

The Pursuit of Parenthood

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[0 : 00] Well, let me ask you to turn with me, if you would, in your Bibles to the prophecy of Isaiah. In the Old Testament, if you have one of the church Bibles, it's page 615.

We're going to read some verses from chapter 55 and 56, which have something to say about our subject this morning, which is the last in our series on aspects of love, on marriage, and on family life, as we think this morning about the pursuit of parenthood, but especially when that pursuit proves to be a painful and a difficult one.

I want to read these wonderful words of promise from the prophet Isaiah, beginning at chapter 55 and verse 10, and reading through chapter 56.

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return from there, but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth.

It shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace.

[1 : 25] The mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress.

Instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle, and it shall be made a name for the Lord, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off. And thus says the Lord, Keep justice and do righteousness, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed.

Blessed is the man who does this, and the son of man who holds it fast, who keeps the Sabbath not prevailing it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil.

Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say, The Lord will surely separate me from his people. And let not the eunuchs say, Behold, I am a dry tree.

For thus says the Lord, To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me, and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters.

[2 : 35] I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it and holds fast to my covenant, these I will bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer.

Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar, for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. The Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares this. I will yet gather others to him besides those already gathered. Amen. And may God bless to us this, his word.

Amen. Well, from time to time, we take a break from our normal pattern, which is to be teaching through different books of the Bible to look at a more thematic set of studies.

And that's what we've been doing over recent weeks, looking at the whole area of marriage and indeed parenthood. And we come to our last in this present series this morning. Last week, we looked at what the Bible teaches about the purpose of parenthood.

[4 : 04] And today, I want to think a little about the pursuit of parenthood. And especially about what right and godly ambition for achieving parenthood might be, especially when it seems that that desire to have children is being tested and frustrated and perhaps even denied altogether.

So this is a very sensitive subject. And for some people here this morning, it's a very painful subject. And I'm very aware of that. And I'm dealing with it because I know that a number of us are struggling with these things right at the moment.

And I'm sure also that others will find these things a struggle in the future. And also because it is some of you who have asked me very specifically to deal with this kind of issue together. And it's not easy to do. And the risk, of course, is that some people will find it very difficult and even hurtful. Perhaps because something that I say is misunderstood or perhaps because I don't say it as well as I should do or as sensitively as I should do.

And that may indeed happen. But my inadequacy isn't really an excuse for me to dodge out of difficult topics and to try and play safe. So I shall do the best that I can.

[5 : 32] But I do ask you to bear in mind that if some of you find it hard to listen to, it's quite hard to preach about as well. But I want to do that because I know it's a real area of need and an area of struggle.

And I want you to know that I'm very concerned about these things and that I have you in mind very specially. But we do have a responsibility, don't we, I think, to think through these things together as Christians for at least two reasons.

First of all, as I've said, many are having or will have to face up to struggles of this painful reality when they find that their natural ambition for a family is frustrated.

And I want to help us to think through a little bit how we are to think about these things and how we are to deal with a very real anguish and pain that is inevitable in these situations.

But secondly, and this is equally important, I want to help all of us to know how we can be and we must be real friends, real brothers and sisters in Christ who can encourage and help others amongst us who are facing these particular trials, even if we ourselves are not.

[6 : 43] Because the Bible calls us, doesn't it, to be our brother's keeper, our sister's keepers. We're called to bear one another's burdens. But the truth is that often we don't just fail to help with our brothers and sisters' burdens.

Sometimes we can even make those burdens worse. We can add to the pain of those that we love because we haven't thought through these things properly ourselves in a biblical way.

And so we're not then able to be as supporting and as caring and as helpful as we would surely want to be and as we certainly need to be if we're to be a true fellowship of the Lord Jesus. So if we think this morning, well, look, this doesn't really apply to me, just remember that if it affects your brothers and your sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ, then it is our concern.

And it's something that we need to take seriously because we are indeed our brother's keepers. So I want us to focus this morning on how we are to apply the Bible's teaching about marriage and about family life to this whole painful area of what we might call involuntary childlessness.

And we saw last week that this increasingly prevalent idea of voluntary childlessness is just a lifestyle choice. So that cannot really fit with Christian thinking because God has made procreation an integral part of marriage.

[8 : 09] marriage, it's part of serving his kingdom in this world through the gift of marriage and parenting. So that kind of attitude that wants to see children merely as an optional lifestyle choice, that is against the Bible's teaching, I think.

But also for the couple who are longing to have their own children, who are unfulfilled in their own desire, that kind of attitude can be deeply wounding and painful, can't it?

Because it just magnifies their own agony. It magnifies their own childness. And when they would give anything to be able to have a child of their own, it's terribly hard to hear somebody treat the whole idea of having children as just rather derisory.

So I want to think this morning about this desire for the pursuit of parenting, a right and a natural desire that God has given us. I want us to think how the Bible wants us to think when it seems that that desire is being frustrated or even being denied.

So I want to consider it under two headings. First of all, godly ambition for parenthood. And then we'll think about godly achievement of parenthood. And right thinking about the first of these will certainly help us towards right thinking about the lengths that Christians might feel it right to go in order to achieve the parenthood that they long for.

[9 : 31] And again, I can't possibly be exhaustive about this, nor do I want at all to be too specific or too prescriptive. We've got to be very careful about that as Christians.

But I do want to give some biblical pointers to our thinking and the way our thinking should be shaped by the Bible's message in this as in every other aspect of our lives. It's part, isn't it, of the renewing of our minds that is necessary if we are going to offer God true worship in body and in

soul, in lives that honor him in everything that we think and everything that we do. So first then, the Christian couple's godly ambition for parenthood. There can be no doubt about the very real pain felt by couples who find themselves unable to have children.

Even the terminology can be very painful. Infertility. Infertile couples. It smacks, doesn't it, sometimes even of stigma.

It smacks even of disease. And that is so very difficult when usually the individuals involved are young and fit and healthy people in every other way. And that can be a very compounding factor in the pain in my experience.

[10:46] It seems so incongruous. We're fit and well and fine. And over the years I've known many friends and colleagues and family members too in this situation.

I don't know, just a little of the depth of the anguish that they feel. And I've wept for them and wept with them and I've seen something of it. And it's no surprise to me therefore that I read of a study done some years ago in this country of infertile couples and it showed that one in five had contemplated suicide at some stage of waiting for fertility treatment.

That nine out of ten had reported feelings of depression or isolation or frustration and that a third said that their relationship with their marriage partner was severely affected by the difficulty they conceived.

Now that's really very serious, isn't it? And added to that of course is all the stress both psychological and financial of undergoing fertility treatments.

Often there's very large costs involved in private clinics. Failure rates very often mean that repeated cycles add greatly to the stress and greatly to the cost.

[11:58] And Christian couples are also human and so they share, don't they? We share all the stress, all the pain, just the same. And yet perhaps for Christians it's even more so because they understand, don't they, the biblical pattern of marriage that we've been looking at together over these recent weeks.

They understand and rejoice in the place of procreation as an integral part of marriage and as a gift from God to serve his kingdom.

They don't see babies just as a lifestyle choice. And because of that, the apparent denial of that gift from God, a good gift, can be a very, very hard thing to turn to terms with, of course.

And I would want to say here that that's one of the reasons why our theology of marriage must be truly biblical, not just partially biblical, because it bears on this whole area of parenting.

If, for example, you take the position of the Roman Catholic Church that sees the primary purpose of marriage as being procreation, well, that leads you to very, very difficult conclusions, doesn't it, about childless marriage.

[13:12] Remember, we quoted the statement from Pope Pius VI, that the innermost purpose of marriage is the awakening and rearing of new life. Well, if that really is so, as the German theologian Helmut Tillicker rightly points out, then the proper conclusion would be that a childless marriage is not a real marriage, because it has failed in its foremost purpose.

And, in fact, he goes on in his book to point out that the Roman Catholic position is in what he calls dubious proximity to, of all people, Bertrand Russell, the atheist philosopher, because Bertrand Russell, the atheist philosopher, said very plainly that a childless marriage was no marriage.

It was of no importance to society, and it was unworthy, I'm quoting, unworthy to be taken cognizance of by a legal institution. That's what he calls his rational ethic.

It's important, isn't it, to see where atheist philosophy takes you, to very unpleasant places. Well, not only is that deeply hurtful, but that is a terrible, terrible insult on everyone whose marriage has so-called failed by these criteria.

But, of course, equally problematic is the opposite tendency, and we can see, obviously, the temptation to want to distance yourself from any of that kind of thinking, but you can go to the other extreme and downplay procreation so much as being really of almost no importance in marriage, so that the only thing that's important in marriage is the marriage partnership and relationship.

[14:44] That's what defines marriage's purpose, even to the extent that, well, having children is just a lifestyle choice. It's neither good or bad in itself. It's just neutral. It doesn't really matter.

You wonder if that's a little bit like Elkanah's response to Hannah. Do you remember in the book of Samuel and her childlessness? Oh, you've got me. What does it matter if you don't have any children? I don't think that was a very great comfort to Hannah or, indeed, to any childless woman.

And sometimes, you see, people might feel, well, we downplay the blessing of children as a good thing. That'll help our friends who are childless because then they'll say, well, I haven't missed out on so much at all. Oh, no, no.

Christopher Ashe puts it so very well when he says, to affirm the goodness of birth is not insensitive to those who cannot conceive or who suffer a miscarriage or a stillbirth any more than affirming the goodness of marriage is insensitive to the widow.

On the contrary, if we do not affirm this goodness, we cannot grieve with them because we're not dignifying their loss as something real and profound.

[15 : 58] That's true, you see, to downplay the desire for children is just as insensitive to the grief and pain felt by childless people, especially women, as it is to centralize procreation and so centralize it as to say that if your marriage doesn't have children, then it's a failure in itself.

So, yes, we must be sensitive but not silent. It's right to acknowledge the pain and the loss that people experience and to weep with them.

But we've seen, haven't we, that the Bible does not teach that either procreation is the primary purpose of marriage or indeed just that the love relationship and partnership is the primary purpose of marriage or indeed that the preservation of public order and decency is the primary purpose of marriage.

These are all different goods of marriage but all of these things are there to serve the primary purpose of marriage which is the service of the kingdom of God through God's purposes in creation and redemption.

You see how important it is that we keep coming back to a clear biblical theology of marriage itself. There's nothing more practical in life than the Bible's theology, than the Bible's view of life and the world and everything because only that will help us think clearly and find answers to all of the difficult questions that we face in lives.

[17 : 27] Marriage is all about, indeed, marriage was created for the service and the better service of the kingdom of God and children are a blessing, yes they are, a gift that is intrinsic to the order of marriage but because children are not the primary purpose of marriage then the actual bestowal of this gift in every particular case can't be essential to true marriage or to a truly fulfilling or fulfilled marriage under God's good and sovereign hand.

And we have to assert that very, very strongly. Children, just like marriage itself, are a gift and not a right. And that's the way it is for every individual.

It's normal to have children in marriage in the sense of usual but not necessarily universal. And our Lord himself says, doesn't he, in Matthew chapter 19 that marriage itself and by implication children are not a gift bestowed upon all for various reasons including one of which being the privilege of serving better the kingdom of heaven.

Now I know that that can seem and it is desperately hard to bear and yet hard though it is we need to remember don't we that these words come to us from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ who was himself unmarried and who was himself childless for our sake for the sake of the glory of the kingdom of God and who in himself has given us all things and who has loved us with an everlasting love and so if like marriage itself children are a gift and a blessing from God then we can't say can we that we have an absolute right to children we're right to seek that gift of course we're right to value that as a gift of God but we're right to have godly ambition for children to serve the kingdom of Christ so that we do want to bring to birth and bring to faith and bring to faithful service missionary children for the kingdom as we spoke of last week but if we rightly understand children as a gift and not as a right then that's going to shape isn't it it's going to shape our ambition for our children in terms of giving shape and giving limits to the lengths to which we will be willing to go in order to achieve that ambition in order to achieve parenthood and that's a very real issue that we have to think about today because we live in an age when there are more possibilities than there have ever been in history before to help us achieve parenthood when things are difficult and so I want to this is my second heading

I want us to consider a Christian couple's godly achievement of parenthood said that we live in an era of achieving parenthood in the most astonishing and advanced ways even in the years since I was at medical school which is 25 years ago now there have been huge advances in the whole area of reproductive technology when I was at medical school the first test tube baby as she was called then was still just a young girl and it was still novel it was exciting but nowadays that is absolutely routine so what are we to think about all of this as Christians that's a real question I want

to give just a very brief outline of the world's technology and the world's ethics the world's morality for using that technology and then briefly just look at a biblical perspective on these matters first of all the world's technology and it is quite staggering what can be done and what can be achieved in this field millions of babies are now born every year by IVF by in vitro fertilization approaching a million in the USA alone have been born that way and nobody today talks about test tube babies

[21 : 45] IVF is a household term everybody knows it simply refers to fertilizing an embryo from gametes from egg and sperm cells out with the parent's body and then implanted directly into the womb and thereafter it's a normal pregnancy and often and probably it's the first choice for all couples if it's possible the process uses the husband's and the wife's gametes and the baby that is born is really theirs genetically as well as having been carried by the mother but of course in many cases of infertility that's not possible and there's reliance on donor eggs or donor sperm in our country in the United Kingdom the whole procedure and process of these things is governed by the human fertilization and embryology authority although there are a lot of controversies about the role of that body and there are many agitators in the scientific world who want much more freedom to do experimentation in this area especially research in embryos and so on and one of the problems in this whole area is that the currently established treatments that we have for infertility is all very much bound up with much wider ethical considerations desires for research as I've said on embryos the use of fetal stem cells the whole area of cloning intermitochondrial transfer and all kinds of things that are being developed and so the goalposts are always moving it's very hard for us to think what we think or are to think it's not just a matter of egg and sperm donation now there's embryo donation there are banks of frozen embryos which seem to be able to last almost indefinitely and of course there are the headline cases that we read about now of cloning cloning embryos even as a possibility there's surrogacy and so on that's where in effect you rent somebody else's womb another woman to carry your baby either using your own genetic material or donated material or a mixture or all of these things that is legal in the United

Kingdom you're not allowed to advertise you're not allowed to pay directly for it but it's a very grey area and we see don't we cases very difficult heart-rending cases in the courts where maybe a couple have used their own egg and sperm for an embryo it's been given to a surrogate mother but then by the time the mother comes to birth she decides that this is her baby she's carried and wants to keep it it becomes very very complicated legally as well as emotionally and psychologically now this is a huge ethical area we can't possibly go into all of that this morning but I want to stick to the very much more limited area of a Christian couple thinking about how far they might make use of all this technology in order to achieve their ambition their godly ambition of parenthood that's a question that is often asked and the basic point is that the world offers us a huge arena of very helpful technology but the question is what is the morality of it all what are the ethics involved well the world's ethics tend largely to be about what we might call the lego kit approach that's a term used by professor john wyatt who's professor of pediatric neonatology in london and he talks about this in this excellent book called matters of life and death which i strongly recommend it's on our recommended list on the church website bookshop and i'm going to draw quite heavily on that in what i'm saying here there's no natural order to a lego kit that's the point there's no specific purpose for the design you just make from it what you can make it's all facts and not values if you like there's no right or wrong way to use it you just use it and you do what you can and you make what works and john wyatt likens that to the view of many scientists today the human body is essentially value free we don't have to think about any taboos any moral questions is this right we just have to think about two things does it work and is it safe and that's what parliament is usually concerned with when it passes legislation so that's the approach to this whole area of reproductive technology that we're looking at is it safe does it work well if it does then it's good and we should have it and you can see actually how that is the approach to morality and ethics in so many different ways in our society the whole area of sexuality and marriage and all sorts of things that is the world's view the Lego kit approach in a nutshell but what what is the Bible's perspective well the Bible's ethics are very different we're not told of course are we anything about IVF or these sorts of things in the Bible in Paul's letters or in Jesus teaching and that just shows us doesn't it why we have to have joined up thinking as Christians why we have to understand theology in other words we have to understand the big principles of the Bible that are brought to their own life and these big principles are very clear a Christian mind a mind renewed and transformed by the gospel doesn't

approach these questions piecemeal we're not just to ask well is this procedure right or is that one wrong we must step back and ask much much bigger and deeper questions mustn't we what does scripture reveal to us about the whole nature and purpose of human life and its purpose within God's plan of creation and redemption we need to understand what it means to be human beings in other words we need to understand what cherishing and guarding human life really is all about and that's vital in every area of

Christian ethics well the whole Bible is absolutely clear on that isn't it that human beings are not just a Lego kit that we're not just value free Genesis 1 to 3 alone is enough to tell us all of that that God is a creator that he has a definite design and purpose for this world and that that is reflected in what we see in this world and indeed in our makeup as human beings in body and spirit we are God's masterpieces of design we're made in his image with his purpose and all of our thinking just simply has to take that seriously but of course it also has to take seriously that the Bible teaches us that we are flawed masterpieces and that it's our responsibility as believers to act as restorers and preservers of the image of God in human beings we are to protect wherever we can God's masterpieces from further harm and we are to seek to restore human beings to their true selves in line with God's creation intentions in line with the original artist's plan that's our rationale isn't it for preaching the gospel we're seeking to bring eternal restoration of human beings it's also our rationale for all

Christian philanthropy for medicine for social care for all that we seek to do to preserve and to restore God's images in human beings and John Wyatt here uses an analogy that I find very helpful in thinking about this whole area of medical technology and especially reproductive technology the analogy of art restoration and the clear and very precise ethics that are involved in that he quotes from the Institute of Conservation Guidelines and it's very interesting conservation is the means by which the original and true nature of an artistic object is maintained and it goes on that true nature is determined by evidence of its origins its original constitution the materials of which it's composed and the information which it may embody as to the maker's intention you see it's the maker's intention that is decisive in art restoration and so the restorer of a painting or an object of art can use all kinds of technology all kinds of tests all sorts of materials but they are only free to operate within the parameters of the maker's original intention in other words it's not just the invasiveness of the technology that's decisive but the goal is it protecting the original intention of the maker not the restorer's view of how it should have been or how it might be made better or how it could be improved or changed but the original maker now of course no analogy is perfect but I think on this point it's really very helpful for us and it can be applied to this whole area of reproductive technology including those where the individual technique in itself might be rather neutral or seem absolutely no problem because the question is not just does it work or is it safe this particular thing but does it use technology to allow the maker's intention to be fulfilled or is it in fact changing the fundamental design of the creator at a very deep level and John

[31 : 19] White applies this in the book to the whole realm of reproduction and he makes the point that in God's design making love and making babies belong together and the DNA is the means by which the unique love between a man and woman is converted physically into a baby into a new life it enshrines in a new life the unique combination of love between the mother and the father and the genetic makeup that we have is a map in that sense and a web of love going back over generations and generations I think that really is a rather wonderful way of putting it see evolutionary biologists people like Richard Dawkins and so on for them sex the whole process is quite a mystery they can't work out really why it's there in the whole evolutionary business it's just a way of mixing genes randomly but you see for the believer for the Christian sex is a way that love becomes incarnate in a unique expression of that love but by contrast you see the danger of so much reproductive technology is that all of that's left behind instead that unique gift of

God's incarnation of shared love it just becomes quite different babies are just a product of our will even a commodity at our disposal now if we think about reproductive technology like that we need to ask is it allowing the maker's intention to be fulfilled to do this or is it changing God's design at a very fundamental level I think that if we look at it like that then some things which may work and may be safe they do seem to be clearly changing that design as you start to go down the road of donation of eggs or sperm or embryo or surrogacy or especially cloning or bringing three or four parents into the whole equation you start to raise very very big questions don't you at the very least you're introducing a whole lot of ambiguity about a whole identity and parenthood of a child and so

on some people like to argue what's the difference between that sort of thing and a blood donation or a bone marrow donation or kidney donation well it seems to me that these latter things are seeking to preserve the order of creation to restore to repair

God's normal design some of these other things are making fundamental changes at a very deep level to the whole business of children and parenting and family life and all the more so of course if you have a single woman perhaps with no partner who nevertheless wants to have a baby which you can have now by technology or a lesbian couple or two men who want to have a baby by these means I think it's a helpful thing to start thinking in that way what about what about in vitro fertilization per se on its own for example using both gametes from the parents well my own view and this is my view is that of itself that can be regarded as a means of restorative technology in other words it's enabling a couple to achieve what some particular problem or blockage in the system is simply preventing an incarnation of their own love in a child who is their own

I say that's my personal view others may not feel comfortable with that and I would want to enter several caveats about it which are important and one is of course that that would be provided that no embryos were created simply for destruction or for research purposes I think that's a very difficult thing and I think we have to take the formation of human life like that very seriously another is that as I've said a lot of the technology that is currently routine has in the past only been developed through researches that has resulted in the destruction of many many embryos and we can't escape from that reality that you're buying into something that has got a hinterland of course that's equally true for many many medical procedures many drugs many things that we benefit from today which likewise have been brought to where they are through all kinds of research that we might find very difficult but it's a question of course another thing is that it's certainly not without risk and it is certainly not without stress such that when I'm counseling couples

I always say that very careful and deep thought is needed before you embark on that kind of course of action I know from bitter experience among many the great stress that is all bind up with that but you need to read more and research these things and I do recommend John Wyatt's book matters of life and death all I've been able to do is sketch out very briefly some of the key issues and certainly not all of them but perhaps just a beginning to help our thinking in this difficult area but in drawing some conclusions I want to restate the basic questions how far should godly parents go in pursuing parenthood well that is going to be determined isn't it fundamentally by how much we see it as a gift from God and how much we see parenthood as a right that we can demand I think we must say that it's right and it's good to have the ambition for parenthood so I think it would be foolish not to pursue for example basic medical tests and help because there are lots of things that can help to restore the masterpiece of the maker's intent but at the same time

[37 : 21] I think we also have to say that that ambition to pursue parenthood must be limited simply because we do recognize it as a gift and not as a right for every marriage in particular and those limits might be due to ethical issues as we've outlined or simply just due to practicalities and wisdom the sheer exhaustiveness and stress of the whole treadmill of endless investigations and treatment and so on not everything that is permissible to us as Christians is always wise for us as Christians in particular circumstances and we have to be real about that what other options might there be well of course one very honorable tradition is that of adoption from very earliest times it was Christians who were renowned for rescuing orphans and findlings who later pioneered adoption services and care homes and fostering and so on one of the great tragedies of course of the huge expansion of the terror of abortion is that there are just so many less babies for adoption than there were in the past in the 30 years that followed our abortion act in 1967 the number of babies being adopted in this country was reduced to less than a quarter of what it was before but again even in this area noble as it is adoption we still have to ask the question why don't we just as in planning to have children any other way you have to ask why is it just for me is it just for our desire to achieve a child at all costs for us or is our attitude deeply suffused by a desire to serve the kingdom of God you see you could have very pious

Christians who might look down their nose enormously at any sort of reproductive technology and look down their nose at others who might go through those procedures but they themselves go to the very ends of the earth in order that they can adopt the perfect baby that they want to have because they won't have some of the babies that might be on offer here that's a natural desire of course it is it's a good desire but just as with all God's gifts we have to submit our desires to him don't we and that will affect how we think even about adoption what kind of baby will I accept if

we're going to adopt must it be the perfect baby we need to be careful don't we because sometimes when we conceive children by ordinary means God doesn't give us a perfect baby sometimes it's a baby with problems or handicaps of various kinds and parenting isn't just for us is it or our satisfaction it's for God it's a response of obedient faith to him whether it's a natural child to us or whether it's an adopted child it's God's gift for a purpose and true fulfillment is found in that purpose not just in us having the child that we want we need to think about that we need to think about what our real motives are ourselves for a child whatever way we're seeking to achieve that even by adoption is it to serve

God's kingdom and faith and fruitfulness that might be a very tough assignment some of the children who come into families from adoption come from very difficult backgrounds but it could be a very wonderful and glorious calling it has been for many people many Christian people but again like everything you need to go into it with your eyes open and your hearts open to God's purpose and his plan that's one honorable way and of course adoption for the right reasons and the right purposes is a beautiful thing but for others their response might simply be acceptance some couples do just come to the point where they accept that for them there are to be no children and that can mean or could mean bitterness and resentment it could mean life lived with a great chip on your shoulder to the end of your days but it needn't be like that if despite the pain and the grief and the real sense of bereavement they're able to see and are helped to see that even this situation can be captured for the glory of Christ then sometimes it can lead to a wonderful fruitful release for couples like that to serve

Christ in a way that they would never have been able to do otherwise perhaps in a way that they could never have even imagined and if childlessness is just like singleness or any other deprivation can itself be seen as a gift from the Lord Jesus in these kingdom terms something to be used for him and the freedom and the joy in that is enormous and using that for him in that situation can bring immense pleasure and purpose and great fulfillment in life even though that is forged through a crucible of great agony for many years and I can think of those that I've known personally over the years for whom that has been wonderfully true in extraordinary ways I think of one dear friend who if anybody was ever made for motherhood it was her and yet very painfully for her children never came and yet that years later opened up the way for Christian service in a way that was quite remarkable and now allowing her with her husband to be parents to so many children looking after them during their schooling years and being immensely blessed and once I remember her saying to me God has given me the joy of so many children I would never have had if I'd actually had my own ones I don't misunderstand that wasn't without pain great pain and yet in it there was great joy real joy fulfillment and blessing in serving the kingdom of the Lord but that is isn't it the promise of our Lord Jesus read Matthew chapter 19 none who has forgone the precious relationships of love in this life for the sake of the Lord Jesus will ever lose out he will compensate he says a hundred fold even now in this life and in the world to come an inheritance of glorious life I want to end just by rereading some of these words from Isaiah chapter 56 that remind us of that new world and of the wonderful comfort and the hope for all whose hearts are wrenched by pain in this present time on this issue just listen this is the promise of God our Savior soon my salvation will come and my deliverance be revealed let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say the Lord will surely separate me from his people and let not the eunuch say behold I am a dry tree but thus says the Lord to the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters [44 : 38] I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off that's the promise of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ that is the great restoration to the maker's true intention for every single one of us that knows and loves the Lord Jesus whatever lack it might be that you have faced in your life in this veil of tears that's what we long for that's what we wait for with confident joy in Jesus our Savior so may the Lord help us one with another to help each other to do that to hope for his glory even through the tears and the grief and the pain that may attend an area of life like this let us be a people pointing to that new Jerusalem always amen let's pray heavenly father how we thank you that you are the sovereign

Lord even over the deepest agonies of our hearts help us to be people brothers and sisters in Christ to reflect the love and the tenderness and the understanding and the mercy of our Lord Jesus himself and help us guide one another's footsteps along the paths of many dark valleys in our own personal lives and family lives that together holding to your glorious promise of grace we might be

found at the last day praising the name of Christ our Savior and rejoicing in the glory of your holy house wherein we have found a home so help us Lord we pray and grant us your peace for we ask it in Jesus name so what do you can count down in the masking that comes out in the depths of her name we pray and