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To Have or Not to Have Children?

by Dr. Maggie Low

On her 60th National Day, Singapore is now officially a senior, albeit a “young senior”. But who will support her as she ages?

In 2023, Singapore’s total fertility rate fell to “...below 1 for the first time, dropping to a record low of 0.97—among the world’s lowest. What it means is that the average number of children each woman has is less than what is needed to replace those in the population who die.” (Theresa Tan, “2024 Dragon Year failed to boost S’pore’s total fertility rate, which remains at a low of 0.97”, *Straits Times*, 1 Mar 2025).

The corresponding impact is that Singapore will become “super aged” in 2026, as more than one in five persons is expected to be 65 years old or older. By 2030, one in four Singaporeans will be aged 65 or above. (Deborah Lau, “How Singapore is preparing for a super aged society come 2026”, *Channel News Asia*, 5 Oct 2024).

What does the Bible have to say about procreation? Is it a command? After all, in the creation of Adam and Eve, Gen 1:28 states, “Be fruitful and multiply!” The Hebrew verbs are imperatives. However, the statement is introduced by “And God *blessed* them and said to them...”

In Hebrew, a blessing can be pronounced with the use of the imperative. For example, in Gen 24:60, when Rebekah’s family

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blessed her, they said, "Become (Hebrew imperative) thousands of multitude..."

Therefore, procreation is a promise rather than a command. It is God alone who can give the blessing of children. However, in modern times, there is a growing anti-natalist sentiment: the thinking that it is irresponsible to have children because we are bringing them into a world of suffering, especially with the increasing harm of pollution, global warming, and wars.

Even when I was newly married thirty-seven years ago, I wondered about having children—not because I was “woke”, but because I thought a mother would have to make more career sacrifices than the father. To be clear, my husband is a strong egalitarian, but there are unavoidable maternal commitments.

So why make babies? What finally convinced me was when I reflected on why God made human beings in the first place. It goes back to what the *imago dei* (image of God; Gen 1:27) encompasses. For Old Testament studies, there are three implications: functional, relational, and ontological.

First, the functional aspect of the *imago dei* means that God created us to serve him by establishing order in creation for the flourishing of life. To have children is for the service of the Kingdom of God, not to have a mini-me to serve my own kingdom.

Second, the *imago dei* is used in the context of the relationships between God and humans, between male and female, between parent and child, and finally, between all humans (Gen 1:27; 5:3; 9:6). In other words, God created us because he wants to enjoy a relationship with us.

Similarly, children are to be conceived as an expression of the love between a husband and wife and the joy of extending it to another. The love between a couple is bilateral in that they choose one another. But a child is loved unilaterally, meaning to say, “I love you, even though you can’t do anything for me.” Having children is a means of spiritual formation that has enabled me to realise more of God’s love and to love like him.

(The broader relational understanding of the *imago dei* is also vital for single people to realise that their worth and fulfilment are not just found in marriage but also in other relationships.)

The third aspect of the *imago dei*, which is ontological

in nature, means that a person has intrinsic worth simply because they are created by God, regardless of their ability to function or relate to others. This truth holds great significance in how we value children and individuals with disabilities in any form.

So, when a young Christian couple think about choosing to have fur kids rather than human kids, I want to explore the root of their concerns with them. Some choose not to have kids simply because they want to enjoy their freedom and lifestyle. Then the challenge is whether they wish to seek God’s kingdom or their own comfort.

On the other hand, some couples are too stressed to have children because of “eco-anxiety” about the world or apprehensions about their own lives. In Singapore, the financial and emotional costs of getting our kids through the competitive educational system can be overwhelming. However, we need to ask whether we are relying on ourselves or on God’s love and strength to face the challenges.

There are also some Christians who feel so hampered by their past family traumas that they want to avoid subjecting children to the same hurts. I would encourage them to seek help for restoration, because that would be God’s desire, rather than let the past haunt them.

While the final decision to make babies rests with the couple, support from the wider community can make a difference. Fathers and extended families play a crucial role, and institutional policies that support flexible work arrangements can help everyone maintain a sane work-life balance.

Finally, a word to those who desire to have children but are unable to do so. Barrenness became a reality in a sin-infected world, but in the Bible, barren women were not usually blamed for their condition. We can certainly pray for children, and we can also remember that, from a New Testament perspective, the emphasis is on spiritual rather than biological fruitfulness (Gal 3). ❖



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