offered to interview the participants during non-working hours to ensure that no one else was present who could see them coming to and going from my office (none of them insisted on doing this, although I did conduct a few interviews during non-work hours because of scheduling conveniences for the participants). I kept my office door shut during the interviews. The only other people who were aware that the participants were in my office were Trinity's Office Manager and Director of Family Life Ministry, and I did not tell those individuals why the participants were coming to see me.

I used the Sonix computer program as my transcription service. I considered purchasing a recording device or external microphone for my computer, but I found after some tests that the internal microphone on my computer would adequately detect the conversations in the interviews and allow Sonix to render a faithful and accurate transcription. Because my voice tends to be significantly louder than that of most other people, I made sure to place the computer as close to the participants and as far away from me as possible during the interviews (and their voices were still much quieter on the recordings than mine). I fully dimmed the computer screen during the interviews so that it would not be distracting either to the participants or to me. I had planned on redacting all names, dates, locations, and other identifying characteristics after the interviews had

been transcribed, but since none of those types of information was ever mentioned, no redaction was needed.

I will keep all records for seven years after the publication of the project, and then I will burn the consent forms and delete the audio files. Each participant is identified in this written project by the title “Participant A,” “Participant B,” etc. These titles were assigned to them solely by the chronological order in which they conducted their first interview with me (with Participant A being the first and Participant G being the last).

### Methodological Approach

My methodological approach to this project was the practical theological framework developed by Dr. Mark Rockenbach of Concordia Seminary. The four pillars of this framework provide a helpful guide to conducting practical theological research. The first of these, attending to self and the world, is something I began doing as I gradually realized that my research problem is a legitimate issue for the church. I recognized that our young people had not been instructed appropriately as to God’s design for marriage and sex, and I hoped to move toward correcting that understanding. In attending to myself, I also recognize that I am no unbiased observer of this phenomenon: I would like to be the pastor of a congregation that is growing and has many young families that will support the work of the church in the present and the future. I also consider it very important that the members of my congregation understand what God’s design for marriage and procreation is, and that they conduct themselves in a manner that shows them to be faithful hearers and interpreters of God’s Word. During the implementation of the project, I continued to attend to myself and to the world as I conducted my research and interpreted the data.

The second pillar, interpreting first-article wisdom, was done when I reviewed the secular

literature about marriage and procreation. My study and discussion of sources related to natural law, demographics, population science, and radical feminism have played an important role in my approach to this project, as Chapter Two of this document has shown.

The third pillar, discerning theological wisdom, is critically important for understanding what a Christian pastor should teach about marriage, sex, and procreation. The Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, and the writings of faithful Christian theologians serve as the basis for the church's teachings about all theological issues, including the ones that I discuss in this project. No faithful pastor will conduct his ministry without basing his activities on this sure foundation. This project was no exception to that rule, as is demonstrated in Chapter Three of this document.

Finally, implementing godly guidance and leadership has been and will continue to be the desired outcome of this project. I wanted to help the participants learn more about God's design for marriage and sex, and I hoped to assist them in making appropriate decisions as they considered their future marriages and families. If I could contribute to a more faithful understanding and godlier attitudes about these issues among of the young people of my congregation, I would be quite satisfied with the outcome of this project. And I will certainly be overjoyed if it eventually leads to a baby boom at my congregation in the long-term future!

### Research Methodology

For this project, I conducted qualitative research by interviewing the participants. I wanted to understand the experiences that they had as they were educated about marriage and sex in my congregation during their junior and senior high school years, and the experience that they had in participating in the Bible study. I asked them broad, open-ended questions so that their own thoughts and beliefs came to the fore. Especially in the initial interview, I wanted to avoid placing any ideas in their heads that might have affected the honesty and spontaneity of their

answers. This consideration was the reason I avoided speaking to the participants explicitly about issues of procreation when I initially approached them and asked them to participate in the project.

### **The Initial Interviews**

Scheduling the initial interviews was somewhat challenging, but not overly so. I typically scheduled the interviews with the participants using text messaging. Because my participants were still high school students at the time of their initial interviews, they still had many academic, athletic, and extracurricular commitments to juggle while trying to find time to meet with me. Additionally, high school students, because of their age, tend not to be the most reliable demographic unless their parents are reminding them to keep their commitments, and I was unable to speak directly to their families about their participation in this project. However, overall I was very pleasantly surprised by the willingness of the participants to take time out of their busy schedules to keep their appointments with me. Occasionally I needed to reschedule an interview because the participant had forgotten about it or a greater priority event had arisen for them, but for the most part those minor inconveniences were few.

I was greatly assisted in scheduling interviews by spring break for Springfield Public Schools, and by the fact that most of my participants were not going on vacation with their families during that week. Thankfully, even the participants who were home schooled or attended private school also were on break that week. I was able to conduct more than half of my initial interviews during spring break week, which meant that my participants and I had to do far fewer proverbial scheduling contortions to fit the interviews into their busy lives.

In the initial interview, I asked the participants the following basic questions:

1. What do you remember learning about marriage in church as you were growing up?
2. What do you remember learning about sex in church as you were growing up?
3. What do you want your future spouse to be like?
4. Do you remember learning anything in the church about the importance of having children in marriage?
5. Do you think God would want you to have children if you are able to do so?

I kept the first three initial questions purposefully vague because I wanted to know if the participants thought at all about procreation and children when they considered their future marriages. I specifically asked them about their future *marriages* rather than *families*, as I did not want to guide them to think about children; I wanted to see if they did so without any prompting from me. These questions helped me to determine if our instruction at Trinity in matters of marriage and sex had indeed been deficient, and to see if the students intrinsically connected marriage and procreation in their minds.

After conducting this initial set of interviews, I analyzed the answers that the participants gave to my questions and transformed these answers into theological language. A list of the themes derived from each of the specific interviews can be found in Appendix Four of this document. A list of general themes from all of the interviews combined can be found in Appendix Eight.

### **Planning the Bible Study**

My initial plan for the Bible study itself was to conduct it during two sessions over two consecutive Sunday afternoon youth group meetings during the summer of 2022. As is typical of Sunday youth group meetings, food would be provided for all of the participants. I chose two

sessions because one would not have been adequate for my purposes, and more than two would have been very difficult to schedule during the summer, when the participants and their families had busy vacation schedules.

Immediately I encountered a number of difficulties in scheduling the Bible study sessions. The first was our congregation's schedule, as during the summer I had to plan around Trinity's Mighty Missionary youth camp week (May 31–June 4), the LCMS Missouri District Convention (June 12–14), our congregation's Martin's Fireworks fundraiser (June 22–July 5), the LCMS Senior High National Youth Gathering (July 8–15), and Vacation Bible School (July 18–22). Any date after the end of July would have been too late, as the participants would most likely leave for college in the beginning of August, and I would still need time to schedule my second interview with them. I also had to avoid intruding on my own family's vacation schedule (August 1–9).

Presenting an additional challenge was my inability, because of confidentiality concerns, to speak with all of the participants together about scheduling the Bible study (i.e., through a mass e-mail or text). I had to individually speak with each participant and suggest possible days for the study, find out what worked and did not work for each one, and then try to find two days that would be acceptable for all seven of them (and for me as well). Inevitably, a day that worked for six of the seven participants did not work for the final one, which necessitated more communication with each of them on an individual basis. I also learned that because of the work schedule of one of the participants, Sunday afternoons would not be possible for her, and we would need to move the Bible study sessions to Sunday evening instead. Finally, we settled on the evenings of May 22 and 29 as the dates for the Bible study sessions. Since high school graduations had occurred for all of the participants during the previous weekend, these seemed

like ideal days to conduct the Bible study before the busyness of summer intruded.

However, several of the participants had changes to their schedules at the last minute. For the first session, two of the participants went with their families on vacations about which they had either forgotten to inform me or had been a last minute decision by their parents. Thankfully, because of FaceTime group chat for the iPhone, those two participants were able to be present virtually during the study, and I appreciated their willingness to take time out of their vacations to participate. Unfortunately, one of the two was a passenger in a car at the time, and his car drove into an area without cell service, so he missed most of the first session. Between the two sessions, I was able to meet with him individually in person, give him my handout, and walk him through the Bible study material he missed.

The day of the second session, the families of two different participants decided at the last minute after church to go to Table Rock Lake near Branson, MO for a quick weekend getaway (this was during Memorial Day weekend). Again, thankfully, both participants were able to attend the Bible study session virtually using FaceTime group chat (from a boat on the lake, I believe). Additionally, a third participant caught COVID-19 (thankfully a very mild case) during the week between the two sessions and thus was unable to attend in person. She also was able to participate via FaceTime group chat. Thus, even though only two of the participants were physically present at both sessions, all of them were able to learn the material from me in a group setting.

I did not restrict participation in the Bible study to my research participants only. As with any Sunday youth group event, all of our senior high youth, plus their adult counselors, were invited to attend. Several non-participant youth did attend, as did Trinity's Director of Family Life Ministry, and some of them offered some very insightful and substantive contributions. Had

I not been forced to move the Bible study to an unusual time to accommodate the work schedule of one participant, I may have had a larger number of youth attend.

### **Contents of the Bible Study**

As I developed the Bible study, at the forefront of my mind was my research question: How will a procreation-centric approach to Christian marriage and family education help college-age young adults to value God's procreative design for marriage and family, and encourage them to make godly decisions about these matters in their own lives in the future? In order to answer this question, I would need to present to my participants a procreation-centric approach to Christian marriage and family education; that is, I would need to discuss marriage with them in a manner in which a significant emphasis was placed on God's will that married couples procreate and raise families. Since I would be teaching the Bible study over two sessions, I decided to title them, in order, "The Blessings of Procreation" and "The Crosses of Procreation." In both sessions, I presented relevant texts from scripture to the participants and facilitated a group discussion of them. I also touched on some of the sociological and scientific issues raised in Chapter Two, although these were not the main focus of the study. My goal was faithfully to present the scriptural teachings on marriage and procreation to the participants, both its positive and negative aspects.

The first session, "The Blessings of Procreation," focused mostly on the great benefits God gives the world through the procreation of children, both by Christian and non-Christian parents. During this session, the participants and I read together the passages from Genesis discussed in Chapter Three of this document, and I explained to them how being fruitful and multiplying enabled humanity to accomplish its God-given task of filling and subduing the earth. I discussed how God also used the bearing of children to grow His people from a single family to a nation of

many thousands of people, who were capable of conquering the land of Canaan that God had promised to Israel. In addition to the passages from Gen. 1; 8–9; 35 that I discuss in Chapter Three, I also highlighted God’s promise to Abram to grant him many descendants and make a great nation of him in Gen. 15. These passages from Genesis all show the importance of procreation in God’s plan to bless humanity in general and the people of Israel in particular.

In addition to the passages from Genesis, I also read with the participants several other Old Testament texts that portray procreation and childbearing as blessings. From the latter prophets, we read passages from Jer. 23 and Ezek. 36, in which God promised the Israelites that He would grant them children and help them to repopulate their lands after their exile in Babylon. Such a promise was intended to give the Israelites hope that there would be a future for their people even in the midst of their current sorrow in exile. The general application to the lives of Christians today is that we too have children as an expression of hope in God’s promises and deliverance from the sufferings of this life. If we were to avoid having children for fear of the future, as many people today have done, then we would be succumbing to despair and refusing to trust in God’s promises to us in Christ.

The participants and I also read Pss. 127 and 128, in which children are described as a “heritage from the Lord” and a “reward,” and in which it is asserted that the man who “fills his quiver” with children is blessed. God blesses a faithful man with a fruitful wife, who bears children for him to carry on the legacy of his family. These psalms move the discussion of procreation from the level of society and church to that of the family, and show that the people of God as individuals are also blessed when they have children.

Finally, I also included in the study, after some hesitation, Paul’s famous assertion in 1 Tim. 2, in the context of a discussion of Eve’s sin in eating the forbidden fruit, that “she will be

saved through childbearing—if they continue in faithfulness, love, and self-control.” The exact meaning of this statement has often been hotly debated, and it was not my purpose to do a detailed exegetical analysis of the passage. R.C.H. Lenski, in his interpretation of 1 Timothy, equates “childbearing” with “childrearing,” which includes the entire process of raising children to believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. Lenski argues that this verse does not teach that women earn salvation through having children, but rather that having children and raising them in the faith is an accompanying circumstance of their salvation; that is, Christian women will do these things in accordance with their faith and in obedience to God’s design for marriage.<sup>1</sup> In discussing this text, I very carefully explained to the participants that Paul is not teaching that women merit forgiveness of sins and eternal life by having children.

Lenski also, by way of dismissal, presents an alternative view of this passage; namely, that it refers to Eve herself rather than to women in general; that is, Eve was saved through childbearing, as it was her descendant Jesus Christ who saved all of humanity through His death and resurrection. In this reading of the text, Paul is proclaiming the critical role that procreation played in accomplishing the salvation of humankind. If God so honored procreation by making it an essential aspect of His plan for salvation, then human beings should also regard it as a blessing. Although Lenski himself rejects this view,<sup>2</sup> I found it to be an interesting interpretation of the passage, and so I presented it to the participants as a possible alternative meaning. Either way, the passage helps to establish the importance of procreation in God’s design for marriage, and also in His plan for the salvation of humanity.

To close the first session of the study, I asked the participants to think of reasons why

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<sup>1</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus, and to Philemon*, Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 9 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 572–73.

<sup>2</sup> Lenski, *Interpretation*, 574–75.

having children during their marriages would be good for them as individuals and for society in general. I wanted them to think beyond the commands and promises found in Scripture and to reason why, from even a secular perspective, children are good for the world. Some of the topics that were discussed in this section of the study were those examined in Chapter Two of this document. For example, the participants and I spoke about the dangers of shrinking populations for a country's economic development and welfare programs, as well as the burden that caring for a disproportionately large number of elderly people places on a society's youngest and most productive citizens. We also discussed the importance of having one's own children to carry on our family's legacy and culture, and the help that children can provide in caring for their parents when they are old. Such considerations were not the study's main focus (which was the scriptural testimony about the blessings of procreation), but they did provide additional support for the desirability of having children for married couples.

The second session of the Bible study, titled "The Crosses of Procreation," explored some of the challenges and difficulties related to having children and raising families. I did not want to portray parenthood in an overly rosy manner and imply that it was easy; I wanted the participants to understand that raising children can be a very difficult task. To that end, I began this section of the study by asking the participants why some people may not want to have children. I discussed with them legitimate reasons for avoiding procreation (e.g., age, health, genetic problems, extreme financial hardship) and illegitimate reasons for avoiding procreation (e.g., maintaining a luxurious and carefree lifestyle, avoiding physical changes to the mother's body, avoiding the hard tasks of discipline and caring for a dependent). I did not attempt to downplay or dismiss those concerns; rather, I asserted that even though raising children is difficult, the hardships associated with it are worth bearing for the sake of remaining faithful to God's design for

marriage, as well as for the blessings God gives through children. I also took care to emphasize to the men in the room that raising children is not only the responsibility of the mother: fathers have an extremely important role to play as well. We discussed how husbands might assist their wives in raising their children together so that the burden of parenthood does not disproportionately fall upon the mother.

At this point in the study, we read several passages from Scripture emphasizing the cost of following Jesus and abiding by His will. We read Jesus' passion prediction from Mark 8 and its aftermath, in which Jesus tells His disciples that they must take up their crosses and follow Him. Having children can certainly be regarded as carrying a cross, as they can make our lives difficult and prevent us from doing some of the things we wish to do. Our capacity to live for ourselves decreases greatly after we have children. Yet this is indeed a cross worth bearing for the sake of faithfulness to the Word of God. I wanted the participants to understand that doing the right thing is not always easy, and that having children is one of the ways we can please God by taking on a necessary burden.

I also read two other Scripture passages with the participants at this point in the study. We read Jesus' Parable of the Rich Fool from Luke 12, in which a rich man dedicates his entire life to accumulating wealth for himself, only to find it fail in the end when his soul is demanded from him. Married couples who refuse to have children because it will restrict their lifestyles are often like that man, in that they neglect the important things of God for the sake of gaining wealth, or of maintaining a certain standard of ease and luxury. God's reaction to these sinful pursuits is made clear at the end of the parable, and thus I encouraged the participants not to conduct their lives in such a manner, but instead to embrace God's design, which in most cases will involve children for married couples.

Finally, I read with the participants the apostle John's exhortation not to love the things of the world from 1 John 2. Again, refusing to have children is often a manifestation of attachment to the things of the world, such as money, entertainment, and ease of living. As John says, "the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever" (v. 17), indicating the impermanent and fleeting nature of worldly pursuits. My goal was for the participants to understand the inadvisability of chasing worldly things at the expense of spiritual goods, of which refusal to procreate is often a manifestation.

I concluded the Bible study with some discussion of another major aspect of the crosses of procreation; namely, encouragement for those who do not have children because they are unable, rather than unwilling to do so. My original plan was not to discuss these topics at all, since I did not want them to serve as a distraction from my main point about God's procreative design for marriage. However, after some serious thought and prayer, I decided that I needed to address these topics at least briefly. I did not want to give the participants the impression that only married couples with children can have God-pleasing marriages, or that infertility was a sign of unfaithfulness to God's will. I also wanted to explore with them ways that their marriage could honor God's design if they were unable to have children, as well as briefly discuss some morally questionable technological methods used by infertile couples to try to have children. In tackling these topics, I was serving not only as a researcher seeking to answer my particular research question, but also as the pastor of these youth who would perhaps be faced with these types of dilemmas in their future marriages. Thus, even though infertility issues are not at all the main focus of this project, I felt compelled to give them some attention at the end of the Bible study.

I began this discussion by reading the account of Adam and Eve's creation and their joining together in marriage from Genesis 2, which does not explicitly mention procreation or

children at all. I showed from this passage that companionship is also an important aspect of marriage, and that the inability to have children does not prevent spouses from fulfilling God's purposes for them. We discussed alternative ways that married couples could please God if procreation were not a possibility for them (such as dedicating themselves to greater service in the church and community). Even though having children should be seen as a normal, desired aspect of marriage, the inability to have them does enable a couple to serve God and their neighbor in other ways. I wanted to make the participants aware of this possibility, and to assure them preemptively that God still has important plans for them and their future spouses if they would be unable to have children for any reason.

I also briefly examined with the participants some alternatives to natural procreation that infertile married couples in the contemporary world use to have children. We discussed some practices that are morally acceptable (adoption) and others that are morally unacceptable from a Christian perspective (surrogacy, because of its interference with the one-flesh union of husband and wife, and in vitro fertilization, because of the inevitable deaths of many living embryos in order to achieve a pregnancy).<sup>3</sup> I did not want to spend a significant amount of time discussing these particular issues, since they are not the focus of my project and I did not want to distract the participants from the main point about the blessings of procreation. Nevertheless, I did want them to understand that God does not bless all married couples with children, and that procreation is not an absolute necessity that should be sought in a manner that is morally problematic. As an example of a morally questionable means of having children, I turned to Genesis 16, in which Abram fathers a child by his wife's servant, Hagar, in order to fulfill God's promise to him of many descendants. Instead of waiting for God to bless them with a child in His

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<sup>3</sup> Gilbert Meilaender offers a brief and helpful analysis of these assisted reproductive technologies and their moral implications from a Lutheran perspective. See Gilbert Meilaender, *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 10–25.

timing, Abram and Sarai tried to take matters into their own hands, with strife in the family and an outcast illegitimate son and his mother as a result. My goal in this section of the study was merely to make the participants aware of such issues, and to give them a basic framework for knowing how properly to respond if infertility does eventually become a problem for them.

In the final section of the Bible study, by way of summary, I asked the participants how the material they had learned over the past two sessions should affect their plans for marriage and the qualities they seek in a future spouse. I wanted to hear that they now considered procreation and parenthood to be very important aspects of their future marriages, and the potential to be a good parent as an essential quality they would seek in a future spouse. I reminded them that considerations about procreation and childbearing are certainly not the *only* important aspects of marriage, and that they need to seriously think about many other issues as they go through the processes of dating, engagement, and marriage. However, as I explained to them, I hoped that the Bible study had filled a significant gap in the way that the church typically teaches its young people about marriage. Procreation is not the only significant aspect of marriage, but it is one very significant aspect of marriage, and my desire was for the participants to view it as such in accordance with God's design.

The handouts used for both sessions of the Bible study can be found in Appendix Five of this document. I have also included a teacher's edition of the Bible study handouts with answers given to each of the questions. This version of the handouts is located in Appendix Six.

### **The Final Interviews**

Scheduling the second interviews with the participants was significantly easier than scheduling the Bible study and even the first interviews. Because the school year had concluded and the participants were on summer vacation, finding a time when they could come to my office

for an interview was not difficult at all. The only challenge I encountered was scheduling the interviews in a timely manner after the Bible study had concluded, as I was unable to conduct the interviews in the weeks immediately following the Bible study. Our congregation's Mighty Missionary Camp and the LCMS Missouri District Convention occupied most of my time for the first two weeks after the Bible study, so I had to wait to conduct most of the interviews until after those events had concluded.

In the second interview, I asked the participants the following basic questions:

1. What did you learn from the Bible study that you had not heard before?
2. Did participating in the Bible study cause you to change any of your thoughts about what you are seeking in a future spouse?
3. Did participating in the Bible study cause you to change any of your thoughts about what you would want your future marriage to be like?
4. Did participating in the Bible study cause you to change any of your plans for having children or starting a family?
5. How might the Bible study be improved for the future?

My participants' answers to these questions would be the most significant data I would have for answering my own research question: How will a procreation-centric approach to Christian marriage and family education help college-age young adults to value God's procreative design for marriage and family, and encourage them to make godly decisions about these matters in their own lives in the future? With the interview questions, I wished to determine if the Bible study was indeed successful in teaching the participants about God's design for marriage and procreation. I also wanted to learn if it was successful in changing their attitudes about these matters (if in fact their attitudes did need to be changed). I wished to know

if the Bible study convinced them to seek spouses who would also be good parents and to desire a marriage that is blessed with children. Finally, for the purpose of potentially using this study in the future, I wanted to hear any feedback or suggestions the participants might have about its effectiveness and what might be changed to improve it. My long-term plan for this study is to incorporate elements of it into our confirmation instruction at my congregation, as well as to use it again in the future with different groups of youth and young adults.

As I had done with the initial set of interviews, I analyzed the answers that the participants gave to my questions in the final interviews and transformed these answers into theological language. A list of the themes derived from each of the specific interviews can be found in Appendix Seven of this document. A list of general themes from all of the interviews combined can be found in Appendix Eight.

#### Assumptions, Limitations and Role of Researcher

For this project, I first of all assumed that my participants were interested in learning what the Scriptures teach about marriage and desired to pattern their lives according to these teachings. I assumed that they are faithful Christians who, if their attitudes about these particular teachings are less than faithful, would be open to correction. I assumed that they did not despise the Word of God, but rather simply needed to be properly informed of what it teaches. Finally, I also assumed that my participants' experiences of being educated in the church about marriage and sex were typical of most LCMS youth.

This project was limited in that it did not fully explore *all* issues relating to marital procreation. In particular, I did not in the main body of my project address situations that might prevent married couples from having children through no fault of their own (e.g.—infertility, age, genetic disease, etc.). I have, however, included an afterward that briefly addresses these

issues, to demonstrate to readers who care about them that I am cognizant of their significance. In this afterward, I have included some resources for those who struggle with infertility issues and encouraged other researchers to address them. As I stated earlier, I also briefly discussed this topic in the Bible study with the participants, but I did not devote significant time to it.

I also did not in the main body of my project discuss ethical issues related to adoption, assisted reproductive technologies, surrogacy, or other means of family formation beyond the natural, one-flesh union of a husband and wife. These are certainly important issues, and they should absolutely be discussed; however, they are not directly related to my specific research problem. I have largely left those matters to other researchers and instead maintained my focus on my own research question. For the sake of pastoral faithfulness and responsibility, however, I did briefly discuss these issues with the participants in the Bible study, although it was not my main focus.

Another potential limitation of the research was the honesty (or lack thereof) of the participants in their answers to my questions. As I am their pastor, they may have simply wanted to give me answers that pleased me, particularly in the second interview. It is certainly possible that they were less than truthful with me when I asked them how the Bible study had changed their attitudes and plans, simply to avoid disappointing me. I did my best to encourage them to view me as a researcher rather than as their pastor, so that they would be more inclined to be honest and not to worry about making me upset.

My own limitations as a researcher stemmed from the fact that I am the pastor of this congregation and of the participants. I wanted the young people of my congregation to understand God's design for marriage and family and live their lives according to it, and I would indeed have been disappointed if I could not help them to do these things. I tried to remain as

dispassionate as possible during the interview process, particularly in a few instances when the participants responded in ways that showed that their knowledge and values had not changed.

Overall, however, I believe that the project was successful in accomplishing its goals. I learned much through the experience and gained some clear answers to my research question. The results of the project, as determined by my analysis of my interviews with the participants, will be the subject of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### PRESENTATION AND EVALUATION OF THE DATA

In this chapter, I will provide a broad analysis of the interviews I conducted with the participants and identify major themes that consistently appeared in the participants' answers to my questions. I will begin by introducing and briefly describing each of the participants. Next, I will examine the participants' responses to my questions in the first interviews, which explored their views of marriage and sex prior to the Bible study, as well as their recollections of how they had been educated about those topics at Trinity during their childhood and youth. I will then examine the participants' responses to my questions in the second interviews, which sought to determine how the Bible study had influenced their understanding of God's design for marriage and sex. Finally, I will compare my initial hypotheses about what I expected to learn from the research with my actual findings and discuss the similarities and differences between them.

#### Data Analyses

##### Introduction and Description of Participants

##### Participant A

Participant A is a female [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

During her interviews with me, Participant A seemed interested in the topic and did not hesitate to share her thoughts, the majority of which were positive. During the Bible study portion of the project, she was less talkative, but her responses to my questions in the second interview indicated that she had paid close attention to the material.

**Participant B**

Participant B is a female [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

During the interviews, Participant B did not give detailed answers to my questions, which I thought might have indicated a lack of engagement with the material. However, after the second interview had concluded, she apologized to me for what was in her mind a lack of substantive answers, as she said that often has difficulty articulating her thoughts about significant issues. During the Bible study, I noticed that she was paying close attention and nodding her head quite often when I made my points, so I believe that she enjoyed and benefited from the study.

**Participant C**

Participant C is a male [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Like Participant B, Participant C had some difficulty articulating his thoughts to his satisfaction during the interviews, but he expressed appreciation for the Bible study and told me that he learned a lot from it.

**Participant D**

Participant D is a female [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

During the interviews, Participant D was overall very positive and interested in the topic at hand. She was a bit less talkative during the Bible study portion, but her answers in the interviews indicated that she paid attention and learned a great deal.

### **Participant E**

Participant E is a male [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

During the interviews (the first interview in particular), Participant E expressed the highest level of agreement with the basic premise of this project of any of the participants. He was very interested in the prospect of getting married and having children, and he was the only participant to specifically mention procreation during the first interview without any prompting from me. Like some of the other participants, he was quieter during the Bible study, but he indicated by his answers to the interview questions that he enjoyed it and grew in his understanding of God's Word.

### **Participant F**

Participant F is a female [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Of all of the participants, Participant F probably expressed the greatest disagreement with the premise of the project (very respectfully, I hasten to add). She was the only one of the participants to express doubts about wanting to have children of her own, although a major reason for her hesitation was connected to her interest in adopting and fostering children from adverse family situations. However, she was also suspicious of male doctors in particular, which contributed to some fear of the experiences of pregnancy and childbirth. She also made some comments that were explicitly pro-LGBT, which reminded me that the people of my congregation need to be repeatedly instructed about *all* aspects of marriage and sex, rather than solely their procreative aspects as I am doing in this project.

**Participant G**

Participant G is a male [REDACTED]

Participant G was probably the most vocal and talkative of the participants, both in the interviews and in the Bible study. He did not hesitate to share his opinions and be a leader in the

Bible study discussion. Overall, he felt positive about the Bible study, but he was not afraid to share with me the aspects of the project he thought could have been improved.

### General Analysis of Initial Interviews

My purpose in conducting the first interviews with my participants before the Bible study was to hear from them their perceptions of what they had learned at church about marriage and sex. I wanted to know if the issue of procreation had been a meaningful aspect of that instruction, or if it had been largely ignored. By and large, the findings of this set of interviews were consistent with what I was expecting; namely, that procreation was not a major emphasis for the participants in their instruction about marriage and sex at church, nor was it a significant aspect of their thinking about these issues at the present time.

Many of the participants, when asked about what they had learned about marriage and sex at Trinity as they were growing up, focused on the moral aspects of reserving sex for marriage. Participant A, for example, when asked about what she had learned about these topics, responded thusly: “I think having principles of stuff like waiting before marriage and like obeying commandments...[sex] needs to stay within marriage because that's what God wants for us.” Participant B responded similarly when she was asked what she had learned about sex in church: “that it should only be if you're married and like regardless of like even if you're engaged or whatever, you still wait until you're married.” Participant E concurred: “that's why it's always good to wait until marriage to find that one that you're going to be with forever. Or that's the goal is to be with them forever. And so wait till it's like kind of stamped that you're going to be with them forever to have sex or you want to have children or anything like that.”

Participant D expressed that the warnings she received against having sex before marriage were so strong that they initially led her to believe that sex was an intrinsically evil action: “I

would probably say that growing up, I thought sex was a bad thing just because outside of marriage, I know it's not like biblical to have sex outside of marriage. And so I grew up thinking it was a bad thing.” Thankfully, she proceeded to tell me that she now realizes that sex is a normal and God-pleasing aspect of marriage, and she also has not moved to the other extreme and rejected all Christian teaching about the sinfulness of premarital or extramarital sex.

Participant F told me that “waiting” was basically the only thing she remembered learning about marriage and sex at Trinity, or from any Christian sources. Her description of what she had learned about these issues as she was growing up was as follows: “Not much. Just like waiting after marriage. And that's basically much it ... whether it be like sex or like talking about other stuff. Also, like my mom talking about it, like everything, just waiting up to marriage. A lot of stuff about that... she's like, wait till after marriage and stuff like that and such.”

Some of the participants mentioned other moral aspects of marriage and sex that are typical of conservative churches’ teachings on these issues. Participant E, for example, commented on the sinfulness of divorce: “You know, divorce isn't a good thing. And like the church has kind of taught me that marriage isn't divorce. Marriage and divorce shouldn't go together.” Participant B agreed: “You should always love your spouse and try to work through any problems before you think about divorce. Because divorce also goes against what God says.”

The issue of homosexuality also was raised by several of the participants when they were asked what they had learned about sex and marriage in church. Participant B briefly mentioned this topic: “I remember that marriage is between a man and a woman and. Like homosexual or relationships, like go against what God said.” Participant G also stressed that marriage is “between a man and a woman.” Overall, however, there was less discussion about homosexuality and same-sex marriage than I would have expected, given that it is such a major issue in

American society at this point in history.

Most of the participants also discussed the role that their Christian faith should play in their marriages. Overall, they felt that it was important to marry someone who shared their faith and would act in a godly manner. Participant A mentioned these spiritual concerns first when I asked her what principles she had learned about marriage in church: “I would say similar beliefs in the church like same denominational beliefs.... And having I think, just having like similar minds when it comes to like Chris, being a Christian and believing in God is most important.”

Participant C stated that spouses helping each other grow in their faith was one of the main purposes of marriage: “When one gets married, they typically try to help each other in their faith and help their children in their faith.... But from what I'd have learned, it was that it was to help the other spouse grow in in faith with the Lord and to help each other grow.”

Participant D recalled that the spiritual aspects of marriage were the most significant things she had learned about marriage at church: “It was more about the spiritual and emotional sides of it, I'd say. We didn't learn a ton about it, but it was more about how you can have a biblical marriage and on how it can affect those around you ... how it was like, God and then your spouse and then family.” Participant E compared the trust that spouses should have in one another to their faith in God: “Like that emotional connection is faith. Because if you have faith in your significant other, then you probably have faith in the church and you probably.... So if you're if you're faithful in one good thing, you're probably pretty faithful and a lot of other good things.” Thus, faith appeared to play a major role in most of the participants’ recollections of what they had learned about marriage in church, and they seemed to have taken those lessons to heart.

In general, the participants remembered learning basic biblical teachings about marriage

and sex at church. They largely understood that sex was to be reserved for married couples only, that divorce and homosexuality were contrary to God's design, and that faith should play a major role in one's marriage. In relation to the purpose of this project, though, for the most part there was little to no discussion about procreation in response to the first few questions of the initial interviews. Participants A, B, and D mentioned children in passing, but more as an assumption that they would probably want to have children someday rather than as a recognition that procreation is an intrinsic aspect of God's design for marriage. Participants C, F, and G did not discuss procreation or children at all without any prompting from me.

The sole exception to this general lack of emphasis on procreation was Participant E, who talked about children several times and expressed great interest in starting a family. The following quote is typical of some of the things he said about procreation during the interview: "I see the ultimate goal, like purpose of sex is to have children. That's at the end of the day, that's what it is. And so, and that's how it should be. That's what God created. Sex to have children for reproduction, and that's all there really is to it." I was surprised that Participant E would speak so strongly and in such positive terms about procreation without me mentioning it to him at all, and it showed that he would be receptive to the material he would be learning in the Bible study. Other than this one exception, though, it appeared that procreation and children did not rank highly on the list of important teachings about marriage and sex that the participants had learned in church.

When the participants answered questions about their future spouses, several themes emerged in their answers. All of the participants expressed a desire to marry someone who was supportive and compatible with them on an emotional level. Participant G used the analogy of a team to describe the type of relationship he wished to have with his future wife: "I want to be

able to see that she's willing to work as a team ... have me and her be in a place in their lives where they're confident enough that they can work together as a team and do whatever needs to be done and live life like that ... I think I want somebody that would be willing to work together and do stuff.” Participant C mentioned humor and open-mindedness as qualities he sought in a future wife: “Someone who's someone who's humorous, who's funny and that kind of thing. And, you know, who understands, who understands just, other things and keeps an open mind.” Participant A expressed a desire for a husband who shared her sense of fun and adventure: “I want to be fun, and he would want to travel a lot because I want to travel...And like, probably like entrepreneur, we're kind of similar to like, like minded to what I want to do.” Participant F desired to marry a man with whom she could rationally discuss difficult issues and find solutions to them: “Understanding. Not controlling, I guess. And like, waiting to talk things out rather than jumping to conclusions and just basically being moral support and emotional support as well.” Similar desires were expressed by all of the other participants as well.

Another major theme that emerged with a majority of the participants was a desire to marry someone who shared their Christian faith. Participant A spoke about the strong relationship with God she hoped her future husband would have: “I would say that first off, he loves God more than he loves me.... I would say probably the most important thing is that he wants to be involved in church and he cares about me and my future children's, you know, relationship with God just as much as he cares about his relationship with God.” Participant D felt similarly, citing her desire to marry a man who was firmly rooted in his faith: “I want him to be servant hearted and founded on, he has a firm foundation and knows what he believes in within the Bible and the church. I want him to be wise just to be able to discern things that aren't. I mean, he knows how to make the right decisions and know what's right and wrong.” Participant C also felt that it was

important to marry someone who shared his beliefs: “I would hope that she's in the faith. I would hope that she carries the same beliefs in, that end, either broad spectrum of being a Christian or, I mean, hopefully also being Lutheran on a more singular level.”

Not all of the participants fully embraced the idea that the people they married would necessarily need to be faithfully Christian. Participant F, for example, did not mention faith at all when asked about the qualities she would like her future husband to have. Participant G, when I specifically asked him about the role of faith in marriage, agreed that he would want to marry a Christian, but perhaps not one who blindly followed everything the church taught her: “I've met girls that have that are like, very religious, but it almost like clouds their judgment. It's almost like, like I'm not allowed to have doubts because it's just like, this is plain and simple...But I think, I do want faith. But I want to also to be like, open minded.” Despite these exceptions, though, the overall theme that emerged from the interviews was that the participants desired their future spouses to be faithful Christians who would be active in the church and encourage their families to do the same.

Conspicuously absent in most of these descriptions of the participants' ideal future spouses was any significant discussion of procreation, children, or parenthood. Few of the participants said anything about hoping to find a spouse who wanted children or who would be a good parent. There was nothing intrinsically wrong with most of the answers they provided, yet by and large they lacked any consideration of the procreative and familial aspects of God's design for marriage.

Again, however, Participant E proved to be a major exception to this trend. At this point in the interviews, I had yet to ask the participants any direct questions about procreation and children, yet Participant E began speaking about these topics without any prompting from me.

Along with mentioning emotional compatibility and a shared Christian faith as desired qualities he would like to have in a future wife, he also described his ideal future wife as “somebody you can raise kids with, somebody you know that like, they'll be a good parent.” This statement, although brief, was far more than any of the other participants discussed procreation and childrearing when they were describing the qualities they desired their future spouses to have.

Finally, when I asked the participants the questions that specifically mentioned procreation, their responses varied widely. Most of them recalled hearing a few things about procreation in church, but that it was not a major emphasis of the instruction they received about marriage and sex. Participant B, for example, when asked if she remembered hearing anything in church about the importance of having children in marriage, responded: “I mean, probably. Can I think of it now? Probably not. But I'm sure like, it's been talked about, but I just don't remember.”

Participant C responded similarly: “I have before. Again, it's one of those things where it's, I don't exactly remember what was being said, so I don't want to say something that's completely not true. But I have, there has been talk and discussion about it.” Participant D seemed to recall hearing more about procreation, but not to a significant extent: “Well, I would say, like it's not necessarily talked about a ton, but I definitely do remember multiple sermons on like having children and, it's like Sunday school talks and confirmation class and all that.”

Participant G did not remember hearing much about procreation in church; however, his perception was that it was understood as a given that he and other young people would eventually marry and have children. It was not explicitly impressed upon him that he should do these things, but it was an unstated expectation that he would. As he said in the interview, “The topic of children, as in us having children was almost like a mandatory thing. It was like going to grow up, going to get married and have kids.” He expressed some regret that these assumptions

were never examined more closely: “I don't think there was ever a point where it was stopped and discussed of, well, why are we? Why? Why is it significant to have children?... I think, honestly, the topic of kids I don't think ever came up in a meaningful way.”

Participant A recalled a similar lack of emphasis on procreation in her instruction about marriage and sex, but she felt that this might have actually been a good thing. She favorably compared Trinity to other churches that are much more emphatic in their teaching that married couples (and wives especially) are obligated to have children: “I think our church does a good job about like, not like projecting that on people because I know a lot of churches can be like, you get married just so like, you can have a ton of kids ... maybe specifically like, for women, like that's all you're taught to do is like, you have to be a wife and be a mom.” She explained that many of her non-Lutheran friends attended such churches, and that the women especially felt that the overbearing emphasis on early marriage and motherhood devalued their abilities and other contributions that they could make to the church and the world. Thus, Participant A agreed with the other participants about the relative lack of instruction about procreation at Trinity, but she expressed appreciation for it instead of lamenting it.

When asked if they believed that God would want them to have children if they were able to do so, most of the participants agreed that He would, and most of them also said that they themselves would like to have children someday. Almost all of the participants believed that God would want them to have children so that they would be raised as Christians and the church would increase in number. Participant B's response to this question was typical: “Yes, because you can teach your children about God and bring them into faith.” Participant A expressed similar thoughts: “Yeah, for sure...to further His kingdom...just because then I could see them grow in their faith with God.” Participant E concurred: “It's always a final goal to reproduce and

be able to raise people, especially if you're in a church because you want to you want to spread that Christianity and you want to get your kids in the church. And so I think all Christians should reproduce and grow their kids up in the church.”

Some of the participants also stated that God would want them to procreate because they themselves love children, and they believe that they would be good parents. Participant D expressed such thoughts: “I really enjoy being around kids and it's always been a dream to be a mom...because my heart is for children. And I mean, He made people to be able to have kids and to be able to enjoy that aspect of life.” Others were interested in seeing how their own personalities and characteristics would be passed on to their future children. Participant A stated that she would like to “just see, like little versions of me and my husband walking around stuff, I don't know. That's a good example, but I think it would be really cool to see their achievements and what their passions are that are different and then like similarities that they'd have to me, my husband.” Participant E expressed similar thoughts in even stronger terms: “And it's like you care for your children more than your spouse. That's usually how it goes. Because your children, that's, that's you. That's a little you.”

A few of the participants expressed some reservations about whether or not God actually would want all married couples to procreate. Participants C and G, although they themselves would like to have children, did not necessarily believe that procreation was a desirable goal for everyone. When asked if he believed that God would want him to have children if he were able to do so, Participant C responded thusly: “Not all the time. Because I don't know if at certain times he, he would want, like if I wasn't a Christian and I would have them grow up to be people not in the faith and, probably not the best environment to be living in. I do not think he would want me to have children so that they would have that.” Since Participant C himself is a

Christian, he was referring to hypothetical situations in which parents might not be believers, and thus he was expressing his belief that God would not necessarily want non-Christians to have children if they would not raise them in the faith.

Participant G felt that a potential parent's mental state or situation in life might cause God not to want them to have children. When asked if he believed God would want him to have children, he answered: "I think there are some people that shouldn't have kids. I think there are some people that just mentally or where they are in their life, just kids are not... I don't think across the board He's going to say that to everybody. I think it's different for everybody that you ask." Again, Participant G was not talking about himself in this hypothetical situation, as he had already expressed to me that he would like to have children and believes that God would want him to do so as well. Therefore, these two participants were not sure if God's command to be fruitful and multiply is universal, or if it only applies to certain couples in optimal situations.

The only participant to express doubts about whether she herself would want to have children was Participant F. This participant had a great interest in adopting and fostering children rather than in carrying and bearing them herself. She expressed her views on this issue as follows: "I would rather adopt and foster as much as having children would be a blessing. There is, in my opinion, there's way too many kids in the foster system and the adoption system in some of those places can be really cruel. And I, whether by myself or with a spouse, I'd rather adopt and foster and give them a good home rather than have my own." She also stated that, from her perspective, having biological children when so many children need to be adopted is "selfish." When asked if God would want her to have children if she were able to do so, she made it clear that she felt that adopting children was an equally acceptable alternative in God's eyes: "I think He would support me whether I chose to not have children and rather adopt and

foster. My parents think it's a good idea, but they want, like blood grandchildren and such. And like, that may not happen ever.” Participant F thus seemed to be the least interested in having her own biological children, although she desired to adopt and foster vulnerable children as an alternative.

In general, the initial interviews revealed that the participants had been taught a fairly typical conservative Christian view of marriage and sex during their time at Trinity. They had learned that marriage should be a lifelong commitment between a man and a woman, that divorce and homosexuality are contrary to God’s design, and that premarital sex is a sin. By and large, they wanted to marry future spouses who not only would be compatible with them emotionally, but who also would be faithful to Christ and active in the church. However, one major aspect of their views of marriage was generally lacking: the recognition of procreation as one of the primary, divinely designed purposes of marriage. Most of the participants were not necessarily hostile to the idea of having children; they simply had not given the issue much thought at all. When the subject was broached in the interviews, most of the participants indicated that they wanted to have children; however, some of them were not sure about the universality of God’s command to be fruitful and multiply, and one participant indicated that she did not necessarily want to have children of her own. In short, these participants were the ideal candidates for instruction about God’s design for marriage, sex, and procreation. After the initial interviews, I was eager to learn how their views would be affected by participating in the project’s Bible study with me.

#### General Analysis of Final Interviews

As I stated in Chapter Four, the results of the second interviews with the participants would be the most significant contributor to answering my research question. After the participants had

participated in the Bible study about God's procreative design for marriage and sex, I wanted to know how this instruction had affected their views of procreation and raising children. I had hoped that for those participants who had said little about procreation during the first interview (almost all of them), the Bible study would have moved that issue to the forefronts of their minds. Ideally, those who were initially friendly to the concept would become more so, while those who had expressed reservations would change their views, at least to an extent.

Most of the participants were able to articulate accurately to me what the topic of the Bible study had been and what I had taught them. Almost all of them, after being asked what they had learned from the Bible study that they had not heard before, mentioned something about procreation and its importance in God's design for marriage. Participant A, for example, said "I learned a lot more about why married couples should have kids in a Christian household." Participant C agreed: "We talked about not only the importance of marriage in the Bible and what it, what it means ... and then having a family added on to that, having kids mainly. We talked about understanding what it meant to have kids." Participant E had similar recollections of the study: "We talked a lot about like, children and like, having children, and...like we all got to talk around and have our opinions on what it means, like to have kids and the church and grow up with kids."

Several of the participants expressed that the Bible study's emphasis on the importance of procreation in God's design for marriage was a new concept for them. Participant A felt this way: "I thought it was more of just a choice, but I feel like the main thing I took away from your thing is we should. Because God, God likes that and wants us to have kids." Participant C felt similarly: "I knew that it was important, that it's a promise that has been given down through generations for the Israelites. But I didn't know that it was as in-depth as it is for why kids are

important...I had heard some form of it or another from different instances, but it's all together, it was different.”

Some of the participants indicated to me that before the Bible study, they had not given much consideration to the potential difficulties that accompany marriage and parenthood. Participant D indicated that she had learned more about those aspects of marriage during the Bible study: “I learned a lot about the different things that could be like, difficult in relationship and like how you need to have those set things before you. Like, want to have kids so that you can have the best life for them, like finances and just stable home and relationship stuff with the husband and just all that kind of important things.” Participant C also recalled our discussion of some of the more difficult aspects of marriage and procreation: “We talked about understanding what it meant to have kids, but also. Again. Yeah, just the difficulties of what it, what they can bring or of what some reasons why people wouldn't be okay with having them.”

By contrast, some of the participants stated that the material covered in the Bible study had not been new to them; they had learned these things previously. Participant B recalled having already heard about the blessings of procreation (albeit not recently): “Well, not so much that I hadn't heard it before, but just haven't heard it in a while. But just saying that like God wants you to be fruitful and multiply and have children if you can.” Participant F, when asked what she had learned from the Bible study that she had not heard before, responded: “Nothing much really. I mean, it's something that I was taught my whole life, mainly like children are blessings and marriage is a great thing to go through and such. So that's something I've been taught my whole life.” At least a few of the participants, therefore, did not feel that they had learned anything particularly new during the study.

One of the participants did not mention procreation at all when he was asked what he

learned in the Bible study that he had not heard previously. Participant G, when I asked him this question, responded: “I learned that there's a lot more about marriage in the Bible than I think I originally thought... And also, I think just how to interpret those, those scriptures and how to how to apply that to today's age and also like, like maybe things that could interfere with those, those ideals and those doctrines.” Some of his answers to my later questions in the interview showed that he did indeed remember that the Bible study discussed procreation, but the fact that he did not mention procreation at all when I initially asked him what he had learned indicated that perhaps I had not been clear enough in my presentation. Alternatively, he may have simply been more interested in the tangential aspects of the study and remembered them better accordingly.

When I asked the participants if the Bible study had changed what they were seeking in their future spouses, I often received responses in the negative. However, this usually occurred because the participants had already been planning to get married and raise families, and so the Bible study merely reinforced for them what they had previously wanted to do anyway. Participant C's response to the question was typical: “I don't think it really did. It didn't change the fact that I would want to have kids with my future spouse. Or what to consider I, I guess I had already thought of most of those things as either being problems in the future, but nothing that would have changed what I thought I would want.” Participant G felt that the Bible study reinforced the vision that he already had for his future spouse and encouraged him to pursue that: “I don't know if I would say it would change my ideas. It made me more aware of what I do want. I guess maybe I didn't have like a strict idea and this kind of helped me help steer me in the right direction of what I want to look for.” Participant E had a similar response: “Well, no and yes, because it's like. I was looking for those things, but it wasn't, like those things weren't like a

priority. And now I was like, we kind of went through that Bible study and it actually kind of made me realize what needs to happen to get a good spouse and to be able to raise kids together.” Thus, most of those who did not feel that the Bible study changed their views still found it to be helpful in solidifying in their minds what they were seeking in a future spouse.

Some of the participants, by contrast, did feel that the Bible study had a significant impact on what they were seeking in a future spouse. When asked if the Bible study had changed her views, Participant A responded: “Yes. I think that I, I definitely changed my opinion on having kids because I thought it was definitely, more like I didn't realize how much like, God actually wanted us to have kids...definitely I think it's a little more important now that I make sure that my spouse wants to have kids.” Participant D agreed: “It made me definitely think a little bit more about like, um, make sure, like, the people I'm dating are on the same page with me about, like, having kids. Or if I can't have kids, like, adopting. It made me think a lot more about, like, what they want to do too.” Participant B also felt that the Bible study had changed her views somewhat: “I guess because like the Bible said, he talked a lot about like, what you should look for in like a spouse and how, like the importance is of like, making sure that there would they would be like, a good husband and a good dad. Because, I mean, I had thought about that, but not like as deeply as like we went into it in the Bible study.” The Bible study thus did make an impact on several of the participants and encouraged them to seek spouses who wished to have children and would make good parents.

I received similar answers to the question about whether or not the Bible study had changed what the participants were seeking in their future marriages. Again, some of them said that their views had not changed, but had been reinforced by their participation in the study. Participant G had a typical response: “I would say no. I think, I think my idea is always kind of

follow this, the church's guidelines, or not guidelines, but suggestions. So I would say I would say it followed pretty closely to what, what I did want.” Participant B felt similarly: “No. I kind of felt like I had the same like, thoughts that were on the Bible study, just that you should love each other and be one and like always support each other and things like that.”

However, as with the previous question, a few of the participants did indicate that their views of their future marriages had changed as a result of attending the Bible study. Although Participant A stated that her desires for her future marriage had not changed significantly, she also proceeded to tell me that she was now giving more thought to the spiritual dimensions of her future marriage after having participated in the study: “I think definitely like spiritually from this Bible study I took, it's a lot more important than I kind of give credit for, especially when it comes to like having kids and also like being active in church and baptism and all that. Just being set in your beliefs before you even have kids.” Participant C, when asked if the Bible study had changed his view on his future marriage, responded: “I think it did a little bit. I, specifically on the part that marrying someone who shares your beliefs is really important, as because it could provide, it could create, if not, if you don't share, uh, the same religion that it can, that could be problems that arise featured on the road that I had probably not thought about completely.” Participant E also highlighted the focus on the spiritual dimension of marriage as a significant takeaway from the study: “Yeah, it, it just made me. It made me want to kind of seek more of a faithful relationship because some relationships, like one of them goes to church, one doesn't. And that, but as you can grow as a married couple, you can increase your faith together and always keep God first before the other one.”

Participant F was the only one of the participants to give a response to this question that indicated a lack of acceptance of the premise of the Bible study. When she was asked if the study

had changed her views on her future marriage, she responded: “Definitely not someone who's, like, pressuring you to have kids. Something I feel like, it's something that should take time... So kind of taking it slow and such.” It seemed that even after attending the Bible study, Participant F still appeared to be more interested in avoiding procreation than in trying to facilitate it. However, Participant F’s stance was an exception to the general rule, as most of the participants were either still equally interested or perhaps even more interested in having children after the Bible study.

When I asked the participants if the Bible study had changed their plans for having children or starting a family, I received some interesting answers. Some of the participants responded that their plans had not particularly changed because they already wanted to have children.

Participant B felt this way: “No, I still want kids... I mean, I want somewhat of a big family, I guess, because I like kids, but, hopefully the husband feels the same.” Participant G responded similarly, although he indicated that maybe he was now more interested in having children than he had been previously: “I think if it did, it made me want to have children more. I think having that force of it's something that is asked of you in the Bible and is something that God wants you to do that I think that just moved me closer to doing it, even though I was already very much on board with having children.” Participant E had similar thoughts:

I always had planned to have children and start a family, but it kind of kind of drove me more to actually want that because it's kind of just like a thought in the back of my mind that like, yeah, when I get older I'll, I'll want that if it happens. But now it's kind of like a goal of mine obviously to get a great spouse. She's going to grow with me, but also have children who I can help grow and help try to become a good man and or good woman in the church.

For some of the participants, therefore, the Bible study led them to have a greater desire to have children in accordance with God’s design for marriage.

Participant D, although she indicated that she still definitely wanted to have children,

focused on some of the difficulties associated with procreation and raising families that we had discussed in the study. When asked if her plans for having children had changed as a result of the study, she responded: “It did make me a little bit more nervous to have kids just because of all the complications and all of that.” It seemed that Participant D now had a greater awareness of the potential challenges that await future parents and a more realistic perspective on what procreation and parenthood actually entail. However, she still expressed a strong interest in having children and raising a family despite those difficulties.

The more interesting answers I received to this question were related to the more tangential aspects of the Bible study that I had not spent a significant amount of time discussing. Participant A, for example, was surprised by my assertion that in-vitro fertilization is morally problematic:

The one thing that I was kind of surprised about when we talked about in vitro and stuff like that, I, I didn't really know. I mean, it's weird because like my, um, one of my cousins was like, born through in-vitro. So it's like, it's just kind of a slippery slope for me because, you know, you're kind of playing God. But at the same time, like, I think about my cousin, I'm like, well, I mean, she's a blessing. Like God, God made her. So I don't know.

This response indicated to me that a Bible study more specifically dedicated to the ethics of procreation and assisted reproductive technologies would be helpful to people of this age group, as they are just now beginning to consider the issues of marriage and family.

Participant F, in response to this question, reiterated her desire to adopt and foster children instead of having biological children of her own: “I would like to have kids, but even if I don't find someone, or even if I do, I feel like adopting and fostering is a bit better for me.” She went on to describe how the processes of pregnancy and childbirth are frightening to her, especially the potential for receiving a “husband stitch”<sup>1</sup> from a male doctor against her will. I personally

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<sup>1</sup> According to Participant F, a “husband stitch” is an additional stitch that doctors will sometimes give to a birthing mother to tighten her vagina if it tears on delivery of the baby. The purpose of this stitch would be to increase the pleasure of a male sex partner, but it leads to significant pain during intercourse for the woman who

had never heard of this practice before the interview, and I have no idea how widespread it actually is.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, Participant F appeared to believe that male doctors would be inclined to administer one if the birthing mother's husband asked them to do so.

Finally, when asked how the Bible study could be improved for the future, most of the participants did not offer any concrete suggestions. Overall, they enjoyed the study and felt that it was informative and spiritually enriching for them. Participant C's response was typical: "I don't think I could have done a better job at it, but, definitely one of the better ones I've ever I've been able to sit through. But uh, I don't think that there was really many improvements that I can think of." Participant E concurred, stating that he enjoyed the study because the participants were free to share their thoughts honestly: "I mean, obviously anything can be improved, but it was a pretty good Bible study because we all got to tell our thoughts and what we thought and there was no judgment." Participant A felt similarly: "I really, I really appreciated that you had people answer questions and like made sure everyone talked for the most part. And I liked that there was group feedback during the, during the presentation. And it wasn't just a presentation, it was kind of like a, like, let's talk about this. How do people feel about this? Let's get different opinions."

Participant G, although he enjoyed the study, suggested that there be some more instruction on the relationship side of marriage, rather than a nearly exclusive focus on procreation. He stated: "I think the balance between children and relationship wasn't very even. But I think that's something that I think also is very important on teaching or teaching, teaching us how to respect your partner and treat your relationship in a godly way. And I think that's also just, just as important as having children and all that kind of stuff." Participant D also expressed some desire

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receives it.

<sup>2</sup> It appears that there is some anecdotal evidence to suggest that "husband stitches" do occur, but no formal studies have been conducted to research their frequency. See Kathleen Davis, "Husband stitch: Myths and facts," *MedicalNewsToday*, June 23, 2020, <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/husband-stitch>.

to learn more about the relational aspects of marriage, especially physical intimacy between spouses: “But I would say, like the importance of, like just having a good physical connection with your spouse as well. Some more like topics on that or having like when, I don't know, kind of more of like the physical side of it as well.” These responses reminded me that even though my project was focused mostly on God’s procreative design for marriage, the young people of the church need to learn about all of the other aspects of this crucial institution as well.

Finally, Participant F, as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, was the only one of the group to express disagreement with the basic premise of the Bible study. When I asked her how the Bible study could be improved, she wanted affirmation that childlessness was an acceptable choice in God’s eyes: “I think also kind of accepting that it's okay not to have kids as well. Like not even, some people are fine without having kids in their lives and I think that's okay.” She also felt that I had not done enough to promote adopting children as an equally faithful alternative to having one’s own children: “I feel like those that's a big thing that we can teach that, especially accepting people who would rather adopt and foster than having their own kids.” I did not mean to give the impression in the Bible study that adopting children was an inferior alternative to having them biologically, so perhaps I need to state this more strongly the next time I teach this material.

Participant F also stated that she wanted to hear more about LGBTQ people who can serve as parents. She indicated that she had no problem with this family arrangement, and in fact had wished to hear in the Bible study how same-sex couples could be equally as effective at parenting as a mother and father: “Or even parents of the LGBTQ who can make amazing parents as well, doesn't have to be just a mom and a dad, but, and I've seen great examples of that. It's actually it's amazing. I feel like including everyone that can be that can be a parent is

good as well.” This statement reminded me that the people of our congregations are not immune to absorbing the world’s values and views of sexuality. Even though most of the participants believed that marriage is between a man and a woman, one of them did not, and as such I need to remember to emphasize this critical aspect of marriage when I teach my people about it.

In general, though, I believe that the Bible study was successful in its intention. Those participants who already wanted to have children in accordance with God’s design for marriage were strengthened in their resolve to do so, while most of those who were unsure about wanting to have children at least somewhat changed their minds. Only Participant F remained largely opposed to the idea that marriage is a fundamentally procreative institution. I certainly would not expect every person who encounters the teachings about God’s procreative design for marriage to embrace them wholeheartedly, so I do not believe that the project was a failure because the Bible study did not convince everyone. Continued resistance to God’s Word simply shows that the world’s values are powerful in the minds of even members of our congregations, and as such the church needs to continue to teach God’s design for marriage faithfully and patiently. I look forward to further opportunities to discuss these issues with the people of Trinity.

### **Expected Findings vs. Actual Findings**

Overall, my findings in the project mostly confirmed my expectations. I expected that the participants would not mention procreation and raising families when they were asked what they had learned about marriage and sex in church, and I was largely correct in that assumption. I expected that most of them would not mention children or parenthood when they were asked what they wanted their future marriages to be like, and I also expected them not to name the desire for children or the potential to be a good parent in qualities they were seeking in a future spouse. Both of these expectations also turned out to be mostly correct (with Participant E being

the major exception).

I did not expect the participants to be hostile to the idea of having children in their future marriages, and most of them indeed were not. Not even Participant F, who was the only participant to express doubts about wanting to have her own children, was *completely* opposed to the idea, and she was interested in fostering and adopting children as an alternative. I did expect the Bible study to raise the participants' awareness of the importance of procreation in God's design for marriage, and it appears that this did indeed occur.

I was unsure about how willing the participants would be to discuss potentially sensitive issues of marriage, sex, and parenthood with me, but I was delighted by the honesty, openness, and maturity with which all of them handled the subject matter. I never felt that the participants were refusing to share important information with me, nor did I sense that they were uncomfortable speaking with me about the topics discussed in the interviews and during the Bible study. I greatly appreciated their engaged participation and insightful comments, as they aided me greatly in answering my research question.

I thought I might potentially discover that certain aspects of the participants' backgrounds and families of origin (e.g., number of siblings, marital status of parents, etc.) would affect the way they perceived marriage and procreation, but those factors did not appear to make a significant difference in my small sample size of participants. The participants from larger families did not seem more inclined to name procreation as an important factor in God's design for marriage, nor were those from smaller families less inclined to do so. The one factor that appeared to make at least some difference in the participants' acceptance of the Bible study material was the amount of exposure they had to Christian teaching over the years. Those who were most involved in church and youth group during their high school years, as well as those

who attended a Christian school or homeschool co-op, were the most likely to embrace the teachings about God's procreative design for marriage. Those who had not been particularly involved in church or had attended public school, by contrast, were slightly less likely to respond positively to the teaching. Again, I must stress that very few general trends can be discerned from a small sample size of participants, so I will refrain from making any grand pronouncements about the role of involvement in church and Christian education in making people more willing to accept the teachings of God's Word. My suspicion, however, is that if a larger sample size of participants had been interviewed, the results would have been similar.

Finally, my expectation that the participants were willing to allow the Word of God to determine their views of marriage and procreation was largely confirmed, with the exception of Participant F. Most of the participants either already greatly desired to have children, or their desire to do so increased after their participation in the project. Participant F, however, did not seem to change her views as a result of attending the Bible study, but she was an exception to the general trend. Participant F also indicated by her answers that she held to a number of other unbiblical views about sexuality and parenthood, most significantly relating to the LGBTQ community. My expectation that the participants were interested in faithfully applying biblical teachings to their lives was not met in this one case, but all of the other participants indicated a willingness to allow the Word of God to shape their views and plans for the future.

In general, I enjoyed the experience of implementing the project with my participants. They were uniformly cooperative, engaged, and willing to speak honestly with me about their views on the subject matter. I was able to overcome the difficulties in scheduling the interviews and the Bible study sessions, and as a result I gained great insights not only in answering my research question, but also in applying those lessons to ministry opportunities in the future. The

implications of this project for the conduct of ministry and instruction on marriage and procreation in the congregation will be the subject of my final chapter.

## CHAPTER SIX

### SUMMARY

I began this project with the following question: How will a procreation-centric approach to Christian marriage and family education help college-age young adults to value God's procreative design for marriage and family, and encourage them to make godly decisions about these matters in their own lives in the future? To answer the question, I developed a Bible study discussing sex, marriage, and family from a procreation-centric perspective; that is, I ensured that God's gift of procreation and command to married couples to be fruitful and multiply were central to the discussion. No other Bible study resources directed toward youth and young adults that I had found heavily emphasized procreation; rather, the issue of procreation was either marginalized or not discussed at all. As praiseworthy as some other aspects of those resources were, this crucial aspect of God's design for marriage and sex was not adequately considered. I resolved, therefore, to fill this significant gap in the church's teaching by producing the Bible study used in this project.

To determine how successful the Bible study would be in accomplishing its purpose, I recruited seven recent high school graduates from my congregation to attend the Bible study and learn about God's procreative design for marriage and sex. I interviewed them before the Bible study to learn about their previous views on these matters, and I interviewed them again after the Bible study to learn if any of their views or plans for starting a family or having children had changed. This interview structure gave me some significant insights into the impact that the teaching had on the participants' understanding of the importance of procreation in the biblical view of marriage.

In implementing the project, I determined that the Bible study was successful in its intent to

make the participants aware that procreation and raising families are intrinsically praiseworthy goals in God's eyes. Although most of them before the Bible study already considered children to be blessings from God, they had not necessarily understood that God would want all married couples to procreate under normal circumstances. The participants largely saw children as optional blessings from God that they were free to have if they chose, but could easily refuse if they desired to avoid the difficulties of having to raise and care for them. Most of them did want to have children of their own, but not necessarily because it was God's will; it was simply their own personal will for their lives and future marriages.

The Bible study, however, helped the participants to understand that God would want them to procreate and raise families if they were able to do so. Several of them reported to me in the second interview that they had not fully realized how important procreation and children are to God's design for marriage, and that their desire to have children had increased as a result of their participation in the Bible study. Others stated that the Bible study had helped confirm for them that they wished to have children in the future, and that hearing about God's procreative design for marriage had strengthened their resolve to follow those plans. Only one of the seven participants remained largely resistant to the premise of the Bible study; the others indicated that they had embraced the teaching that God would want them to have children if they were able to do so. Thus, I would consider the Bible study and the project to have been a success, and I gained a definitive answer to my research question. For college-age young adults who are open to learning God's Word and leading their lives according to it, a procreation-centric approach to Christian marriage and family education does indeed help them to value God's procreative design for marriage and family, and it encourages them to make godly decisions about these matters for their own lives in the future.

## **Implications for Future Ministry**

The findings of my project indicate that procreation-centric teaching about marriage and sex could be fruitfully employed in a number of areas of congregational ministry. My particular project was limited in its scope to young adults, but there is no reason why the biblical teachings about procreation should be restricted to that demographic. Considering the significant impact that children (and the lack thereof) have on families, the church, and the world as a whole, it would behoove the church to integrate procreation-centric teaching into many different aspects of congregational life. I wish to offer a number of suggestions to the church and its leaders as to how they might accomplish this task.

First and foremost, an emphasis on procreation should be included in any discussion about the biblical doctrine of marriage. The Bible study I used for my project was not intended to serve as a comprehensive instruction about God's design for marriage, but it could certainly be integrated into any wider teaching on this subject. For example, if a pastor wished to teach a multi-session class about marriage, he could include the Bible study lessons I developed as a part of his curriculum, or he could at least incorporate many of their insights. Too often, teaching about marriage in the church focuses solely on the relationship between husband and wife, as established at the creation in Gen. 2 or as reflected in the relationship between Christ and His church as Paul describes in Eph. 5. Although any discussion of marriage certainly should include these critical issues, something very important is missing if God's procreative design for marriage is not considered as well. I would hope that my Bible study lessons could help to fill this deficiency in the church's typical approach to instruction about marriage, and help members of our congregations to become more aware of the desirability and importance in God's eyes of procreation and raising children.

Instruction about God's procreative design for marriage should also be a prominent feature

of any discussions about marriage and sex directed toward children or youth. If children in the church are told that God wants them to grow up and someday find a spouse, they should also be told that they will hopefully have children with their future husband or wife, if God allows them to do so. Similarly, when older youth in confirmation classes or youth group are educated about marriage and sex, they should be told about God's procreative design for marriage. They do not only need to be told that marriage is desirable and advisable for them; they should also be taught that procreation is ordinarily the natural outcome of a God-pleasing marriage. The Sixth Commandment and other issues related to sex and marriage should not be taught without any reference to procreation, as has unfortunately been done in many quarters of the LCMS in the recent past. Even young children should be trained to think of themselves as future mothers and fathers, as hopefully the vast majority of them will be. If children and youth are taught from a young age that God wants them to have their own children when they grow up and get married, then they will be more likely to embrace this teaching and approach their future marriages with the expectation that they and their spouses will indeed procreate.

Procreation-centric teaching about marriage would also serve the church well in its ongoing struggle to proclaim that marriage is a lifelong commitment between a man and a woman, as opposed to a commitment between same-sex couples. One of the main reasons why same-sex marriage has become widely accepted in Western society is that Westerners have largely embraced what I described in Chapter Two as the "revisionist" view of marriage. They typically see marriage as solidified by the feelings of love and sexual desire that the spouses feel for one another, rather than by its fundamental procreative nature. Same-sex couples, obviously, cannot procreate as God encouraged Adam and Eve to do, and as He has desired husbands and wives to do throughout all of human history. If pastors wish to uphold the biblical view of marriage as a

commitment between opposite-sex couples, then they would do well to focus on the procreative aspects of marriage as they teach their congregations about these issues. Doing this would give them another line of argumentation that supports a traditional understanding of marriage, rather than simply having to rely on Bible verses that condemn homosexuality. Any additional arguments that can be employed in defense of the true doctrine of marriage are worth pursuing, as modern Western culture's confusion about this issue only continues to increase as time passes.

Finally, I also believe that an emphasis on the procreative aspects of marriage would be very helpful in marriage counseling situations, most significantly in premarital counseling. Couples who are engaged or considering marriage should be told that under normal circumstances, God would want them to have children together and raise those children in the Christian faith. With fertility rates continuing to decrease in the United States, and with more and more married couples choosing to be childless, pastors can no longer assume that all of the couples asking them to officiate weddings intend to have children at some point. Greater attention paid to verses such as Gen. 1:28 would help potential spouses to understand God's procreative design for marriage and his encouragement to them to be fruitful and multiply. Although it may lead to some awkward conversations, pastors should not be afraid to assert during premarital counseling that God would want these future husbands and wives to have children together. Pastors should encourage couples not to pursue greater freedom, comfort, and luxury, but rather to recognize that God calls them to sacrifice their own desires for the sake of obeying His will. Christian couples who begin their marriages with this understanding of God's design for their marriage would probably be more likely to procreate as God intends, and to have fewer conflicts with each other about whether or not they would want to have children.

Overall, therefore, procreation-centric teaching has the potential to make a significant

impact on the preaching, teaching, and counseling practices of parish pastors. Not only is teaching about God's procreative design for marriage and sex faithful to God's Word, but it also has the potential to encourage Christians to contribute to the church and to humanity as a whole. I have already discussed the negative effects that declining population can have on church membership and on society, and I believe that encouraging Christians to procreate can help to mitigate some of those adverse outcomes. Proclaiming these truths may prove controversial in our congregations, as many of our people have been trained to think of children as merely optional features of marriage, only to be born if husbands and wives desire them. Even many pastors are not accustomed to speaking about procreation in this way. Yet the church is called to be faithful to God's Word above all else, and thus its pastors and laypeople should embrace His procreative design for marriage. I hope that this project can serve as my contribution toward that end.

### **Implications for Future Research**

I would encourage other researchers with more time, resources, and access to larger numbers of potential participants to pursue this matter further and determine if the results I obtained in my project are typical of those who conduct similar studies with similar groups of participants. In particular, I would encourage pastors of larger congregations to use these Bible study materials and learn how their young adults respond to them. I believe that my congregation overall has a high percentage of faithful families who participate actively in our ministries, and most of my participants came from such families. I would like to see the results from a similar study done with young adults whose families were only peripherally involved in their congregations, and the main point of contact for the participants themselves was youth group and other social events, rather than the Sunday morning Divine Service. I would be interested to

know if such participants might be more or less likely already to have a biblical view of God's design for marriage and sexuality, and to learn how they would respond to the teaching from my Bible study. In other words, I would like to know how frequent church attendance and participation in the ministries of the church would affect the results with the participants. In a larger congregation, there will naturally be greater variation with the involvement of each family and their children simply because the membership pool is greater in size. I hope that at some point, another researcher might conduct a study in such an environment with a larger sample size, so that this question might be more satisfactorily answered.

One of the limitations I faced in my study was having to wait until all of my participants had turned eighteen years old before I could include them in my study, or even approach them and ask if they would be willing to take part in it. Concordia Seminary at this point does not allow its Doctor of Ministry students to conduct any research with minors as participants. However, such restrictions necessarily excluded some potential participants who probably could have contributed some valuable insights in their interviews. I would encourage a future researcher to conduct this study not only with young adults, but also with high school youth (with the permission and involvement of their parents, of course). Such a study would have the advantage of interviewing participants with fresher memories of their time learning about sex and marriage at their congregations as they were growing up. The cooperation and input of parents might also be a valuable tool for discerning their thoughts on the issue of God's procreative design for sex, and whether their own instruction of their children has been according or contrary to it.

I also would encourage researchers in non-Lutheran settings to conduct a study such as this one in their own congregations, to see if the results vary between Christian denominations. In

particular, I would be interested to learn if young adults within denominations that officially condemn artificial contraception, such as Roman Catholicism, would have different views on God's design for marriage than their Lutheran counterparts. It would be fascinating to learn if an official prohibition of contraception actually did lead to different attitudes and practices on the part of youth and young adults, or if such a prohibition has been more likely to be ignored than followed. I also would want to learn about the experiences that Evangelical youth have had in being educated about procreation in the church, as Evangelicalism is one of the most influential strains of Christianity in the West and in the United States in particular. Perhaps in studying the results of research in these settings, we in the Lutheran Church could learn about different approaches that might help in educating our own youth and young adults about God's procreative design for marriage.

Finally, I would also encourage a future researcher to conduct a similar study that incorporates the material I have developed into a more comprehensive Bible study about marriage in general. As I learned in my research, some of my participants did not fully understand fundamental biblical teachings about marriage, and some of them had requested more instruction about the relational aspects of marriage. I have always envisioned the Bible study from this project as existing alongside additional lessons that discussed other significant topics related to marriage (such as its reflection of the relationship between Christ and His church, its limitation to one man and one woman, its function as a check on human sexual sin, etc.). Because of the need to limit the scope of this project, and because of the time constraints that my participants and I needed to navigate, I was not able to teach them much during the Bible study about most of the other significant aspects of marriage. I would be interested to learn how a comprehensive, thorough examination of the biblical teachings on marriage, including its

procreative aspects, would affect the attitudes of youth and young adults who participate in it. Ultimately, this is the manner in which I would desire my Bible study materials to be used, and I hope that future researchers would consider incorporating them into any project that measures the impact on young people of the biblical teachings about marriage and sex.

### **Reasons for Hope**

At first glance, it may appear that I have conducted this research project too late to make a significant difference in the life of the church and of Western society as a whole. Fertility rates in the United States, for example, continue to drop lower every year, and there is little sign of that trend being reversed in the near future. Especially since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, young adult Americans have been having children in dramatically decreasing numbers (with a fertility rate drop of 4% in 2020 alone). They have cited rising costs of living, student loan debt, climate change, and a desire for a greater freedom and luxury as reasons not to have children.<sup>1</sup> In the United Kingdom, recent polling has indicated that 46% of adults aged 18-24 do not desire children and plan not to have them at all, for many of the same reasons as the Americans.<sup>2</sup> It is safe to assume that some of these young adults will eventually change their minds and have children; however, a large percentage of them will most likely remain true to their convictions and remain childless for their entire lives. As detailed in Chapters Two and Three of my project, if this trend continues, it could lead to many negative political, economic, and social consequences in most Western countries, including the United States.

When confronted with these impending problems, concerned individuals might be tempted

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<sup>1</sup> Leanne Italic, “Gen Z, Millennials Speak out on Reluctance to Become Parents,” *The Associated Press*, August 30, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/covid-health-millennials-fcaa60313baf717312c6e68f12eb53ff>.

<sup>2</sup> Rachel Hains, “Almost Half of Gen-Z Don’t Want to Have Kids, Finds Research,” *Wales News*, March 24, 2022, <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/cost-of-living/almost-half-gen-z-dont-23484684>.

to despair over a future that looks increasingly bleak because of the likelihood of a contracting population. They might worry that there will be no younger generation to support welfare programs such as Social Security when they reach retirement age, and that they will suffer financially as a result. They might be concerned about the economic state of the Western world, where a shortage of laborers and entrepreneurs could cause poverty and weakness relative to that of other societies. If they are Christian, they may fear that the church will shrink along with the rest of society, and that there will be fewer believers on earth to support the work of ministry and proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to the world. These are real possibilities that should concern all people, Christians and non-Christians alike, and anything that can be done to reverse the demographic trends or alleviate the negative effects of a declining population should be considered.

However, as concerned as I myself am about some of these potential difficulties in the future, I counsel the readers of this project not to allow themselves to fall into despair. In conducting research for this project, I have uncovered just as many reasons to be hopeful as to be pessimistic about the future. Most obviously, my experience with my research participants was encouraging in that they largely showed themselves willing to consider the teachings of God's Word about the blessings of procreation. God encourages His people to be fruitful and multiply, and faithful married Christians under normal circumstances will heed His command and have children. My research participants were (mostly) very willing to receive this teaching and either be strengthened in their resolve to procreate or reconsider their previous hesitation toward the prospect of doing so. I was heartened by the participants' openness toward hearing and believing the Word of God on this issue, and I suspect that many other young Christian adults would be similarly inclined positively to receive instruction about God's procreative design for marriage.

If enough of them are convinced to have children, especially if they were not originally planning to do so, then perhaps enough of a difference could be made in the overall population size to mitigate some of the negative developments that seem likely to occur. Additionally, since those who receive this teaching would be Christians, their children would be baptized and added to membership in the church, which would help to slow or perhaps even arrest the church's numerical decline. If the children remain in the faith throughout their lives, then as adults they would be able to share the Gospel of Jesus with others, which would bring more and more of the lost into fellowship with the true God. Thus, assuming my research participants are at least somewhat representative of Christian youth and young adults in the United States, there is great potential for helping this demographic to understand better the blessings God grants to those who have children. Should they come to believe in and appreciate God's procreative design for marriage, they could make a significant difference in the welfare of society and of the church.

I also have hope in our society's current situation of fertility decline because much of the decline is actually concentrated in non-religious populations. Even though fertility rates have dropped to some extent among religious Americans, they have not dropped anywhere nearly as precipitously as they have for unbelievers. According to a recent article in *Christianity Today*, the fertility rate between fall 2020 and spring 2022 for women who attend religious services weekly was roughly 2.1 (or exactly replacement level), while the rate for women who never attend church was considerably lower at 1.3.<sup>1</sup> If those trends continue, the share of faithful Christians within the overall population could be expected to increase over the next several decades. Of course, this projection would assume that a large number of children within the church would remain Christians as they mature and grow to adulthood, which is admittedly an

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<sup>1</sup> Lyman Stone, "Baby Blues: How to Face the Church's Growing Fertility Crisis," *Christianity Today*, August 8, 2022, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2022/august-web-only/birth-rates-church-attendance-decline-fertility-crisis.html>.

optimistic assumption. Concerted efforts would need to be made to retain these children as church members, and I encourage other researchers to tackle this highly important task, as it is beyond the scope of this particular project. Nevertheless, the demographic projections for faithful Christians and the church specifically may actually be more encouraging than they are for society at large. Should Christians, who already appear naturally inclined to procreate more than unbelievers, be explicitly taught about God's procreative design for marriage, their fertility rates may rise even more significantly in response.

The greatest reason I have for hope, however, has nothing to do with the fertility projections for society or the church, or even with my research participants' responses to my Bible study. My greatest reason for hope is the same that it has always been; namely, the Gospel of Jesus Christ and His death and resurrection for the salvation of all who trust in Him. As important for the world in this age as it may be for human beings to procreate, the ultimate salvation of the world does not depend on the number of children born to each woman. Nor does the salvation of the church depend upon the number of children Christian couples have. Rather, salvation remains the free gift of God in Christ Jesus, to be received by faith in His blood. It can be very easy for those concerned about dismal demographic projections to become highly pessimistic about the future of society, and even Christians are not immune from this sort of thinking. Christians may be even more concerned about the future of the church, and give themselves over to despair at the prospect of the church shrinking down to a tiny fraction of its former size. Yet those who trust in Christ are not called to despair! We are to remember His promises of forgiveness, life, and salvation and draw strength from them, knowing that in the end, all things will be made new and His people will inherit eternal life. God will preserve His church in this age and in the age to come, and no matter what earthly hardships His people

endure now, He will bring them safely to His kingdom on the last day. Thus, we Christians can face the future with hope and confidence, trusting in His promises to us for the sake of His Son Jesus Christ. Regardless of what happens to fertility rates in our society and in the church, Christ will win the victory, and His people will live eternally with Him in His kingdom.

And perhaps, somewhat ironically, the fact that nothing, including fertility rates, can prevent Christ's eternal victory may be a significant reason why Christians tend to have more children than unbelievers. For many non-Christians, the sorry state of the world seems to loom largely in their minds when they make decisions about whether or not they will procreate. Issues such as climate change and economic conditions are often cited as reasons not to have children, because potential parents would not want their children to be raised in a world with such hardships. Likewise, unbelievers have little reason to sacrifice comfort, luxury, and entertainment in this life to raise children, because in their minds, this life is the only life they will ever have. Christians, however, even though we may have similar concerns, see things differently. We recognize that having children and raising them in the faith will lead them to eternal life with Christ, which will make any environmental or economic hardships of this world fully bearable for them. We also recognize that we ourselves are destined for eternal life in God's kingdom, which gives us motivation to sacrifice our own comfort and luxury now for the sake of raising our children. Speaking for myself, there are certainly times when I wonder if the hardships of raising children are worth enduring, and I also worry about the state of the world in which my children will live when they reach adulthood. However, my hope as a Christian overrides any concerns I might have about our lives in this age. My wife and I have never hesitated to have children, because we know that if we raise them in the church and they remain strong in their faith for their entire lives, they will spend eternity with Christ in the kingdom of

God. This eternal hope alone makes having children worthwhile, and it appears that many other Christian families believe the same thing.

### **Conclusion**

As Psa. 127:3 states: “Children are a heritage from the Lord.” Indeed, they are a great blessing from Him, which is why He encourages His people to be fruitful and multiply. My wife and I have been blessed with three boys ourselves, and although raising them has not always been easy, it has always been rewarding for us. My goal in this project has been to encourage other future husbands and wives also to procreate according to God’s design, so that they too might share in the same blessings that we have received from Him. It should not even be necessary to encourage people to do this, yet as we have seen, many voices in the world and humanity’s sinful nature would dissuade potential parents from having children. Thus, they are missing a wonderful opportunity to sacrifice their own desires for the sake of others, to obey God’s commands, and to receive His blessings. My prayer for my research participants, and for all those who read this project, is that they would be led by the Holy Spirit to take God’s Word seriously and have children of their own, if they are capable of doing so. God blesses us immeasurably through His gifts of family and children, and we Christians would do well to accept these blessings with joy and thanksgiving. If my project encourages other Christian spouses to be fruitful and multiply as God commanded Adam and Eve at their creation, then I will consider it to have been a great success. May God grant all of us a zeal for children, families, and God’s procreative design for marriage!

## APPENDIX ONE

### **A Word to Those Who Struggle with Infertility**

With a Major Applied Project like this one, there is always the potential that readers will be upset or offended by the topic, not only because of the procreative choices that they have made during their lives, but also because of the procreative choices that they were unable to make. I have said much in this project about how those married couples who are choosing to be childless should rethink their choices in light of God's design for marriage and procreation. However, I have said comparatively little about married couples who desperately desire to have children, and yet are unable to have them for physiological or medical reasons. An extended discussion of infertility is beyond the scope of this project, so I encourage another researcher to tackle this topic, as it significantly affects many married couples in our congregations. I do, however, wish to offer a few encouraging words at this time to those who struggle with infertility.

First of all, I wish to convey that I am very aware of the terrible pain and hardship that can result when a married couple is unable to have children. I have known friends who have been unable to conceive children or have suffered miscarriages, and I have witnessed the grief that has come from those situations. Additionally, my wife and I ourselves are not complete strangers to this issue. Although God has blessed us with three healthy sons, we are unable to have any more children because of medical reasons, and that has given us a sense of loss as we contemplate what could have been. Our three boys were born in the fall, summer, and winter, and we would have loved to have had a fourth child in the spring to have one baby for each season. God had other plans for us, however, and so we are content with the family that He has given us. Still, though, in some small way we are able to identify with those who cannot have children. We understand that if we feel loss in our own situation, then those who are completely infertile must

be suffering far worse than we. My deepest sympathies and prayers are with those who struggle with infertility, and I hope that reading this project has not deepened their pain or caused them to wonder if their marriage is serving God's purposes for it.

As I said to my participants during the Bible study, procreation is a significant purpose of marriage, but it is not the only one. Gen. 2 describes the creation of Adam and Eve and the delight that they find in one another, without referencing procreation or children at all. God has designed marriage so that a man and a woman may unite in an exclusive, lifelong commitment to each other, so that their need for companionship and their sexual desires might be satisfied in an orderly way that is pleasing to Him. Their capability (or lack thereof) of having children does not affect this important purpose of marriage at all. Additionally, couples that are unable to have children might find that God, through their infertility, opens other avenues for them of service to the church and to the world (e.g., adoption of orphaned children, greater participation in the ministry of the church, etc.). Thus, there is no theological reason to believe that infertile married couples are somehow less pleasing to God than those who have borne many children, and I would never want to give the impression that this was the case. Infertility is a painful enough cross to bear without also being told that it is punishment from God, or that it makes one's marriage less blessed in His sight.

For a more extensive discussion of issues of infertility, I would refer the interested reader to several resources within the LCMS. Concordia Publishing House offers an electronic Bible study resource entitled "The Master's Touch: Living with Infertility" that is somewhat dated at this point, but still provides a faithful theological examination of this topic. The resource offers comfort and hope to those who struggle with infertility and reminds them of God's love and grace for all who trust in Him. A small group Bible study would be the perfect setting to discuss

this material, so that the participants could offer each other mutual support and encouragement.<sup>1</sup>

A newer resource from within the LCMS that could be helpful for infertile couples, and infertile women specifically, is a book entitled *He Remembers the Barren*, by Katie Schuermann. As a wife who has struggled with infertility herself, Schuermann understands the pain that infertile couples experience and helps them to view it in light of the cross of Jesus Christ. This book could be read by an individual or a couple, or it could serve as a good resource for a support group for Christian women.<sup>2</sup> Schuermann, along with several other women, also hosts an online blog dedicated to discussing issues of infertility from a Christian perspective. Although it has not been updated for several years, there are still helpful articles and links to resources on the webpage, and I would encourage anyone with interest to explore the site.<sup>3</sup>

I also would encourage infertile couples to do adequate research and speak to their pastor before attempting to conceive children through the use of assisted reproductive technologies. Although exploring the issues presented by these technologies is beyond the scope of this project, I would at least like to call attention to the fact that there are many ethical considerations that must be addressed before Christians can employ them in good conscience. As a starting point, I would direct the reader to the work of Gilbert Meilaender, a Lutheran theologian who has written much faithful scholarship in the field of bioethics. In particular, I would urge that anyone considering the use of assisted reproductive technologies read Meilaender's discussion of the issue in his brief books entitled *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians*<sup>4</sup> and *Neither Beast nor God: The Dignity of the Human Person*.<sup>5</sup> Although it may be tempting for Christian couples to

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<sup>1</sup> Roger and Robin Sonnenberg, "The Master's Touch: Living with Infertility" (St. Louis: Concordia, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Katie Schuermann, *He Remembers the Barren*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Fort Wayne, IN: Emmanuel, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> He Remembers the Barren (blog), accessed September 22, 2022, <https://heremembersthebarren.com>.

<sup>4</sup> Gilbert Meilaender, *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 10–25.

<sup>5</sup> Gilbert Meilaender, *Neither Beast nor God: The Dignity of the Human Person* (New York: New Atlantis,

embrace uncritically such technologies if they enable the conception and birth of a child, the moral and theological ramifications of doing so should give them pause. Children are gifts from God rather than the creations of human beings, and we need to be careful that we do not overstep our bounds and create children for ourselves when He has not seen fit to bless us with them.

Again, I would strongly encourage other researchers to explore issues of infertility, assisted reproductive technologies, and their impact on the people of our congregations. These are very serious issues with which the church in today's world must wrestle, and I support any effort to develop appropriate theological responses to them. For my purposes in this project, however, suffice it to say that I deeply sympathize with those who struggle with infertility and pray that God would grant them peace and contentment in their situation. I would never want to give the impression that God is less pleased with the marriages of Christian couples that cannot have children, because He certainly is not. All Christian husbands and wives, regardless of their ability to conceive children, will please God if they remain faithful to Him and to each other for their whole lives. Under normal circumstances, marriage is a fundamentally procreative institution, but many exceptions certainly do exist, and those exceptional cases are not inferior to the norm in any way.

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2009), 21–36.

## APPENDIX TWO

### Informed Consent Form

Concordia Seminary

801 Seminary Place  
St. Louis, MO 63105

#### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**Study Title: Children Are a Heritage from the Lord: A Procreation-Centric Approach to Christian Marriage and Family Education**

**Researcher: Rev. Nicholas Hagerman**

**Email Address and Telephone Number: hagermann@csl.edu 417-612-3109**

**Research Supervisor: Dr. Richard Marrs**

**Email Address: marrsr@csl.edu**

**Contact for Questions or Concerns: Concordia Seminary, Dr. Mark Rockenbach, Director of Doctor of Ministry Program, rockenbachm@csl.edu**

You are invited to be part of a research study. The researcher is a student at Concordia Seminary in Saint Louis, Missouri as part of the Doctor of Ministry program (D,Min.). The information in this form is provided to help you decide if you want to participate in the research study. This form describes what you will have to do during the study and the risks and benefits of the study.

If you have any questions about or do not understand something in this form, you should ask the researcher. Do not sign this form unless the researcher has answered your questions and you decide that you want to be part of this study.

#### WHAT IS THIS STUDY ABOUT?

The researcher is hoping to learn about how recent high school graduates at Trinity Lutheran Church have been educated about marriage and sex during their time as children and youth of the congregation, and what they have learned from that instruction. The researcher also wishes to learn if a two-session Bible class about these issues will teach the participants anything new and/or affect their attitudes and plans regarding their future spouses and marriages.

#### WHY AM I BEING ASKED TO BE IN THE STUDY?

You are invited to be in the study because you are:

- Either a recent high school graduate or about to graduate from high school

- At least 18 years of age
- A member of Trinity Lutheran Church who has participated in confirmation instruction and youth group at the congregation for a number of years

If you do not meet the description above, you are not able to be in the study.

### **HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL BE IN THIS STUDY?**

About 8 participants will be in this study.

### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The researcher is a pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church.

### **WILL IT COST ANYTHING TO BE IN THIS STUDY?**

You do not have to pay to be in the study.

### **HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THE STUDY?**

If you decide to be in this study, your participation will last about 6 hours. You will have to participate in two 60-minute interviews with the researcher, and attend two 2-hour youth group sessions in which a Bible study will be taught.

### **WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THIS STUDY?**

If you decide to be in this study and if you sign this form, you will do the following things:

- answer questions during an interview about your experience being educated at church about marriage and sex, your future plans for marriage, and the qualities you seek in a future spouse
- attend and participate actively in a two-session Bible study

While you are in the study, you will be expected to:

- Follow the instructions you are given.
- Tell the researcher if you want to stop being in the study at any time.

### **WILL I BE RECORDED?**

The researcher will make an audio recording of your interviews. The researcher will use a secure computer program to create written transcriptions of the audio recordings.

The researcher will only use the recordings of you for the purposes you read about in this form. They will not use the recordings for any other reasons without your permission unless you sign another consent form. The recordings will be kept for seven years and they will be kept confidential. The recordings will be destroyed after seven years.

### **WILL BEING IN THIS STUDY HELP ME?**

Being in this study will not help you. Information from this study might help researchers help others in the future.

### **ARE THERE RISKS TO ME IF I AM IN THIS STUDY?**

No study is completely risk-free. However, we don't anticipate that you will be harmed or distressed during this study. You may stop being in the study at any time if you become uncomfortable.

### **WILL I GET PAID?**

You will not receive anything for being in the study.

### **DO I HAVE TO BE IN THIS STUDY?**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You can decide not to be in the study and you can change your mind about being in the study at any time. There will be no penalty to you. If you want to stop being in the study, tell the researcher.

The researcher can remove you from the study at any time. This could happen if:

- The researcher believes it is best for you to stop being in the study.
- You do not follow directions about the study.
- You no longer meet the inclusion criteria to participate.

### **WHO WILL USE AND SHARE INFORMATION ABOUT MY BEING IN THIS STUDY?**

Any information you provide in this study that could identify you such as your name, age, or other personal information will be kept confidential. However, due to the nature of action research it may be possible that people within the context of the research setting may be able to identify you. But, in any written reports or publications, no one will be able to identify you. You will be identified in the published study as "Participant A," "Participant B," etc.

The researcher will keep the information you provide in a locked file cabinet in his office at Trinity Lutheran Church, and only the researcher will be able to review this information.

Only the researcher will have access to the audio recordings of your interviews.

Even if you leave the study early, the researcher may still be able to use your data. If, for example, you complete the first interview, but drop out of the project before attending the Bible study, then your responses to the interview questions could still be used.

### **Limits of Privacy (Confidentiality)**

Generally speaking, the researcher can assure you that she/he will keep everything you tell him/her or do for the study private. Yet there are times where the researcher cannot keep things private (confidential). The researcher cannot keep things private (confidential) when:

- The researcher finds out that a child or vulnerable adult has been abused
- The researcher finds out that that a person plans to hurt him or herself, such as commit suicide,
- The researcher finds out that a person plans to hurt someone else,

There are laws that require many professionals to take action if they think a person might harm themselves or another, or if a child or adult is being abused. In addition, there are guidelines that researchers must follow to make sure all people are treated with respect and kept safe. In most states, there is a government agency that must be told if someone is being abused or plans to hurt themselves or another person. Please ask any questions you may have about this issue before agreeing to be in the study. It is important that you do not feel betrayed if it turns out that the researcher cannot keep some things private.

### **WHO CAN I TALK TO ABOUT THIS STUDY?**

You can ask questions about the study at any time. You can call the researcher if you have any concerns or complaints. You should call the researcher at the phone number listed on page 1 of this form if you have questions about anything related to this study.

**DO YOU WANT TO BE IN THIS STUDY?**

I have read this form, and I have been able to ask questions about this study. The researcher has talked with me about this study. The researcher has answered all my questions. I voluntarily agree to be in this study. I agree to allow the use and sharing of my study-related records as described above.

By signing this form, I have not given up any of my legal rights as a research participant. I will get a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I attest that the participant named above had enough time to consider this information, had an opportunity to ask questions, and voluntarily agreed to be in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**DO YOU WISH TO BE AUDIO RECORDED IN THIS STUDY?**

I voluntarily agree to let the researcher audio record me for this study. I agree to allow the use of my recordings as described in this form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **APPENDIX THREE**

### **Interview Questions**

#### Initial Interviews

- 1.) What do you remember learning about marriage in church as you were growing up?
- 2.) What do you remember learning about sex in church as you were growing up?
- 3.) What do you want your future spouse to be like?
- 4.) Do you remember learning anything in the church about the importance of having children in marriage?
- 5.) Do you think God would want you to have children if you are able to do so?

#### Final Interviews

- 1.) What did you learn from the Bible study that you had not heard before?
- 2.) Did participating in the Bible study cause you to change any of your thoughts about what you are seeking in a future spouse?
- 3.) Did participating in the Bible study cause you to change any of your thoughts about what you would want your future marriage to be like?
- 4.) Did participating in the Bible study cause you to change any of your plans for having children or starting a family?
- 5.) How might the Bible study be improved for the future?

## APPENDIX FOUR

### Analysis of Initial Interviews

#### Participant A

1. **Question:** What do you remember learning about marriage in church as you were growing up?

a. **Statement:** “I would say probably like the biggest highlight would be when I was in eighth grade, I was 14 and then we'd do the purity banquets at Trinity...And then every now and then in Sunday school I think that we talked about it too.”

**Transformed:** Marriage was a topic that was occasionally discussed in Trinity's catechetical program.

2. **Question:** What kinds of things were you taught?

a. **Statement:** “I think like how sex works. I think also like dating and stuff. Doing what works and then. I think what is a godly, a good, godly marriage and the principles into like what that is and why we should try to strive for that.”

**Transformed:** I was taught about God's design for marriage at Trinity.

3. **Question:** What are some of those principles?

a. **Statement:** “I would say similar beliefs in the church like same denominational beliefs...And having I think, just having like similar minds when it comes to like Chris... being a Christian and believing in God is most important.”

**Transformed:** Spouses should share the same confession of faith in Jesus Christ.

b. **Statement:** “And then I think having principles of stuff like waiting before marriage and like obeying commandments.”

**Transformed:** Potential spouses should wait until they are married before enjoying God's gift of sex.

c. **Statement:** “I think being faithful to your partner is a huge thing.”

**Transformed:** God desires that married couples remain faithful to each other and not seek sex outside of their marriages.

d. **Statement:** “I think another thing is that I've learned is even when you're married, it's not like all your problems are solved, like there are still going to be problems within marriage.”

**Transformed:** Because both spouses are sinners, they will experience conflict within their marriage at times.

e. **Statement:** “Love is an action, not an emotion. And I think that that's a big thing too, because a lot of times we marry someone because we love them and we do love them. But it grows into something deeper and a bigger connection as you go on.”

**Transformed:** Christian spouses must intentionally love each other through their actions, as Christ has loved His church, rather than only their emotions.

f. **Statement:** “And a lot of people that aren't Christians and don't go to church, I feel like sometimes don't realize that. And that's why, you know, so many divorces happen. But if you marry for the right reason and for God pleasing reason, I think it's way more beneficial.”

**Transformed:** A firm foundation of faith in Christ is essential for the success of a marriage.

4. **Question:** What do you remember learning about sex in the church as you were growing up?

a. **Statement:** “Honestly, not much. I feel like my parents, my parents, like they had the talk with me, like when I was nine, so I kind of already knew stuff and I honestly can't really.”

**Transformed:** My parents took their God-given responsibility of educating me about sex seriously.

b. **Statement:** “I mean, obviously in like Wednesday nights and stuff, I feel like whenever we would go over like the Sixth Commandment, that was probably the biggest time in church where we learned about that topic. And I remember it's always like a taboo topic like, Oh, we're going to learn about the Sixth Commandment today, and everyone would be like nervous. So excited about, I don't know, but I think those classes, maybe like Wednesday nights, were the most that we ever did talk about that.”

**Transformed:** Other than some lessons specifically dedicated to the Sixth Commandment, I was not taught much about sex at Trinity.

c. **Statement:** “I think it was just more like taught like, like sex is a gift from God, and we shouldn't be ashamed of it. But we also like it needs to stay within marriage because that's what God wants for us.”

**Transformed:** Sex is God's gift to married couples, to be used responsibly within their marriage exclusively.

5. **Question:** What do you want your future husband to be like?

a. **Statement:** “I would say that first off, he loves God more than he loves me, and then I would also say very disciplined hard worker, but I would say probably the most important thing is that he wants to be involved in church and he cares about me and my future children's, you know, relationship with God just as much as he cares about his relationship with God.”

**Transformed:** I wish to marry a man who is a believer in Jesus Christ and provides spiritual leadership to my family in helping us to grow in our faith.

b. **Statement:** “I want to be fun, and he would want to travel a lot because I want to travel...And like, probably like entrepreneur, we're kind of similar to like, like minded to what I want to do.”

**Transformed:** I wish to marry a man who enjoys many of the same things as I do.

6. **Question:** Do you remember learning anything in church about the importance of having children in marriage?

a. **Statement:** “Yes, but not, not a ton. I think that I think our church does a good job about like not like projecting that on people because I know a lot of churches can be like, you get married just so like you can have a ton of kids and like further, the kingdom, which yes, you should be doing that.”

**Transformed:** Even though having children is important, it is not the only aspect of a God-pleasing marriage, and the church should not focus on it exclusively.

b. **Statement:** “But I think a lot of times, maybe specifically like for women like that's all you're taught to do is like, you have to be a wife and be a mom. And I think our church does a really good job of like, you can still be a mom and you can still have kids, but you can also still have a job. I mean, there are a lot of churches that don't really do that.”

**Transformed:** Some churches only tell women to be wives and mothers, which is a waste of many of their other God-given gifts.

c. **Statement:** “I personally have not experienced that because I've grown up in Trinity my whole life”

**Transformed:** Trinity has done a better job than some other churches of presenting a more holistic teaching on God-pleasing marriages.

d. **Statement:** “I do have friends that have went to like more Southern Baptist churches or more like Pentecostal churches and their, their churches, like really pressed the belief of like, you know, you have to like dress like sacrilegiously [*sic*], like modest and then you have to get married at a young age or you're unsuccessful or like, you shouldn't go to college because you're just going to be a mom and cook anyway.”

**Transformed:** Other churches focus too heavily on issues of modesty, early marriage, and domestic tasks for wives, to the exclusion of other biblical aspects of marriage.

e. **Statement:** “They, they feel like it's unfair because I mean, girls have just enough ability as guys do, like when it comes to working. So and I do believe there is a different position between being a father of a household and a mother of the household. But that's not to say like a mother can't be capable of multi-tasking.”

**Transformed:** Even though God has made husbands the heads of their households, that does not mean that wives cannot have career interests and pursuits outside the home.

6. **Question:** Do you think God would want you to have children if you were able to do so?

a. **Statement:** “Yeah, for sure...to further his kingdom.”

**Transformed:** God would want me to have children to increase the number of people in His church, and to produce more people who can share the Gospel with others.

b. **Statement:** “I would like to have kids, probably just because then I could see them grow in their faith with God.”

**Transformed:** I wish to raise godly children who will live a life of faith in Jesus Christ.

c. **Statement:** “And also, you know, just see like little versions of me and my husband walking around stuff, I don't know.”

**Transformed:** I wish to see how God will create a new person using my husband's and my features and characteristics.

d. **Statement:** “I think it would be really cool to see their achievements and what their passions are that are different and then like similarities that they'd have to me, my husband's.”

**Transformed:** I wish to see what God will accomplish in the world through my children.

#### Participant B

1. **Question:** What do you remember learning about marriage in church as you were growing up?

a. **Statement:** “I remember that marriage is between a man and a woman and, like homosexual or relationships, like go against what God said.”

**Transformed:** God's design for marriage is for a man and a woman to marry each other, rather than two men or two women.

b. **Statement:** “You should always love your spouse and try to work through any problems before you think about divorce. Because divorce also goes against what God says.”

**Transformed:** Divorce is a sin against God's design for marriage, therefore married couples should try to avoid it by loving each other faithfully.

2. **Question:** Do you feel like that what you learned about marriage here is different from what you've heard in other settings?

a. **Statement:** “Yes. Just because I go to a public high school and there's people who are Christian and people who aren't and people who have different ways of thinking, coming about things.”

**Transformed:** My public high school has many people with a diversity of opinions, only some of whom adhere to biblical standards about sex and marriage.

3. **Question:** What do you remember learning about sex in church as you were growing up?

a. **Statement:** “That it should only be if you're married and like regardless of, like even if you're engaged or whatever, you still wait until you're married.”

**Transformed:** Sex is God’s gift to married couples, to be shared exclusively with each other within the bounds of marriage.

4. **Question:** What would you like your future husband to be like?

a. **Statement:** “Well, Christian and, like, treats me well, kind, respectful, respectful to my parents, supports me.”

**Transformed:** I wish to marry a believer in Jesus Christ, who will live his life in a manner that is pleasing to Him and supportive of me.

5. **Question:** Do you remember learning anything in the church about the importance of having children in marriage?

a. **Statement:** “I mean, probably. Can I think of it now? Probably not. But I'm sure like, it's been talked about, but I just don't remember.”

**Transformed:** I do not remember any specific instances of being told at church that God would want me to have children when I get married.

6. **Question:** Do you think God would want you to have children if you're able to?

a. **Statement:** “Yes. Because. You can teach your children about God and bring them into faith.”

**Transformed:** God would want me to have children so that I might make disciples of them and teach them to trust in Jesus Christ.

b. **Statement:** “Yes, but I don't think God would punish you if you decided not to have kids.”

**Transformed:** Although God would want Christian married couples to have children, I do not believe that it would be a sin worthy of punishment if they chose not to do so.

### Participant C

1. **Question:** What do you remember learning about marriage in church as you were growing up?

a. **Statement:** “I always learned in church that, when one gets married, they typically try to help each other in their faith and help their children in their faith...From what I'd have learned, it was that it was to help the other spouse grow in in faith with the Lord and to help each other grow.”

**Transformed:** God uses marriage to help spouses grow in their faith in Christ and raise children in the faith as well.

2. **Question:** Can you think of anything else, theologically speaking, that you might have learned about marriage?

a. **Statement:** “Honestly, not a whole lot has... It's not a, I guess, a thing at the forefront of my mind, especially, like now or earlier.”

**Transformed:** I have not learned much in church about God’s design for marriage, and it is not a topic about which I commonly think.

3. **Question:** What do you remember learning about sex in church as you were growing up?

a. **Statement:** “I don't think that subject was ever really talked about except in my confirmation class and trying to remember a lot of it... I really can't. Yeah. It's not really a huge talked about subject. I do remember going to a...maybe an event during... it was at Trinity Lutheran and, we, I think, discussed over a little bit about it, but I don't remember much from that.”

**Transformed:** I do not remember hearing much about God’s design for sex at church as I was growing up.

b. **Statement:** “I mean, if, if I was told the exact opposite of what I would assume would be what the, what my faith says about those topics, then I would probably pay a little bit more attention, try to figure out why. But it was probably something that I already understood and agreed with. And so I didn't really want to need, to need to push further.”

**Transformed:** I did not hear anything about sex in church while I was growing up that I disagreed with or thought would be contrary to the teachings of Scripture.

4. **Question:** What do you want your future wife to be like?

a. **Statement:** “I mean, whatever she wants to be. But I guess, you know, added on to that, I would hope that she's in the faith. I would hope that she carries the same beliefs in that either broad spectrum of being a Christian or, I mean, hopefully also being Lutheran on a more singular level.”

**Transformed:** I wish for my future wife to be a believer in Jesus Christ who shares my confession of faith.

b. **Statement:** “I would hope that she holds same values for family and the importance of family and that kind of stuff.”

**Transformed:** I wish for my future wife to have similar Christian values as me, with an emphasis on the importance of family.

c. **Statement:** “I guess if like from like in a more in-depth, I guess way I would... Someone who's, someone who's humorous, who's funny and that kind of thing. And, you

know, who understands. Who understands just other things and keeps an open mind.”

**Transformed:** I wish to marry someone whose God-given personality is a match for my own, in that she will understand me and make me laugh.

5. **Question:** Do you remember learning anything in the church about the importance of having children in marriage?

a. **Statement:** “I have before. Again, it's one of those things where it's, I don't exactly remember what was being said, so I don't want to say something that's completely not true. But I have... There has been talk and discussion about it.”

**Transformed:** I recall hearing something about God's procreative design for marriage in church, but I do not remember the substance of what was said.

6. **Question:** Do you think God would want you to have children if you're able to do so?

a. **Statement:** “I would think if I was able to do so, I feel like, I would say, for me, not all the time. Because I don't know if at certain times he, he would want... Like if I wasn't a Christian and I would have them grow up to be people not in the faith and, probably not the best environment to be living in. I do not think he would want me to have children so that they would have that. But that's, I guess, just kind of me personally.”

**Transformed:** God would not want me to have children if I were not a Christian, because that would be a spiritually poor environment in which to raise children.

b. **Statement:** “If I, if I was in the faith and if I, and if I was ready to be a parent, I guess then I would believe that God would want me to have children.”

**Transformed:** God would want me to have children if I were a Christian who was ready to do so.

c. **Statement:** “I think that it's important to have a family, not just from, not just as normally, but in I guess in the, in the faith. It's important to have that so that you can help, I guess, grow a generation in which they help others and help to teach. Help to also teach others about God.”

**Transformed:** It is important for Christians to have families so that their children can grow in the faith and teach others about the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

#### Participant D

1. **Question:** What do you remember learning about marriage in church as you were growing up?

a. **Statement:** “I'd say in confirmation class, it was always about like, having a healthy marriage. And most of the time it wasn't always about the physical aspects of marriage, but it was more about the spiritual and emotional sides of it, I'd say.”

**Transformed:** I learned in church that God's design for marriage is more concerned with

the emotional and spiritual connection between the spouses than their physical connection.

b. **Statement:** “It was more about how you can have a biblical marriage and on how it can affect those around you.”

**Transformed:** Spouses who live out God’s design for marriage have a positive impact on people beyond themselves.

c. **Statement:** “...and how to put your relationship with your spouse before your kids.”

**Transformed:** In God-pleasing marriages, the relationship spouses have with each other is more important than the relationship they have with their children.

d. **Statement:** “I’d say it was like respecting boundaries. And before you go into marriage, like knowing where you stand so that you don’t carry any emotional or physical baggage.”

**Transformed:** God desires Christians not to have sex with each other before they are married, and if they do have premarital sex (with anyone), it can cause problems later in the marriage.

e. **Statement:** “...so that you can be with your spouse as best as you can and have a firm foundation in the word before you go into a marriage that is, that could potentially be unstable if you don’t have that.”

**Transformed:** Spouses should have a shared confession of faith in Jesus Christ; otherwise, they might experience problems in their marriage.

2. **Question:** Are other places where you’ve learned about marriage other than church?

a. **Statement:** “Since my school is a Christian private school, we talked some about marriage, but the part that they stray away from is like the sex part. Just because a lot of people, I think in our generation right now don’t like to talk about it because it can either be seen as really, like, bad thing or it just is something that’s saved for marriage.”

**Transformed:** I learned about marriage at my Christian school, but there was a reluctance to talk about sex because it is seen as “bad,” since God forbids sex before marriage.

b. **Statement:** “But I think it’s right now really like it’s taken way out of the place that it’s supposed to. And it’s, it’s like normalized in our society right now.”

**Transformed:** In today’s world, it is normal for people to thwart God’s design for sex by having it before they are married.

c. **Statement:** “It would be more helpful to have people talk about the spiritual side of it and the emotional boundaries that had to be set up. Because there’s a lot of times where I mean, I know a lot of couples that I mean, just high school relationships that fall apart because they go too far emotionally. And I feel like a lot of people my age don’t realize that that is some baggage that can be carried on into next relationships.”

**Transformed:** It would be helpful for the church to talk about the appropriate level of emotional, as well as physical, engagement within premarital relationships for young Christians.

3. **Question:** What do you remember learning about sex in church as you were growing up?

a. **Statement:** “Honestly, I would probably say that growing up, I thought sex was a bad thing just because outside of marriage, I know it's not like biblical to have sex outside of marriage. And so I grew up thinking it was a bad thing.”

**Transformed:** Because premarital sex is sinful in God’s eyes, the church gave me the impression that sex under any circumstances is sinful.

b. **Statement:** “But as I've grown up, I've realized that it's more of a normal thing that people do in marriage. And even then, if people aren't Christians and they do it outside of marriage, but in church, it was, it wasn't really talked about a whole lot, but I think it's just because I was little and, I mean, that's something that a lot of parents and kids don't necessarily want to talk about because it's an intimate, deep thing.”

**Transformed:** I have come to realize that sex is a gift from God to married couples, even though most parents still feel uncomfortable talking about it with their children.

4. **Question:** “Do you think it would be helpful if we talked about [sex] more [in church]?”

a. **Statement:** “I would just because, if it's becoming more normalized in the society right now, then it's more dangerous that people don't realize how serious it actually is and how intimate it can be, and that it is a good thing and not necessarily a bad thing.”

**Transformed:** I believe that the church should talk about sex more to offer godly guidance to its members in a society that has largely lost a biblical understanding of sex.

5. **Question:** What do you want your future husband to be like?

a. **Statement:** “I would say I want him to be servant-hearted and founded on... He has a firm foundation and knows what he believes in within the Bible and the church. I want him to be wise just to be able to discern things that aren't... I mean, he knows how to make the right decisions and know what's right and wrong. I want him to be able to be a leader that can lead my family. And if something happens where we financially are not there or something like that, he knows how to come back and just stay positive and try to lead our family in the best way possible.”

**Transformed:** I would like to marry a man who confesses faith in Jesus Christ and leads my family in a wise and godly manner.

6. **Question:** Do you remember learning anything in the church about the importance of having children in marriage?

a. **Statement:** “Yes. Um. I mean, it was kind of like in the Lutheran Church I think it's brought up in like we're supposed to make disciples and we're also supposed to have kids so that they can go spread the word. And I mean, it's pretty much our job to bring people into the world.”

**Transformed:** God desires Christian married couples to have children in order to raise more disciples in His church, who can then in turn share the Gospel with unbelievers and bring them to faith.

b. **Statement:** “It's not necessarily talked about a ton, but I definitely do remember multiple sermons on like having children and... It's like Sunday school talks and confirmation class and all that.”

**Transformed:** Although it was not a major emphasis, I remember hearing some things at church about God's procreative design for marriage.

7. **Question:** Do you think God would want you to have children if you're able to do so?

a. **Statement:** “If I'm able to. Yes, I really enjoy being around kids and it's always been a dream to be a mom. And so I think that's something that's really been on my mind and on my heart. But I know that if he doesn't, then I probably want to adopt just because I want a family and. I want to be able to raise children up in faith and be able to see them grow up.”

**Transformed:** I greatly desire God to bless me with children, because I love children, and because I wish to raise them in the Christian faith.

b. **Statement:** “I would say just because my heart is for children. And I mean, he made people to be able to have kids and to be able to enjoy that aspect of life, and I'd love to have more people in the world that can spread his word.”

**Transformed:** God would want me to have children because I like them very much, and because in so doing I would be able to raise faithful Christians who can share the Gospel with others.

#### Participant E

1. **Question:** What do you remember learning about marriage in church as you were growing up?

a. **Statement:** “As I was growing up in the church, I just always...it was like kind of a symbol almost, because like. It was like almost that. It's not like a physical connection to be married to somebody. It's like kind of more of an emotional one.”

**Transformed:** God designed marriage to be much more than physical attraction; He designed it to be more of an emotional and spiritual connection between husband and wife.

b. **Statement:** “And whether you're going to get along with them and stay with them for the rest of your life. You know, divorce isn't a good thing. And like the church has kind of taught me that marriage isn't divorce. Marriage and divorce shouldn't go together.”

**Transformed:** Divorce is contrary to God's design for marriage, since He desires married couples to stay together for their whole lifetimes.

2. **Question:** Do you remember in what context you learned those things?

a. **Statement:** “I just remember learning a lot, just sitting at church service, but also like our Youth Sunday schools and just learning that growing up was a good, good place for my mind, kind of to see that as I was growing up.”

**Transformed:** I heard a lot about God’s design for marriage in church, and it helped me to form a godly mindset about marriage in my own life.

b. **Statement:** “Like a lot of the details on marriage and, how it's a big thing, and, because obviously if you're going to marry someone and grow up with grow kids and stuff like that, you need to, you know, be with them forever and not make it more difficult than it has to be in marriage.”

**Transformed:** I learned that God desires married couples to work through their differences and stay together, not only in obedience to His commands, but also for the sake of their children.

3. **Question:** Do you remember learning anything about how God or Christianity and Christian faith factor into that?

a. **Statement:** “Yeah. I mean, it's all about that adultery thing, like waiting until marriage and all that.”

**Transformed:** Remaining faithful to your spouse and not having premarital sex are major aspects of what I learned at church about God’s design for marriage.

b. **Statement:** “And like I said, it's like an emotional connection. And that's, it doesn't sound like it, but that also goes through with faith and, like that emotional connection is faith. Because if you have faith in your significant other, then you probably have faith in the church and you probably... So if you're if you're faithful in one good thing, you're probably pretty faithful in a lot of other good things.”

**Transformed:** A shared Christian faith is an important aspect of married couples’ emotional and spiritual connection to each other, and marriage can help make spouses’ faith stronger.

4. **Question:** What do you remember learning about sex in church as you were growing up?

a. **Statement:** “It's about that emotional connection...And that's why it's always good to wait until marriage to find that one that you're going to be with forever. Or that's the goal is to be with them forever. And so wait till it's like kind of stamped that you're going to be with them forever to have sex or you want to have children or anything like that. And it goes with that.”

**Transformed:** It would be against God’s design for sex to have sex with someone to whom you are not married, as you have not yet made the proper connection or commitment to each other for it to be appropriate.

b. **Statement:** “Like sex shouldn't define a relationship or it shouldn't even like, make a

difference in how you feel about somebody.”

**Transformed:** God wants married couples to be committed to each other for reasons beyond physical attraction and sexual desire.

5. **Question:** Do you remember learning about the purpose of sex in church?

a. **Statement:** “Well, I see the ultimate goal, like purpose of sex is to have children. That's at the end of the day, that's what it is. And so, and that's how it should be. That's what God created. Sex to have children for reproduction, and that's all there really is to it.”

**Transformed:** God created sex primarily for the purpose of procreation.

6. **Question:** What do you want your future spouse to be like?

a. **Statement:** “I want my future spouse to like obviously be super caring and sweet and stuff like that.”

**Transformed:** I would like to marry a wife who exhibits godly love and care for those around her.

b. **Statement:** “But I want her to also, like, make me grow as a person because like. A spouse should help you grow along with them. It should be like a combined thing and growing with each other and nobody should be set back from anything. And like, if one person is being set back and one person is growing as a person, that's not how it should be. Both people should be growing as a person and making each other feel good about themselves.”

**Transformed:** God designed marriage to help both husband and wife help each other to become better people through their marriage, and they should not be putting stumbling blocks in each other's way.

c. **Statement:** “Somebody you can raise kids with, somebody you know that like they'll be a good parent.”

**Transformed:** Because God usually blesses husbands and wives with children, the person you marry should be a good potential parent who desires to have children.

7. **Question:** How does faith play into that [i.e.—what you want your spouse to be like]?

a. **Statement:** “Faith. Just one big word. You have a lot of faith in the church, which is amazing. But you also. Like if you have an amazing faith in the church, that's a really good way to connect and have amazing faith in your spouse. And so that's just like obviously believing in God, believing in your faith. It's an amazing thing, but it'll also help with other outside factors as marriage and such and stuff like that.”

**Transformed:** Having Christian faith will help a person in other areas of his life, including in marriage and in his relationship with his spouse.

8. **Question:** Do you remember learning anything in the church about the importance of having children in marriage?

a. **Statement:** “I mean, yeah. I mean, God wants everybody to reproduce. That's the final goal of everyone is to reproduce and raise kids. And I don't vividly remember like much about it, but like, from what I already know, I know. That's what, that's what God wants, is you find somebody that cares for you and you can reproduce with them and raise them up in the church to also have amazing faith so they can do the same thing you did.”

**Transformed:** Although I do not recall specifically hearing anything in church about God wanting married couples to have children, I believe that He wants His people to have children when they are married so they can raise a family in the faith.

9. **Question:** Why would you say God would want you to have children?

a. **Statement:** “Oh, because that's, that's the whole like reproduction deal. That's what he wants for all his children. And even like you, having children will make you a better person in general. And it'll make you care for somebody more than you ever have in your life.”

**Transformed:** Having children forces parents to care for someone self-sacrificially, so it helps them to develop this Christian virtue.

b. **Statement:** “And it's like you care for your children more than your spouse. That's usually how it goes. Because your children, that's, that's you. That's a little you.”

**Transformed:** God creates one flesh (a child) from the union of a husband and wife, and that child reflects many aspects of the personhood of his or her parents, which also is a gift from God.

c. **Statement:** “And you always, it's always a final goal to reproduce and be able to raise people, especially if you're in a church because you want to you want to spread that Christianity and you want to get your kids in the church. And so I think all Christians should reproduce and grow their kids up in the church. And it'll be like a little effect that things keep happening.”

**Transformed:** Christian parents can raise their children in the church, and they in turn can share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with others and bring more people to faith.

#### Participant F

1. **Question:** What do you remember learning about marriage in church as you were growing up?

a. **Statement:** “Not much. Just like waiting after marriage. And that's basically much it. It's, I don't remember a lot of anything.”

**Transformed:** What little I remember learning about marriage in church had to do with saving sex for marriage in obedience to the Sixth Commandment.

b. **Statement:** “My parents, like just like whenever they gave, like the talk, whatever,

they... Well, my mom tried to have me read a book about it rather than telling me, but she's like, wait till after marriage and stuff like that and such.”

**Transformed:** My parents gave me some guidance about God’s design for marriage, which mostly consisted of urging me to reserve sex for marriage.

2. **Question:** What do you remember learning about sex in church as you were growing up?

a. **Statement:** “Nothing. I don't really remember any. And if they did talk about it, I probably wasn't here whenever they were talking about it.”

**Transformed:** I do not remember receiving any guidance about God’s design for sex at church.

3. **Question:** What do you want your future husband to be like?

a. **Statement:** “Oh, understanding. Not controlling, I guess. And like. Waiting to talk things out rather than jumping to conclusions and just basically being moral support and emotional support as well.”

**Transformed:** I wish to marry a husband who will love me in a supportive and sacrificial way, as Christ did for the church.

b. **Statement:** “And I haven't really, I mean, I maintain I'm not focusing on marriage right now. I'd rather go to school first. I don't I don't really care if I end up married or not in my life.”

**Transformed:** I believe that God’s plans for me now are for me to go to school, and He may not plan for me to get married at all in the future.

4. **Question:** Do you remember learning anything in the church about the importance of having children in marriage?

a. **Statement:** “Blessings and such, all children are blessings.”

**Transformed:** Children are gifts from God to married couples.

b. **Statement:** “But for me, I would rather not have my own. I would rather adopt and foster as much as having children would be a blessing. There is, in my opinion, there's way too many kids in the foster system and the adoption system in some of those places can be really cruel. And I, whether by myself or with a spouse, I'd rather adopt and foster and give them a good home rather than have my own.”

**Transformed:** I believe that God’s plan for me may not be to have my own biological children, but rather to serve other children in difficult situations by providing a home for them.

c. **Statement:** “It's fine if people want to have their own kids, but sometimes, and I'm not saying being super opinionated, I feel like for me it would be selfish of myself to have my

own kids and give them a home and a life rather than some kid who doesn't have any of those any love or attention that they need.”

**Transformed:** I believe God would want me to sacrifice the blessing of my own children for the sake of giving love and a stable home to other children who already exist.

5. **Question:** Do you think God would want you to have children if you're able to do so?

a. **Statement:** “Sure. I think so. Yeah, I think He would support me whether I chose to not have children and rather adopt and foster.”

**Transformed:** I believe that God would want me to have children, but not necessarily my own biological children.

b. **Statement:** “My parents think it's a good idea, but they want like blood, grandchildren and such. And like that may not happen ever, but they're hoping to have like foster grandchildren that they'll have definitely not immediately. I want to get settled first and have a good income before I start adopting and or fostering.”

**Transformed:** I wish to provide grandchildren for my parents through adoption and fostering, but I don't believe it is in God's plan for me to do that for a while.

c. **Statement:** “It kind of breaks my heart knowing this kid's out there being mistreated... And that makes me want to kind of help me realize that there's so many kids out there that need help, and I would be one of those people to help them.”

**Transformed:** God can use me to show love to children who have faced hardship or abuse.

6. **Question:** Do you think you would do that if you were married or not? Would that make a difference?

a. **Statement:** “Yeah, I would want someone who would agree with my decisions on that. Who think that adopting and fostering kids is a really good idea and not really care if we have children or not.”

**Transformed:** I wish to marry someone who also believes God has called him to care for adopted children rather than have biological children of our own.

7. **Question:** Would you want to do that if you were single?

a. **Statement:** “Yes. I've told my parents, like I expect to have, like, even if I'm single, I'm going to probably adopt and foster kids anyways. So that's something I wholeheartedly plan on doing in the future when I have the chance.”

**Transformed:** I do not believe I need to be married in order to fulfill God's call to care for adopted children.

## Participant G

1. **Question:** What do you remember learning about marriage in church as you were growing up?

a. **Statement:** “Growing up. I think as far as marriage goes, it was for a long time it was the blanket, you know, man and woman that kind of set, like just the basics of that when you're younger.”

**Transformed:** I learned in church as a child that God intends marriage to be between a man and a woman.

b. **Statement:** “And then I think for a good couple of years, it was not, not touched upon as much. It was kind of like and it honestly wasn't touched on until we got to the topic of sex. And then so then it started becoming more of marriage and waiting till marriage and all that kind of stuff.”

**Transformed:** As an older child I learned in church that God wants His people to wait to have sex until they are married.

c. **Statement:** “It was more like the technicalities that come with marriage, not like, like what to do, like in a marriage and that kind of that kind of sense...I think they just, like we learned more of the rules around marriage and less of like what a marriage means, what a marriage can entail, like what? What you should do in a marriage, you know, if that makes sense. More of like less of, like how to act like a person and more of the limits of where a marriage lies.”

**Transformed:** I learned in the church what God's design for marriage is, but not necessarily the practicalities of how to form a godly marriage with my future spouse.

2. **Question:** What do you remember learning about sex in church as you were growing up?

a. **Statement:** “Sex is one of those things that always been like a very taboo subject, especially for kids. And I think first thing that I ever heard about it personally was the junior when we did the junior high... Every year we do the junior high get together, the sex talk and that kind of stuff with the other neighboring churches.”

**Transformed:** Because of adult reluctance to speak to children about sex in the church, I did not hear anything about God's design for sex until a major event specifically dedicated to that topic.

b. **Statement:** “But it's almost like people are, like, scared to tell kids that, which I don't I don't think they should be.”

**Transformed:** Adults should be more open with children in the church about God's design for sex.

c. **Statement:** “But I think church did a good job of like coming in at a time where, like, it was definitely I needed to know.”

**Transformed:** Even though Christian adults can be reluctant to talk to kids about God's design for sex, the church still helped to instruct me about these matters at the appropriate

time.

3. **Question:** What would you like your future wife to be like?

a. **Statement:** “I think that's a question that I've, I've been asking myself a lot recently. Just personal stuff. And I think it's. I think it's less of what I want her to be like and more. I want to be able to see that she's willing to work as a team...But also, this, have to, have me and her be in a place in their lives where they're confident enough that they can work together as a team and do whatever needs to be done and live life like that.”

**Transformed:** I wish to marry a woman who will work together with me to form a marriage that is pleasing to God.

b. **Statement:** “But also, I mean, like I don't like, like I said, I'm not looking for flawless. Like I was like, I mean, working on each other together is also very healthy.”

**Transformed:** I understand that as a sinner, no woman is perfect (and neither am I), so we will help each other to become more faithful and godly people through our marriage.

4. **Question:** Where would faith fit into that [i.e., what you want your future wife to be like]?

a. **Statement:** It's definitely in a factor, I think. I have a, I think there's, I think there's a fine line. I think there is. I've met girls that have, that are like, very religious, but it almost like clouds their judgment. It's almost like, like I'm not allowed to have doubts because it's just like, this is plain and simple. This is. And I do, I do have doubts sometimes. I mean, I feel like we all do. But I think, I do want faith. But I want to also to be like open minded, like, oh, you don't you're not, you're not seeing this right. Or you're, you're seeing this different way than I am. Let's talk about it. Let's you know, let's see how you feel about it first. And not like this is like it's written right here. This is what it is. We need to like you need to just let it go because I have met girls like that, and that's that may be a little too far for me.

**Transformed:** Although I do wish to marry a girl who trusts in Jesus Christ, I would like her to be able to think critically about faith and wrestle through some of these issues with me.

5. **Question:** Do you remember learning anything in the church about the importance of having children in marriage?

a. **Statement:** Not really, I... The topic of children, as in us having children was almost like a mandatory thing. It was like going to grow up, going to get married and have kids. That's why, that's what's going to happen.”

**Transformed:** At church, it was simply understood that God wanted everyone to have children after they were married, and this was portrayed as normative.

b. **Statement:** “I don't think there was ever a point where. It was stopped and discussed of,

well, why are we? Why? Why is it significant to have children? Why is it? I mean, there's the there's like the answer of like, oh, you're carrying on your legacy or it's more people in the world. But like. Why is it important to me specifically? I don't think that, I don't think that question was never actually answered. I think it was just more of like a default. You're going to grow up, have kids. That's, that's what it is. And there was never like a, should you have kids? What if, what if I don't have kids? What do I do then? I think, honestly, the topic of kids I don't think ever came up in a meaningful way.”

**Transformed:** The reasons why God might want married couples to have children were never discussed in church.

c. **Statement:** “I think that's a discussion that's better for like, high school students. I think it's like because I mean, there are the children are a blessing, but there are there are downsides. And depending on where you at, where you are, what stage you are in your life right now could affect where if a child is needed or if a child is the smart decision. But I feel like when we just, when we just give the message of you're going to have kids and don't like lay out the idea of like waiting until you're ready or your spouse is ready or both. Both of you are ready at the same time. I think that leads to like just, I think it's nonchalant or no or no big deal. But I think children is something that should be further explored.”

**Transformed:** Some more guidance for youth and young adults in the church about when and how to responsibly receive God’s blessing of children would be helpful and needed.

6. **Question:** Do you think God would want you to have children if you're able to do so?

a. **Statement:** “I would say so, I think. I don't know if it's like he would want me to, but I think he would steer me in the direction of having children. I don't think it, I don't see it as like a, I want you to have kids. I think it's more of like I think it would be good for you to have kids.”

**Transformed:** I believe that God would encourage me personally to have children.

b. **Statement:** “I think there are some people that shouldn't have kids. I think there are some people that just mentally or where they are in their life, just kids are not. And that's fine. That's totally fine.”

**Transformed:** God’s blessings of procreation and children are not appropriate for everyone, for various reasons.

c. **Statement:** “But I think for someone like me who thrives with other people and feeds off other people's energies and like. Just overall excels when there's somebody else in my life. I think having a child would really be beneficial for me, because then I could give that child what, what I, what I want. Or, and or what I needed.”

**Transformed:** I think I would be a good father because God has made me to enjoy being around people, and I can show love to a child the way I would want to be loved myself.

d. **Statement:** “I think the question is more personal. I think it's more like. It's going to be different for whoever you ask...I don't think across the board [God’s] going to say that to everybody. I think it's different for everybody that you ask.”

**Transformed:** I do not believe that God would want every person to have children.

## APPENDIX FIVE

### Bible Study Handouts—Student Edition

# Children Are a Heritage From the Lord: A Bible Study on Procreation

## Session 1: The Blessings of Procreation

As high school age youth and recent high school graduates, some of the most significant issues you will be considering over the next several years are those related to relationships, dating, and marriage. Many people meet their future spouses during their college years, and weddings often happen immediately after graduation. So it would make sense that all of you right now would probably be thinking at least a little bit about this highly important aspect of your lives.

This study, which I (Pastor Nick Hagerman) will be teaching you over the next couple of weeks is intended to address one key aspect of marriage that young people often don't think much about. When we think about marriage and finding a spouse, we usually think about romance, personality compatibility, physical attraction, and the like. We may want to find someone with similar interests and hobbies, or someone who shares the same sense of humor we do. As Christians, we also want to find somebody who trusts in Jesus Christ and is willing to build a marriage upon that foundation.

However, we will not be talking about any of those issues in this particular class. They are all *extremely* important, and we should definitely talk about them, but those topics will be for a different Bible study. Instead, over these next couple of weeks, we will be discussing one particular aspect of marriage that is absolutely essential, yet is rarely treated as such: that of procreation, or having children.

When you normally think about marriage, what do you consider its purpose to be?

If you plan to get married someday, what do you hope to experience in it?

For those married couples that have children, why do you think most of them do so?

Why do you think some married couples avoid having children, or limit the number of children they have?

Although children and family are often viewed as an optional feature of marriage, to be enjoyed only if one desires, the reality is far different. According to Scripture, procreation is an inherently desirable outcome for married couples and for the societies they comprise. We will read some Bible passages now that show us exactly how highly God regards procreation and family.

Read Genesis 1:26-28. When God created man in His own image, how many sexes did He create? Why might this have been?

How did God “bless” Adam and Eve? What did He tell them to do?

How will being fruitful and multiplying enable Adam and Eve to accomplish the task of subduing the earth and having dominion over it?

Should this command from God be regarded more as a harsh order or as an invitation to participate in His blessings?

Although Genesis 1 is the most obvious chapter of Scripture that addresses the issue of procreation, it is certainly not the only one.

Read Genesis 8:20-9:1. How is God's command to Noah's family to be fruitful and multiply connected to His promise to never again flood the earth?

Read Genesis 15:1-6. How does God promise to bless Abram?

Read Genesis 35:9-12. What does God command Jacob to do? What blessing is connected with this command?

How will participating in this blessing of procreation enable Jacob's descendants to inhabit the Promised Land of Canaan?

Clearly, procreation and childbearing were key elements of God's people's claiming of His promises to them. If they had not been fruitful and multiplied, they would not have had the numbers to claim the land. In the Bible, whenever any nation or people, especially the nation of Israel, increases in number, this growth is depicted as a blessing from God. There is no situation in which population growth is seen as a bad thing.

Even beyond the book of Genesis in the Old Testament, God continues to promise blessings to His people through procreation.

Read Jeremiah 23:1-4 and Ezekiel 36:8-15. How does God promise to bless the people of Israel in these passages? Why might this have been especially comforting for them to hear in this particular situation?

Read Psalm 127. How does this psalm describe children? What happens to the man who “fills his quiver with them?”

Read Psalm 128. How does this psalm describe the wife of a man who fears the Lord? What kind of effect does this have on him and his family?

Although the New Testament does not address the issue of childbearing as frequently as the Old Testament does, there is one key passage that shows just how important it has been in God’s plan of salvation for us.

Read 1 Timothy 2:13-15. This passage discusses the sin of Adam and Eve, specifically Eve’s role in the situation. How does Paul say that Eve will be saved?

How should Christians today view childbearing, if God so honored it by making it an essential part of His grand plan of salvation?

According to Scripture, God has granted us a great gift in the ability to procreate. He calls those who have children blessed, and He encourages His people to be fruitful and multiply so that they may accomplish the tasks that he has for them. What are some ways that having children can bless our families, our churches, and our society today?

Children are indeed a heritage from the Lord, and we Christians ought to give thanks for them and rejoice that God has given us the opportunity to have them. But no one ever said that raising children was easy, or that every single person would be able to procreate. In our next session, we will discuss some of the difficulties and crosses that are associated with procreation, and how God gives us the strength and hope to overcome them.

# Children Are a Heritage From the Lord: A Bible Study on Procreation

## Session 2: The Crosses of Procreation

In our previous session, we learned what's God's written Word tells us about procreation, and how He desires married couples, especially those among His people, to participate in this blessing. We also heard about some of the concrete ways that God blesses families, churches, and whole societies when people procreate and have families. In this session, we will discuss some of the difficulties that are associated with procreating today, and how Christians might appropriately respond to them.

Specifically, we will be discussing how Christian couples should handle situations in which they are either *unwilling* or *unable* to have children. Either way, an obstacle has been placed in the way of procreation, but the sources of those obstacles are very different, and as such they call for very different responses.

Why might some married couples be *unwilling* to procreate?

Are some of these reasons more appropriate than others for not wishing to have children? If so, which ones?

Are having children and raising a family difficult? How so?

Why does the burden for raising children typically fall upon their mother instead of their father? Should that always be the case?

How could fathers help to ease this burden on their wives?

It's not that those couples who are unwilling to procreate have no reasons for concern: they certainly do. Yet we have to ask ourselves whether or not those types of concerns should guide our actions in this life, especially when God's Word tells us to do something different.

Read Mark 8:34-37. What does Jesus say is required for people who would follow Him?

Are there certain ways in which raising a family could be described as "taking up one's cross?" How so?

Read Luke 12:13-21. Against what does Jesus say we should guard ourselves? Why?

How are married couples who refuse to procreate sometimes like the rich fool in Jesus' parable? What might be the consequences for them of not raising a family?

Read 1 John 2:15-17. How is refusing to procreate often a manifestation of "loving the things of the world?" How does the apostle John urge us to avoid this?

Raising a family involves making tremendous sacrifices on the part of the parents. They give up literally decades of their lives to care for their children and raise them to be faithful and productive adults. But they do this for a reason: just as God blesses those who remain faithful to Him through adversity with eternal life, so too does He bless those who raise families according to His will, despite all of the difficulties associated with it. As Jesus says, it is a poor trade to gain the world and yet forfeit your soul. In our previous session, we talked extensively about the many kinds of blessings that God gives those married couples who have children. Refusing to procreate, under normal circumstances, not only thwarts God's will for marriage, but also deprives the parents of those blessings.

Now it's time for us to switch gears and address those situations when married couples are *unable* to procreate. These couples would dearly love to have children, but for one reason or another (usually a health issue or some form of infertility) are not able to do so.

How can Christians support those married couples who are unable to have children?

Read Genesis 2:18-25. According to this passage, why does God create Eve, and how does this show us one of the primary purposes of marriage? Are children or procreation mentioned at all in this passage?

How can married couples who are unintentionally childless still find joy and purpose in their marriage and in their lives?

If infertile couples still desire to have children, what are some appropriate ways that they might be able to raise a family of their own?

What are some inappropriate ways that infertile couples might try to have children? Why are these inappropriate?

Read Genesis 16:1-6. How does this story illustrate a very early version of an infertile couple trying to have children apart from the one-flesh union of marriage? How did this turn out?

As with everything else in this sinful world, God's good gifts of procreation and raising a family do not always work the way they should. Some married couples would prefer to forgo these blessings from God, while others desperately desire to have them but cannot. These tensions will be present with us until Jesus returns on the last day, and our role in the meantime is to simply do the best we can to obey God's Word with the resources He has given us. We are to trust that God's plan and His will are always best, and that no matter what grief or struggle we encounter in this life, He remains our Lord who loves us through His Son Jesus Christ. We may bear many crosses in this life, but we will experience eternal joy and gladness in the new heavens and earth.

So, given everything we have heard in this Bible study, how should procreation and raising families factor into our plans for marriage?

How should they factor into our criteria for selecting a future spouse?

Procreation and raising families are certainly not the *only* factors we should consider when making plans for marriage, but they are significant ones. If we seek a spouse only for reasons of emotional compatibility, physical attraction, shared interests, or even a shared Christian faith, we are ignoring a key factor in God's design for marriage and sex. God wants His people under normal circumstances to have children and raise them in the faith, and thus that should be a goal that we all pursue (unless we have very good reasons not to).

These can be very difficult issues to discuss, as they deal with some of the most important and intimate decisions that we will ever make. However, that is precisely why it is so important for us to hear what God has to say about these issues, so that we obey His will in the most significant aspects of our lives. And if we have made any mistakes in these matters, we know that our Lord Jesus Christ remains our loving and merciful Savior who has forgiven us for all of our sins. His grace extends to everyone who trusts in Him, and that includes all of us!

## APPENDIX SIX

### Bible Study Handouts—Teacher’s Edition

# Children Are a Heritage From the Lord: A Bible Study on Procreation

## Session 1: The Blessings of Procreation

As high school age youth and recent high school graduates, some of the most significant issues you will be considering over the next several years are those related to relationships, dating, and marriage. Many people meet their future spouses during their college years, and weddings often happen immediately after graduation. So it would make sense that all of you right now would probably be thinking at least a little bit about this highly important aspect of your lives.

This study, which I (Pastor Nick Hagerman) will be teaching you over the next couple of weeks is intended to address one key aspect of marriage that young people often don’t think much about. When we think about marriage and finding a spouse, we usually think about romance, personality compatibility, physical attraction, and the like. We may want to find someone with similar interests and hobbies, or someone who shares the same sense of humor we do. As Christians, we also want to find somebody who trusts in Jesus Christ and is willing to build a marriage upon that foundation.

However, we will not be talking about any of those issues in this particular class. They are all *extremely* important, and we should definitely talk about them, but those topics will be for a different Bible study. Instead, over these next couple of weeks, we will be discussing one particular aspect of marriage that is absolutely essential, yet is rarely treated as such: that of procreation, or having children.

When you normally think about marriage, what do you consider its purpose to be?

*Some participants might mention procreation and raising a family, but a number of others will probably talk about love and romance, companionship, sexual fulfillment, mutual care of each other, etc. These answers certainly are not wrong, but they are incomplete on their own.*

If you plan to get married someday, what do you hope to experience in it?

*Answers will probably be similar to the question above.*

For those married couples that have children, why do you think most of them do so?

*Most participants will probably answer something about wanting to share love with children, or taking delight in them, etc. Some may answer that it is God’s will for them, or that it is a service to society and to the church to procreate.*

Why do some married couples avoid having children, or limit the number of children they have? *A range of answers is possible here, with factors such as age and health playing a role. Some will also probably mention finances and lifestyle as key issues.*

Although children and family are often viewed as an optional feature of marriage, to be enjoyed only if one desires, the reality is far different. According to Scripture, procreation is an inherently desirable outcome for married couples and for the societies they comprise. We will read some Bible passages now that show us exactly how highly God regards procreation and family.

Read Genesis 1:26-28. When God created man in His own image, how many sexes did He create? Why might this have been?

*He made them male and female—the obvious reason being for procreation. Otherwise, if companionship and physical pleasure were the only considerations, He could have made a single sex and been done with it.*

How did God “bless” Adam and Eve? What did He tell them to do?

*He commanded them to be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it. His blessing was giving them the invitation and capability to do these things.*

How will being fruitful and multiplying enable Adam and Eve to accomplish the task of subduing the earth and having dominion over it?

*Two people, by themselves, cannot rule over the entire earth. More people are needed to accomplish this task effectively.*

Should this command from God be regarded more as a harsh order or as an invitation to participate in His blessings?

*God wants His people to enjoy the blessing of procreation. They are to see this as an opportunity to grow as families and as a people, rather than as an onerous burden.*

Although Genesis 1 is the most obvious chapter of Scripture that addresses the issue of procreation, it is certainly not the only one.

Read Genesis 8:20-9:1. How is God’s command to Noah’s family to be fruitful and multiply connected to His promise never again to flood the earth?

*God desired the people of the world to populate the earth, even after they had sinned against Him and He had poured out His wrath upon them through the flood. Thus, He invited Noah’s family to rejoice in His promise and again take advantage of the blessing of procreation.*

Read Genesis 15:1-6. How does God promise to bless Abram?

*God will bless Abram by making a great nation of him (i.e.—giving him many descendants). Procreation is how Abram will receive and participate in this blessing.*

Read Genesis 35:9-12. What does God command Jacob to do? What blessing is connected with this command?

*He commands Jacob to be fruitful and multiply, which will make a great nation and kings come from him.*

How will participating in this blessing of procreation enable Jacob's descendants to inhabit the Promised Land of Canaan?

*A whole nation or people is needed to establish possession of a territory. If Jacob remains childless, or even if he has few descendants, they will be unable to claim the promise that God has given them.*

Clearly, procreation and childbearing were key elements of God's people's claiming of His promises to them. If they had not been fruitful and multiplied, they would not have had the numbers to claim the land. In the Bible, whenever any nation or people, especially the nation of Israel, increases in number, this growth is depicted as a blessing from God. There is no situation in which population growth is seen as a bad thing.

Even beyond the book of Genesis in the Old Testament, God continues to promise blessings to His people through procreation.

Read Jeremiah 23:1-4 and Ezekiel 36:8-15. How does God promise to bless the people of Israel in these passages? Why might this have been especially comforting for them to hear in this particular situation?

*God was promising that He would restore the Israelite exiles to their land after they had spent several decades in Babylon. Not only would he bring them back to the land, but He would also give them prosperity, and multiplying them was a significant aspect of this restoring of fortunes.*

Read Psalm 127. How does this psalm describe children? What happens to the man who "fills his quiver with them?"

*Children are described as a "heritage from the Lord" and a "reward." The man who has many of them is blessed by God and given great honor among men. The same should be true of women who have children as well!*

Read Psalm 128. How does this psalm describe the wife of a man who fears the Lord? What kind of effect does this have on him and his family?

*She is described as a "fruitful vine" who produces many children. As before, this is shown to be a blessing to the man who has many children, and to the woman who has them as well.*

Although the New Testament does not address the issue of childbearing as frequently as the Old Testament does, there is one key passage that shows just how important it has been in God's plan of salvation for us.

Read 1 Timothy 2:13-15. This passage discusses the sin of Adam and Eve, specifically Eve's role in the situation. How does Paul say that a woman will be saved?

*She will be saved through childbearing, but not in the sense that childbearing earns salvation for her. Rather, childbearing is a mark of faithfulness to God's will, and those who trust in Him will do what He desires.*

*This passage could also be interpreted as referring to Eve specifically, and the child who will eventually descend from her: Jesus Christ. Had Eve and her descendants not had children, salvation could not have come to humanity. Childbearing thus has played an integral role saving people from sin, death, and the devil.*

How should Christians today view childbearing, if God so honored it by making it an essential part of His grand plan of salvation?

*We should continue to view it as a blessing from God, and desire to participate in and receive this blessing.*

According to Scripture, God has granted us a great gift in the ability to procreate. He calls those who have children blessed, and He encourages His people to be fruitful and multiply so that they may accomplish the tasks that he has for them. What are some ways that having children can bless our families, our churches, and our society today?

*Families: They bring us joy, they receive our inheritance, they have children of their own, they take care of us when we are elderly, etc.*

*Church: They ensure that the church continues to the next generation, they provide the leadership of the future, they remind us that Jesus loves children and wants them to come to Him*

*Society: They serve as the next generation of workers, they prevent our population from shrinking, they support our welfare state when they begin working*

Children are indeed a heritage from the Lord, and we Christians ought to give thanks for them and rejoice that God has given us the opportunity to have them. But no one ever said that raising children was easy, or that every single person would be able to procreate. In our next session, we will discuss some of the difficulties and crosses that are associated with procreation, and how God gives us the strength and hope to overcome them.

# Children Are a Heritage From the Lord: A Bible Study on Procreation

## Session 2: The Crosses of Procreation

In our previous session, we learned what's God's written Word tells us about procreation, and how He desires married couples, especially those among His people, to participate in this blessing. We also heard about some of the concrete ways that God blesses families, churches, and whole societies when people procreate and have families. In this session, we will discuss some of the difficulties that are associated with procreating today, and how Christians might appropriately respond to them.

Specifically, we will be discussing how Christian couples should handle situations in which they are either *unwilling* or *unable* to have children. Either way, an obstacle has been placed in the way of procreation, but the sources of those obstacles are very different, and as such they call for very different responses.

Why might some married couples be *unwilling* to procreate?

*They might be unwilling to deal with the stresses of having children (e.g.—financial, emotional, physical), they may simply not understand that it is God's will for married couples in normal situations, they may want to maintain a certain lifestyle that children would inhibit, the wife may not want to see her body change*

*They may also desire not to procreate for reasons of age, health, or genetic disorders that could be passed on to their children*

Are some of these reasons more appropriate than others for not wishing to have children? If so, which ones?

*The ones concerning age or health (of the mother or the potential child) are certainly more legitimate than those concerned with finances or the desire to maintain a carefree lifestyle. The former take into account the genuine possibility of harm to the mother or child, while the latter are driven by essentially selfish reasons.*

Are having children and raising a family difficult? How so?

*They are certainly difficult! Pregnancy and labor are hard. Caring for children and teaching them right from wrong is hard. They do not always appreciate the gifts you give them, and they rebel against you. You lose a great deal of your former independence. You have much less disposable income. You physically age faster!*

Why does the burden for raising children typically fall upon their mother instead of their father? Should that always be the case?

*Mothers actually carry, bear, and often nurse their children, which are tasks that fathers are not able to complete. In some ways, that burden naturally falls on mothers. Mothers also tend to be better at nurturing and caring for children, especially when they are very young. But fathers have an important role to play as well; they cannot just leave raising the kids to their wives. Parenting is a man's work as well, and he needs to participate in it as much as he can.*

How could fathers help to ease this burden on their wives?

*They could help discipline the children, help with housework, try to avoid spending long hours at work, watch the kids so that their wives can work too, provide emotional support*

It's not that those couples who are unwilling to procreate have no reasons for concern: they certainly do. Yet we have to ask ourselves whether or not those types of concerns should guide our actions in this life, especially when God's Word tells us to do something different.

Read Mark 8:34-37. What does Jesus say is required for people who would follow Him?

*He tells His disciples that they need to take up their crosses and follow Him: to obey His commands even when it will cost them greatly to do so*

Are there certain ways in which raising a family could be described as "taking up one's cross?" How so?

*Much is sacrificed by parents who raise families, especially those who raise large families. Speaking as a parent of three boys myself, I am well aware of the crosses that parenthood imposes upon us!*

Read Luke 12:13-21. Against what does Jesus say we should guard ourselves? Why?

*We should guard against covetousness and desire for material goods, because one's life does not consist in the abundance of those things.*

How are married couples who refuse to procreate sometimes like the rich fool in Jesus' parable? What might be the consequences for them of not raising a family?

*The rich fool accumulated much wealth for himself at the expense of being rich toward God; so too do parents who refuse to procreate seek wealth, health, and happiness for themselves at the expense of obeying God's commands. They might regret it later in life when they have no one to care for them or spend time with them when they are old.*

Read 1 John 2:15-17. How is refusing to procreate often a manifestation of "loving the things of the world?" How does the apostle John urge us to avoid this?

*Because raising families can prevent parents from participating in worldly pursuits, some married couples may decide to remain childless. John reminds us that such worldly things will ultimately pass away, but God and His Word remain forever.*

Raising a family involves making tremendous sacrifices on the part of the parents. They give up literally decades of their lives to care for their children and raise them to be faithful and

productive adults. But they do this for a reason: just as God blesses those who remain faithful to Him through adversity with eternal life, so too does He bless those who raise families according to His will, despite all of the difficulties associated with it. As Jesus says, it is a poor trade to gain the world and yet forfeit your soul. In our previous session, we talked extensively about the many kinds of blessings that God gives those married couples who have children. Refusing to procreate, under normal circumstances, not only thwarts God's will for marriage, but also deprives the parents of those blessings.

Now it's time for us to switch gears and address those situations when married couples are *unable* to procreate. These couples would dearly love to have children, but for one reason or another (usually a health issue or some form of infertility) are not able to do so.

How can Christians support those married couples who are unable to have children?

*We cannot give them children and fix the problem, but we can be there to counsel and comfort them in their grief. We can show them that their marriage is still a great gift to them and is pleasing in the sight of God.*

Read Genesis 2:18-25. According to this passage, why does God create Eve, and how does this show us one of the primary purposes of marriage? Are children or procreation mentioned at all in this passage?

*God creates Eve so that Adam would not be alone; that he would have a companion to be with him. Companionship between the husband and wife is another primary purpose of marriage, one that they can enjoy even if they are not able to have children.*

How can married couples who are unintentionally childless still find joy and purpose in their marriage and in their lives?

*If God does not see fit to bless a couple with children, He is giving them opportunities to serve the church and the world in other ways. They will have more time and resources to devote to service to others, since they will not need them to raise children. And of course, without the crosses that come from raising families, they will have more time and resources to spend with each other and enjoy their lives together.*

If infertile couples still desire to have children, what are some appropriate ways that they might be able to raise a family of their own?

*Adoption—many children all around the world need to be adopted. If a childless couple feels that adoption might be appropriate for them, they could certainly pursue that option.*

What are some inappropriate ways that infertile couples might try to have children? Why are these inappropriate?

*Many assisted reproductive technologies are inappropriate because they cause children to be formed and developed outside of the context of the one-flesh union of marriage (e.g.—sperm donation, surrogacy, etc.). Others are problematic because they usually cause the deaths of*

*human embryos (e.g.—in vitro fertilization). Married couples who are infertile should accept the cross that has been laid upon them and not seek to obtain something with which God has not blessed them.*

Read Genesis 16:1-6. How does this story illustrate a very early version of an infertile couple trying to have children apart from the one-flesh union of marriage? How did this turn out?

*Sarai demanded that Abram father a child with her servant Hagar that she could claim as her own. A child was born, but the proceedings caused problems between Abram, Sarai, and Hagar. This serves as an example of a family not accepting God's will and trying to have a child apart from His promises, and of the negative consequences that can result.*

As with everything else in this sinful world, God's good gifts of procreation and raising a family do not always work the way they should. Some married couples would prefer to forgo these blessings from God, while others desperately desire to have them but cannot. These tensions will be present with us until Jesus returns on the last day, and our role in the meantime is to simply do the best we can to obey God's Word with the resources He has given us. We are to trust that God's plan and His will are always best, and that no matter what grief or struggle we encounter in this life, He remains our Lord who loves us through His Son Jesus Christ. We may bear many crosses in this life, but we will experience eternal joy and gladness in the new heavens and earth.

So, given everything we have heard in this Bible study, how should procreation and raising families factor into our plans for marriage?

*We should plan on having children! Children are blessings from God, and we receive them gladly, even though it may be difficult for us to raise them at times. If we do not plan on having children, then we should have a very good reason not to (e.g.—the reasons discussed above).*

How should they factor into our criteria for selecting a future spouse?

*We should try to find someone who wants to be a parent, and also whom we believe would make a good parent. Of course, we can't see the future to know for sure whether or not anyone will be a good parent, but we certainly can make good educated guesses.*

Procreation and raising families are certainly not the *only* factors we should consider when making plans for marriage, but they are significant ones. If we seek a spouse only for reasons of emotional compatibility, physical attraction, shared interests, or even a shared Christian faith, we are ignoring a key factor in God's design for marriage and sex. God wants His people under normal circumstances to have children and raise them in the faith, and thus that should be a goal that we all pursue (unless we have very good reasons not to).

These can be very difficult issues to discuss, as they deal with some of the most important and intimate decisions that we will ever make. However, that is precisely why it is so important for us to hear what God has to say about these issues, so that we obey His will in the most significant aspects of our lives. And if we have made any mistakes in these matters, we know that our Lord Jesus Christ remains our loving and merciful Savior who has forgiven us for all of our sins. His grace extends to everyone who trusts in Him, and that includes all of us!

## APPENDIX SEVEN

### Analysis of Final Interviews

#### Participant A

1. **Question:** What did you learn from the Bible study that you had not heard before?

a. **Statement:** “I think I learned a lot more about, I learned a lot more about why married couples should have kids in a Christian household. I thought it was more of just a choice, but I feel like the main thing I took away from your thing is we should. Because God, God likes that and wants us to have kids.”

**Transformed:** I learned that God’s design for married couples under normal circumstances is to procreate and raise families, and that Christians should not choose childlessness for self-centered reasons.

b. **Statement:** “Probably just to further his kingdom. And I mean, it even says in the Bible, like multiply like multiply doesn't it say that in Genesis or something, it talks about?”

**Transformed:** Christian parents can enlarge and expand the kingdom of God by having children and raising them up to be faithful Christians themselves.

2. **Question:** Did participating in the Bible study cause you to change any of your thoughts about what you're seeking in a future spouse?

a. **Statement:** “Yes. I think that I, I definitely changed my opinion on having kids because I thought it was definitely more, like I didn't realize how much like God actually wanted us to have kids.”

**Transformed:** The Bible study helped me to understand that procreation is a key aspect of God’s design for marriage.

b. **Statement:** “And at the same time, I still think that like, I mean, obviously there's situations where like, like married couples can't have kids because of complications and stuff.”

**Transformed:** I understand that God does not bless every married couple with children, even if they desire to have them.

c. **Statement:** “As far as a future spouse, I think that I'm looking for the same qualities. But definitely I think it's a little more important now that I make sure that my spouse wants to have kids...Be good at being a father and leading a household and stuff.”

**Transformed:** Even though I already wished to have children, I am more convinced now of the importance of this aspect of God’s design for marriage.

3. **Question:** Did participating in the Bible study cause you to change any of your thoughts about what you would want your future marriage to be like?

a. **Statement:** “Quite honestly, probably not. I think that just thinking more about like just, because a lot of times when, you know, like when you're thinking about your future spouse, you think about what the personality is going to be like, like what, what they look like and like, the physicality traits. But I do think spiritually, that's probably the most important.”

**Transformed:** The Bible study helped me to focus more on the spiritual aspects of marriage rather than on the emotional and physical connection between spouses.

b. **Statement:** “I think definitely like spiritually from this Bible study I took, it's a lot more important than I kind of give credit for, especially when it comes to like having kids and also like being active in church and baptism and all that. Just being set in your beliefs before you even have kids.”

**Transformed:** The Bible study showed me that it is important for Christian parents to have a shared spiritual commitment to God and His Word in order to be faithful and godly parents.

4. **Question:** Did participating in the Bible study cause you to change any of your plans for having children or starting a family?

a. **Statement:** “Honestly, the one thing that I was kind of surprised about when we talked about in vitro and stuff like that, I, I didn't really know. I mean, it's weird because like my, um, one of my cousins was like, born through in-vitro. So it's like, it's just kind of a slippery slope for me because, you know, you're kind of playing God. But at the same time, like, I think about my cousin, I'm like, well, I mean, she's a blessing. Like God, God made her. So I don't know. I think that that when we talked about that, that definitely didn't confuse me, but I was like, whoa, I didn't think about it that way.”

**Transformed:** Because of my personal experiences with family members, I am conflicted by the idea that in vitro fertilization is an inappropriate method of conceiving children in God's eyes.

5. **Question:** How might the Bible study be improved for the future?

a. **Statement:** “I think that it was really good and I really, I really appreciated that you had people answer questions and like made sure everyone talked for the most part. And I liked that there was group feedback during the, during the presentation. And it wasn't just a presentation, it was kind of like a, like, let's talk about this. How do people feel about this? Let's get different opinions. So I liked hearing all the sides to every situation question.”

**Transformed:** I appreciated the collaborative approach that was used in the Bible study to help us as participants wrestle with the implications of God's design for marriage and procreation, rather than simply telling us what God wants and leaving no room for discussion.

## Participant B

1. **Question:** What did you learn from the Bible study that you had not heard before?

a. **Statement:** “Well, not so much that I hadn't heard it before, but just haven't heard it in a while. But just saying that like God wants you to be fruitful and multiply and have children if you can.”

**Transformed:** I had heard about God's procreative design for marriage before, but the Bible study helped remind me of it.

b. **Statement:** “But it's still like, okay, if you can't have children because there's like times where you just can't, and that's okay.”

**Transformed:** I learned that God does not bless every married couple with children, and that they can still have a fulfilling life together as husband and wife if they are unable to procreate.

2. **Question:** Did participating in the Bible study cause you to change any of your thoughts about what you are seeking in a future spouse?

a. **Statement:** “I guess, because like the Bible said, he talked a lot about like what you should look for in like a spouse and how like the importance is of like making sure that there would they would be like a good husband and a good dad. Because, I mean, I had thought about that, but not like as deeply as like we went into it in the Bible study.”

**Transformed:** The Bible study helped me to realize how important it is for my future husband to be a godly father, and made that quality more significant in my criteria for evaluating potential future husbands.

3. **Question:** Did participating in the Bible study cause you to change any of your thoughts about what you would want your future marriage to be like?

a. **Statement:** “No. I kind of felt like I had the same like, thoughts that were on the Bible study, just that you should love each other and be one and like always support each other and things like that.”

**Transformed:** I already had a godly view of marriage before attending the Bible study, and the study confirmed those ideas in my mind.

4. **Question:** Did participating in the Bible study cause you to change any of your plans for having children or starting a family?

a. **Statement:** “No, I still want kids... When like, after I get married, obviously. And, and, I don't know. I mean, I want somewhat of a big family, I guess, because I like kids, but, hopefully the husband feels the same.”

**Transformed:** I have always wanted children in accordance with God's design for marriage, and the Bible study helped to confirm for me that this is a godly desire.

5. **Question:** How might the Bible study be improved for the future?

a. **Statement:** “I felt like it was good. I felt like it covered everything that needed to be covered. I feel like there's a lot of information that was given that was helpful that we hadn't, that hasn't been emphasized previously. But yeah, I felt like it was good. I don't know if there's anything I would change about it.”

**Transformed:** I found the Bible study to be helpful in articulating God’s design for marriage, and I felt that it accomplished its purpose well.

#### Participant C

1. **Question:** What did you learn from the Bible study that you had not heard before?

a. **Statement:** “From the Bible study that I had been through, we talked about...the importance of marriage in the Bible and what it what it means.”

**Transformed:** The Bible study taught me about God’s design for marriage.

b. **Statement:** “We also went over some of the hardships of either starting of being married and then having a family added on to that, having kids mainly. We talked about understanding what it meant to have kids, but also. Again. Yeah, just the difficulties of what it, what they can bring or of what some reasons why people wouldn't be okay with having them.”

**Transformed:** The Bible study taught me about some of the crosses associated with procreating and raising families.

c. **Statement:** “I knew that it was important that it's a promise that has been given down through generations for the Israelites. But I didn't know that it was as in-depth as it is for why kids are important.”

**Transformed:** I learned about how God’s promises to the Israelites in the Old Testament of the blessings of procreation apply to Christian married couples today.

2. **Question:** Did participating in the Bible study cause you to change any of your thoughts about what you were seeking in a future spouse?

a. **Statement:** “I don't think it really did. It didn't change the fact that I would want to have kids with my future spouse. Or what to consider I, I guess I had already thought of most of those things as either being problems in the future, but nothing that would have changed. What I thought I would want.”

**Transformed:** I already wished to find a spouse who wanted to have children in accordance with God’s design for marriage, so the Bible study did not significantly change my views on this issue.

3. **Question:** Did participating in the Bible study cause you to change any of your thoughts

about what you would want your future marriage to be like?

a. **Statement:** “I think it did a little bit. I, specifically on the part that marrying someone who shares your beliefs is really important, as because it could provide, it could create, if not, if you don't share, uh, the same religion that it can, that could be problems that arise featured on the road that I had probably not thought about completely. And it kind of just shed more light on that.”

**Transformed:** I learned from the Bible study that married couples should have a shared Christian faith, so I am now more interested in finding someone who has the same beliefs as I do.

4. **Question:** Did participating in the Bible study cause you to change any of your plans for having children or starting a family?

a. **Statement:** “I've always wanted a family. But I don't think that, I don't think it changed much that I would want one. So no, I don't think you did.”

**Transformed:** I have always been interested in having children in accordance with God's design for marriage, so the Bible study merely confirmed that this was a godly plan for me.

b. **Statement:** “I was thinking of more like one child in the future, when, but, knowing that it's, it's a gift from God that we are able to have these children to carry on not only our legacy, but what we believe in and, to help grow a better world. I mean, it's like I can see why people go for more than one.”

**Transformed:** Hearing in the Bible study about the blessings God grants humanity through procreation has made me consider having more than one child after I get married.

5. **Question:** How might the Bible study be improved for the future?

a. **Statement:** “I mean, I don't think I could have done a better job at it, but, definitely one of the better ones I've ever I've been able to sit through. But uh, I don't think that there was really many improvements that I can think of.”

**Transformed:** I felt that the Bible study adequately and engagingly explained God's design for marriage and procreation.

#### Participant D

1. **Question:** What did you learn from the Bible study that you had not heard before?

a. **Statement:** “I really liked how you didn't use...or you used the word procreation instead of like the normal language that we use here... Reproduction. Yeah, I like that. Just because I've never really heard that in like the biblical sense and how it like it's so important to procreate instead of just reproduce because procreation is more of like a relationship and reproduce kind of like takes out that relationship with it is kind of how I feel like that is.”

**Transformed:** I learned that “procreation” is a better word to use than “reproduction”

because procreation involves the relationship between spouses and their relationship with God, while reproduction is more of a mechanistic, industrial term.

b. **Statement:** “I learned a lot about the different things that could be, like, difficult in relationship and like how you need to have those set things before you.”

**Transformed:** I learned that husbands and wives bear crosses in marriage, and they must learn to bear them patiently in order to have a God-pleasing marriage.

c. **Statement:** “Like, want to have kids so that you can have the best life for them, like finances and just stable home and relationship stuff with the husband and just all that kind of important things.”

**Transformed:** I learned that my future husband and I should aspire to form a stable and God-pleasing relationship and home so that our future children can prosper.

2. **Question:** Did participating in the Bible study cause you to change any of your thoughts about what you are seeking in a future spouse?

a. **Statement:** “It made me definitely think a little bit more about like. Um. Make sure, like, the people I'm dating are on the same page with me about, like, having kids. Or if I can't have kids, like, adopting. It made me think a lot more about, like, what they want to do too. So to make sure that there's not a lot of complications with any of that.”

**Transformed:** The Bible study made me think more about God's encouragement to procreate and be a parent, so I would be more likely to seek a spouse who also desired to do those things.

3. **Question:** Did participating in the Bible study cause you to change any of your thoughts about what you would want your future marriage to be like?

a. **Statement:** “I definitely think that like, I would put more of an emphasis on making sure my marriage is good as before, like... I mean, to be able to have a stable home, you have to have a good marriage. And so when you want to start having kids, then like you want to have a good relationship with your spouse first.”

**Transformed:** The Bible study taught me that having a God-pleasing relationship with my future husband will be crucial to raising children in a faithful and stable home.

b. **Statement:** “So I think like communication kind of really stood out to me during the Bible study and like being able to communicate how you feel and make sure your emotions are expressed completely and not just, like, hiding anything. Because if you don't communicate thoroughly, then something is going to be off and then it's going to like not be good for your marriage and in the end, not be good for your children in the future.”

**Transformed:** Christians husbands and wives must communicate with each other effectively in order to be faithful and God-pleasing parents.

4. **Question:** Did participating in the Bible study cause you to change any of your plans for having children or starting a family?

a. **Statement:** “It did make me a little bit more nervous to have kids just because of all the complications and all of that.”

**Transformed:** The Bible study made me realize that there are crosses that Christian parents must bear in order to be faithful to God’s will for their marriages.

b. **Statement:** “I really like the emphasis on that was pretty much what we were called to do is to procreate. And if you can't, then you can adopt. And there's other ways you can be with kids.”

**Transformed:** I appreciated the Bible study’s emphasis on procreation as an essential aspect of God’s design for marriage, as well as on God-pleasing alternatives for married couples if procreation is not possible.

c. **Statement:** “But I don't necessarily think that it changed a ton.”

**Transformed:** I was already planning on having children in accordance with God’s design for marriage, so I did not need the Bible study to convince me to do so.

5. **Question:** How might the Bible study be improved for the future?

a. **Statement:** “I would say, like the importance of, like just having a good physical connection with your spouse as well. Some more like topics on that or having like when, I don't know, kind of more of like the physical side of it as well... But I think just like a tiny bit on that would be important just to realize that it's not just the emotional connection that you had to have with your spouse, but also a physical one.”

**Transformed:** I would like to know more about how physical attraction and sexual intimacy fit into God’s design for marriage.

#### Participant E

1. **Question:** What did you learn from the Bible study that you had not heard before?

a. **Statement:** “We talked a lot about like, children and like, having children, and it's kind of more of a relaxing talk than, it's like we all got to talk around and have our opinions on what it means, like to have kids in the church and grow up with kids.”

**Transformed:** The Bible study taught me about God’s design for procreation and its importance to the church.

b. **Statement:** “And we didn't talk about that too much during Bible study, but we definitely hit that a lot during that, that upcoming [sic] Bible study that we just had.”

**Transformed:** I had not discussed God’s design for marriage and procreation at church before participating in this particular study.

c. **Statement:** “It's better kind of to reproduce because that's obviously one of the ultimate

goals, reproduce, then grow them up in the church. Let them learn about God, let them follow God through their faith as they're growing up and even as they're older and have their own children. It's just there's a good talk about kind of motivating to have kids and grow them up in the church and be able to just keep faith with your family.”

**Transformed:** I learned that procreating and raising children in the Christian faith is an important aspect of God’s design for marriage.

2. **Question:** Did participating in the Bible study cause you to change any of your thoughts about what you're seeking in a future spouse?

a. **Statement:** “Yeah. Well, no and yes, because it's like. I was looking for those things, but it wasn't like, those things weren't like a priority.”

**Transformed:** The Bible study did not necessarily change my views on the qualities I seek in a future spouse, but it helped me prioritize certain qualities that are important to God.

b. **Statement:** “And now I was like, we kind of went through that Bible study and it actually kind of made me realize what needs to happen to get a good spouse and to be able to raise kids together, and a spouse that's going to make you a better person.”

**Transformed:** I learned in the Bible study that I should prioritize finding a spouse who wishes to have children and help build me up in the Christian faith, in accordance with God’s design.

c. **Statement:** “We can both work together kind of, and make each other better and be able to create one of our own. It's kind of the ultimate goal for a spouse. It's just finding somebody who's going to make you a better person.”

**Transformed:** I wish to find a spouse who will work with me in mutually building each other up in the Christian faith and encouraging each other to do good works.

3. **Question:** Did participating in the Bible study cause you to change any of your thoughts about what you would want your future marriage to be like?

a. **Statement:** “Yeah, it, it just made me, it made me want to kind of seek more of a faithful relationship because some relationships, like one of them goes to church, one doesn't. And that, but as you can grow as a married couple, you can increase your faith together and always keep God first before the other one. Because God will always be first. Just stuff like that. That'll help each other grow through faith.”

**Transformed:** The Bible study encouraged me to seek a spouse who will be faithful to Christ and prioritize her faith in Him above all else, so that both of us can grow in our faith.

4. **Question:** Did participating in the Bible study cause you to change any of your plans for having children or starting a family?

a. **Statement:** “Well, I always had planned to have children and start a family, but, it kind

of kind of drove me more to actually want that because it's kind of just like a thought in the back of my mind that like, yeah, when I get older I'll, I'll want that if it happens. But now it's kind of like a goal of mine obviously to get a great spouse.”

**Transformed:** Even though I already planned marrying a godly spouse, the Bible study helped me to think more intentionally about it.

b. **Statement:** “She's going to grow with me, but also have children who I can help grow and help try to become a good man and or good woman in the church.”

**Transformed:** I hope that not only will my wife and I grow together in the faith, but also that we will also have children who will become faithful Christians themselves.

5. **Question:** How might the Bible study be improved for the future?

a. **Statement:** “I mean, obviously anything can be improved, but it was a pretty good Bible study because we all got to tell our thoughts and what we thought and there was no judgment. Everybody kind of got to speak their mind and it all went pretty well because you ask the questions that we would spend time just kind of talking about it, getting thoughts, and it kind of just got the brain moving a little bit and got you thinking.”

**Transformed:** I thought that the Bible study was interesting and faithful to God’s Word, and I appreciated being able to ask questions and express my thoughts in a safe environment.

#### Participant F

1. **Question:** What did you learn from the Bible study that you had not heard before?

a. **Statement:** “Nothing much really. I mean, it's something that I was taught my whole life mainly like children are blessings and marriage is a great thing to go through and such. So that's something I've been taught my whole life.”

**Transformed:** I had learned already about God’s design for marriage and procreation, so I did not gain very much from the Bible study that I had not heard previously.

b. **Statement:** “I mean, like I also learned that it's okay. Like if you want to have whether or not you want to have kids or not, like it's not something that you should be ashamed of if you don't want to have kids or anything. But and especially because there could be so many reasons behind it if you don't want to.”

**Transformed:** I learned from the Bible study that Christians should not feel obligated to have children if they have no desire to do so.

2. **Question:** Did participating in the Bible study cause you to change any of your thoughts about what you're seeking in a future spouse?

a. **Statement:** “Not really. I think everyone had the same idea. Like someone with, who supports you, who is by your side, your partner, your best friend, the one person you can count on, and you guys will have each other's backs and such.”

**Transformed:** The Bible study did not have a significant effect on my view of the qualities I would seek in a future spouse, as my focus is on the companionship aspect of God's design for marriage.

b. **Statement:** "I mean, like, if they're good with kids and such. Yeah. I mean, I could, that could be a thing."

**Transformed:** I would want to marry a husband who would also be a good father in accordance with God's design for marriage and family, although this quality is not very significant in my mind.

3. **Question:** Did participating in the Bible study cause you to change any of your thoughts about what you would want your future marriage to be like?

a. **Statement:** "Definitely not someone who's, like, pressuring you to have kids."

**Transformed:** I am not interested in marrying someone who would want to have children before I am ready to do so.

b. **Statement:** "Something I feel like, it's something that should take time, especially when, if you guys are like, ready to be financially stable, have good jobs and have been steady on the feet before starting one and making sure like, it's something like, how many you want or, or something, kids you want and such, it's both of your ideas. Like especially because you never know what could happen in the future. So kind of taking it slow and such."

**Transformed:** I do not believe God would call me to have children unless my husband and I were in a stable enough financial situation to be able to comfortably afford them.

4. **Question:** Did participating in the Bible study cause you to change any of your plans for having children or starting a family?

a. **Statement:** "I mean, if I were to get married, I would at least like to have at least one kid of my own. But I still want to just adopt and foster. And like, even if I don't get married and such, I would still like to foster and adopt on my own."

**Transformed:** Although I would like to have at least one biological child, I believe that God is calling me to devote more effort to adopting children who need stable and loving homes.

b. **Statement:** "I would like to have kids, but even if I don't find someone, or even if I do, I feel like adopting and fostering is a bit better for me."

**Transformed:** I believe that God is calling me to adopt and foster children and serve as a parent for them even if I never get married.

c. **Statement:** "Some of the things that I have heard about from other people and or seen is just kind of traumatizing. And there's very few kind of people I would trust to go with me if I were to have kids or anything, especially some doctors and such. So I'd rather have like a midwife or something or someone to help me instead of like a doctor. Because there's so many, because there are a lot of things that people think that is just women trying to get

attention or something. And it's not.”

**Transformed:** I am concerned that a doctor would not treat me well during the processes of pregnancy and childbirth, which makes me worried to have children in accordance with God’s design for marriage.

d. **Statement:** “If I were to have kids in my own, I wanted all females. And Springfield has this thing, too, where nurses can't touch the women in labor until the doctor gets there...Not a lot of people know it, but it's something that I'm aware of that I try to keep in mind, like, that's why I want to like all females, or at least midwife at home.”

**Transformed:** I would only want a female doctor or midwife to assist me in the processes of pregnancy and childbirth, because I do not believe that male doctors would exercise their God-given vocation properly in caring for me.

5. **Question:** How might the Bible study be improved for the future?

a. **Statement:** “I think also kind of accepting that it's okay not to have kids as well. Like not even, some people are fine without having kids in their lives and I think that's okay.”

**Transformed:** The Bible study should have allowed greater freedom for married couples to choose whether or not they should have children, because I believe that God will respect their choices in these matters.

b. **Statement:** “And I feel like those that's a big thing that we can teach that, especially accepting people who would rather adopted and foster than having their own kids.”

**Transformed:** The Bible study should have conveyed a greater acceptance of those who feel called to adopt children rather than have children of their own.

c. **Statement:** “Or even parents of the LGBTQ who can make amazing parents as well, doesn't have to be just a mom and a dad, but. And I've seen great examples of that. It's actually it's amazing. I feel like including everyone that can be that can be a parent is good as well.”

**Transformed:** I believe that people who embrace alternative lifestyles (such as LGBTQ) are not sinning against God, and they can also make good parents. I think the Bible study should have conveyed approval and acceptance of such couples as parents.

## Participant G

1. **Question:** What did you learn from the Bible study that you had not heard before?

a. **Statement:** “I learned that there's a lot more about marriage in the Bible than I think I originally thought. I thought. I mean, I knew there was a good amount. I didn't realize that there were so many different sides of it, though. I think like they all kind of focus on the same thing or like they all point towards the same ideal. But I think there's a bunch of different aspects of that ideal that I didn't really know.”

**Transformed:** The Bible study helped me to understand that God’s design for marriage is multifaceted and involves aspects that I did not previously understand.

b. **Statement:** “Like, I mean, as far as, like how you should treat your wife, you know, everything like that. I mean, I think that's the thing that like we missed out on, but I think that helped me out with.”

**Transformed:** The Bible study taught me some new things about how to be a godly husband to my wife and treat her appropriately.

c. **Statement:** “And also, I think just how to interpret those, those scriptures and how to how to, apply that to today's age and also like, like maybe things that could interfere with those, those ideals and those doctrines. But, and if those, if those do come up, how to go about those.”

**Transformed:** The Bible study helped me to understand some of the differences between the world's view of marriage and God's view of marriage.

2. **Question:** Did participating in the Bible study cause you to change any of your thoughts about what you're seeking in a future spouse?

a. **Statement:** “I'm not sure. I don't know if I would say it would change my ideas. It made me more aware of what I do want. I guess maybe I didn't have like a strict idea and this kind of helped me help steer me in the right direction of what I want to look for...I wouldn't say it changed my view on what I want in a marriage. I think it just helped me move closer to what I do want instead of changing it.”

**Transformed:** The Bible study gave me greater clarity about what the qualities that I (and God) would want in a future wife for me, rather than completely changing my ideas.

b. **Statement:** “Just I mean, a woman that, you know, there's a mutual respect. It's two people coexisting together. And also, I mean, there's love there.”

**Transformed:** I desire to marry a wife with whom I will share mutual love and respect as God intends.

c. **Statement:** “There's, I mean, she wants children. That's a big thing for me.”

**Transformed:** I desire to marry a wife who wishes to have children as God has designed for married couples.

d. **Statement:** “It's part of the church. I think that's whether it's here or wherever or wherever it might be.”

**Transformed:** I wish to be faithfully involved in the church with my future wife and family.

e. **Statement:** “And also, I think the most beneficial part of it was. There are complications that could come up, that could arise in a marriage. And how do you deal with those? And especially when it comes to like having children and all that kind of stuff.”

**Transformed:** The Bible study helped me to realize that there are crosses to bear in marriage, especially related to having and raising children, so I should be prepared to bear them in a godly manner.

f. **Statement:** “But I think there's more to that that I've learned from this, such as how to respect her if things go awry or respect her if like a complication comes up and like having children. That's like a big thing that I never really, everyone thinks about, but never I don't think I ever put a lot of thought into of how I would react if that happened. But I think now I have that kind of respect for her that if it doesn't, it's not, it's nobody's, it's just not God's plan.”

**Transformed:** If my future wife and I are unable to have children, I feel better equipped to handle that situation in a godly manner.

3. **Question:** Did participating in the Bible study cause you to change any of your thoughts about what you would want your future marriage to be like?

a. **Statement:** “I would say no. I think I think my idea is always kind of follow this, the church's guidelines, or not guidelines, but suggestions. So I would say, I would say it followed pretty closely to what, what I did want.”

**Transformed:** I already had the proper views about what God wanted for me in my marriage, so the Bible study confirmed what I already knew.

4. **Question:** Did participating in the Bible study cause you to change any of your plans for having children or starting a family?

a. **Statement:** “No, I think my, I think if it did, it made me want to have children more.”

**Transformed:** The Bible study increased my desire to have children in accordance with God's design for marriage.

b. **Statement:** “I think having that force of it's something that is asked of you in the Bible and is something that God wants you to do that I think that just moved me closer to doing it, even though I was already very much on board with having children.”

**Transformed:** The Bible study showed me that not only am I personally interested in having children, but also that God would want me to do so.

c. **Statement:** “It's something that I've always wanted to have of my own sort of family eventually. Not maybe, maybe not soon, but. That's just always the thing I've wanted to have whenever I'm, you know, financially and stable enough to do that. But I think this has helped me move closer to how I want to go about that.”

**Transformed:** The Bible study helped me to think more intentionally about how I would start a family in accordance with God's design.

5. **Question:** How might the Bible study be improved for the future?

a. **Statement:** “I would say the only thing that could be improved is just teaching it sooner. I think that's something that's and obviously I'm not saying like use everything that we

learned about and like. Elementary school kids. But I think some of the things that we learned, elementary school kids, you know, could, could begin to learn, maybe like kind of a lowered version of it.”

**Transformed:** Even children as young as elementary school could learn an age-appropriate version of God’s procreative design for marriage.

b. **Statement:** “And I mean, obviously, because us having us that were a part of this program and even the people that were there, some of the high school youth that was there. But that who weren't 18, I think it's just like I think that's something that we could we could definitely learn before we get into high school, because I think high school is a place for like... You're, you're interested in, you're interested in people now, you're like dating, is now, like something that we all think about. And I think it might, as it starts to become a thought in your mind in junior high. That's what I think we, that's what I think this lesson would be the most beneficial, especially to those that age group.”

**Transformed:** Because high school students are interested in dating and relationships, high school would be a good time to teach youth about God’s procreative design for marriage.

c. **Statement:** “I think maybe delve deeper into the, the relationship, the relationship aspect of it. And, because I think there was there was a good amount of that. But I think the balance between children and relationship wasn't very even. But I think that's something that I think also is very important on teaching or teaching, teaching us how to respect your partner and treat your relationship in a godly way. And I think that's also just, just as important as having children and all that kind of stuff.”

**Transformed:** The Bible study could have been improved with a focus on other aspects of God’s design for marriage, rather than procreation only.

## APPENDIX EIGHT

### General Themes from the Interviews

#### Initial Interviews

1. **Question:** What do you remember learning about marriage in church as you were growing up?
  - a. Other than in confirmation classes and in a few events dedicated specifically to the topic, the participants did not remember hearing that much about marriage as they grew up at church.
  - b. God has designed marriage to last a lifetime.
  - c. Divorce and adultery are sins in God's eyes.
  - d. Christians should seek to marry other believers, so that they can help each other to grow in the faith.
  - e. The spiritual and emotional connection between spouses is more important than their physical connection.
  - f. God has designed marriage to be between a man and a woman, rather than between same-sex couples.
2. **Question:** What do you remember learning about sex in church as you were growing up?
  - a. The participants remembered some reluctance to discuss sex on the part of their parents and church leaders.
  - b. Premarital sex is a sin in God's eyes, and Christians should wait until they are married to have sex.
  - c. Sex is a gift from God, to be enjoyed only by married couples.
3. **Question:** What do you want your future husband/wife to be like?
  - a. The participants wanted to marry a spouse who connected with them emotionally and with whom they could share mutually enjoyable life experiences.
  - b. The participants wanted to marry a spouse who shared their Christian faith.
  - c. The participants wanted to marry a spouse who would be respectful to them and their families.
4. **Question:** Do you remember learning anything in the church about the importance of having

children in marriage?

- a. The participants largely did not remember hearing very much in church about the importance of procreation in God's design for marriage.
- b. Children are blessings from God.
- c. Children are important because they too can become disciples of Jesus and thus help the church to grow.
- d. Parents can pass on their legacy (e.g.—faith, interests, physical and personality characteristics, etc.) to their children.

5. **Question:** Do you think God would want you to have children if you were able to do so?

- a. The participants largely believed that God would want them to have children if they were capable of doing so.
- b. God would want the participants to have children so that His church would grow.
- c. Some participants believed that God would want them to have children because they love children and would be good parents.
- d. Some participants were unsure of whether or not God would want all people to have children, or whether or not He would want them specifically to have children.

#### Final Interviews

1. **Question:** What did you learn from the Bible study that you had not heard before?

- a. Most of the participants did not feel that they learned anything “new” per se, but that the study reinforced what they had already been taught at various points about God's design for marriage.
- b. God desires married people under normal circumstances to procreate.
- c. Having children and raising families can be difficult crosses to bear, but they are worth bearing for the sake of faithfulness to His design.
- d. Not all people will be able to have children, but God will still bless their marriages.

2. **Question:** Did participating in the Bible study cause you to change any of your thoughts about what you're seeking in a future spouse?

a. Some participants felt that the Bible study did change their views on what they were seeking in a future spouse, in that they were more interested in finding one who desired to have children.

b. Some participants did not feel that the Bible study changed their views because they already desired children and wanted to find a spouse who desired them as well.

3. **Question:** Did participating in the Bible study cause you to change any of your thoughts about what you would want your future marriage to be like?

a. Most of the participants felt that their views on their future marriages were similar to what they had been before the Bible study.

b. Most participants still wanted to follow God's design for marriage and have children with their spouse (or were strengthened in their desire to do so).

4. **Question:** Did participating in the Bible study cause you to change any of your plans for having children or starting a family?

a. Most of the participants had already planned on having children and starting a family according to God's design, so the Bible study did not change much for them.

b. Some of the participants felt some trepidation at having children after hearing about some of the difficulties of raising them, but they still ultimately wanted to start a family.

c. Some participants felt better equipped to handle a situation in which infertility prevented them from having children.

5. **Question:** How might the Bible study be improved for the future?

a. Most of the participants enjoyed the Bible study overall and did not suggest any (appropriate) substantive changes.

b. The participants largely felt that the Bible study was faithful to God's Word and accurately conveyed its teachings.

c. The participants enjoyed the Bible study's openness to discussion and the opportunities they had to share their thoughts and opinions.

d. Some participants wanted to hear more about the relationship side of marriage as well, which would be a good topic for a future study.

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