

How to Loan Your Child to the Lord Forever

Yes, the theme of the message this day is child dedication. But the message is for everyone. There are more or less five different categories you fall into today. All listeners are either children, young married couples, parents with children, parents with grown children, or singles/couples without children. There should be something here today for everyone.

For long ages humans have experienced intense desire for their children to be blessed. By the early Christian centuries the practice of infant baptism had already begun. In fact, it appears that the doctrine of original sin was developed to support an already existent practice of infant baptism.

Sometimes people speak of what they view as being the bondage of Adventism. I find the opposite. In fact, Adventism has a number of very freeing qualities. One of those is our Anabaptist heritage. The Anabaptists said they wanted to do more than reform a broken church; they longed to return to the purity of the New Testament church. They gave themselves freedom to examine and discard dogmas and doctrines which were not found rooted in biblical soil. Consequently, original sin, infant baptism, and other post-biblical innovations were happily thrown overboard.

Also from our Anabaptist heritage we received believer's baptism, the idea that those are to be baptized only who are of an age of moral accountability and who are able to make an intentional, informed, personal decision to accept Jesus and all the work in us He longs to accomplish.

There are two kinds of church: so-called high church and low church. High church places a premium on ritual and display, low church has a minimum of ritual and display. Guess

which line Seventh-day Adventism falls into? It is not difficult. We have a bare minimum of ritual. We are very “low church.”

Why mention all this? To point out that the few observances we do engage in thus are made that much more meaningful. Rites in our church worship services are limited mostly to baptisms, communion, ordinations, and sometimes child dedications. For that matter, we would hardly even call them rites. While we will not be accomplishing a big exegetical probe today, and the message is more of a collection of things than a careful outline, still it should be helpful.

Today is a special day. Not because we are going to invoke magic or call down the power of God. We do nothing of the sort. But today a precious little child will be dedicated to the Lord. Today parents and church will register their consecration and commitment to the welfare of a gentle little lamb.

You see, long before there were strange teachings like infant baptism, there was the design of God. Let us open the Scriptures to 1 Samuel 1:11. Here is the setting. Elkanah had two wives: Peninnah and Hannah. Peninnah had many sons and daughters. Hannah was childless. Meanwhile, the priesthood of Israel was corrupt because Eli refused to restrain his two sons who were priests from doing evil. Hannah goes up to the temple and she prays.

And she vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.

There are some things here that are not according to the Lord’s design, like having two wives concurrently, and there are other places where we are warned against vows (Deuteronomy 23:21; Ecclesiastes 5:4, 5; Matthew 5:33-37; etc.). But let’s not linger on these details. Hannah

prays at the temple, is mistaken for a drunk person, admonished by the priest, explains to the priest, then he asks blessing for her, and she departs. Notice that she expressed herself freely at the sanctuary. Her sorrow was not hidden.

A Lesson From Prayer

When she left, verse 18 tells us, “her countenance was no more sad.”

Here is one lesson for us. When Hannah had made her request to God, she left it with Him. She trusted Him. And her face was no more sad. There is an enormous power in prayer. Every heavy heart needs it. Jesus Himself found prayer to be a necessity. It is a necessity for us also. But part of prayer is trusting in God’s wise kind of answers. When we pray for something concerning one of His children, we may be sure that He hears. We may be sure that it empowers Him to act in ways He might otherwise not have acted in.

There is a protocol in prayer, and the key element of all, is to ask. Once we have asked, He has wider latitude to answer according to the unblemished fairness He holds to in executing the Great Controversy War. If you have not prayed, then possibly, in the matter you have in mind, God will withhold His stronger interventions. He longs for us to be more engaged. Our praying does not bring Him down to us, but lifts us up into the spiritual atmosphere where He knows it is best for us to dwell. He knows what is needed for the people He designed.

Co-Loaning

One thing we can all do is recognize that there is a co-loaning going on, both here in Hannah’s story, and in our own. We may “lend” our children to the Lord for their lifetime. But also, God is the Giver of life. He own us by creation. That means He owns our children by

creation. He also owns us by redemption; He alone has paid the price to buy us back for His kingdom. Thus, we are His by redemption, and our children are also His by redemption. So there is a very real sense in which God is lending His children to us. Our children are His children; His children are our children. Every child is a treasure of God.

Every child has the capacity to mirror the image of Jesus, to echo His likeness, to reproduce His character, even the character of the Father, perfectly—in spite of the disordered humanity they are born with.

Inheritance and Environment

Our children receive an inheritance we wish they did not receive. Make no mistake. For 4,000 years our race has “been decreasing in physical strength, in mental power, and in moral worth” (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 117). Our children, generally, are not quite as physically strong, not quite as smart, and not quite as morally inclined as the generations before them. What does this mean? It certainly does not mean for us—or them—to give up! It does mean that if the inheritance weighs ever more heavily upon them, our business today is to compensate for that by optimizing their environment. Listen:

Things which they see and hear in infancy and childhood are deeply imprinted upon their minds (*Child Guidance*, p. 202).

In childhood and youth the character is most impressible... More than any natural endowment, the habits established in early years decide whether a man will be victorious or vanquished in the battle of life (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 101).

Children grow according to the influence of those who surround them (*Child Guidance*, p. 27).

Much more might be said. But the point is made. Early childhood is an extraordinarily important time for children. It is a period of great opportunity. What they see and hear, in the behavior of parents, church members, fellow children, on a television screen, from the radio, on the internet, are deeply imprinted in their minds.

But take note of this point also. Inspiration tells us that the influence of environment is greater than the influence of any natural endowment. If the child can be led (age-appropriate, of course) in the development of right habits, then negative endowments can be overruled. It does not say anywhere that this will be an easy task for the parent. You must persist, patiently, kindly, and so lead the child.

Environment and the Church

We usually think of home and school as “environment” places. Certainly they are, preeminently, they are. But there is another place.

Church.

Church offers many opportunities to help our children with good environment. On a given week, there may be a church social event or youth ministry event on the weekend, a children’s choir practice on Tuesday, a prayer meeting on Wednesday, and on Sabbath morning a Sabbath school program, a church service, and perhaps a fellowship meal in the afternoon. Here at Mentone there may also be a Pathfinders event, an Adventist Family event, etc. These are unrepeatable opportunities. No rewind, no reset button, no time-travel backwards; every day, every moment, is unrepeatable. You can never spend it differently. We are writing with a pen of iron across the page of life. How many opportunities to grow as a Christian can we afford to miss? How many can our children afford to miss?

How many hours do our teachers labor in the church, preparing for the children Sabbath morning. And then they do not come. And it is not because they choose not to come, but because their ride leaves later than intended and they arrive at church later than intended. Parents, bring your children to church and bring them on time. You are educating them about habits right now. I know that if my little boy is going to learn to be on time to his appointments some day, he needs to see me consistently modeling that while he is very young.

If your children are grown, or if you have no children, still, your example can tell for Christ. Perhaps most of all, your example at church.

We should be on our best behavior at all times in all places, because we represent Christianity at all times and in all places. But for the sake of the children, we should be urgently invested in being Christlike at church. Not only angels thousands of years old are watching; so too are the little lambs. What are you teaching them?

Lent to the Lord

But let us focus on Hannah's plea. How urgently she wanted to be a mother! And she laid a most specific request before the Lord. Notice her statement. If God gives a positive answer to her request, then "I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life." Hannah returns home, she and her husband do what married do, and she conceives. She has the child and names him Samuel (Shamu-el), a combination of the Hebrew words for "ask" and "God" (vs. 20). But Hannah refuses to go up to the temple that year, but said that when the child had grown, "then I will bring him, that he may appear before the Lord, and there abide for ever" (vs. 22). Later, the child is still quite young. Nevertheless, Hannah brings him to the sanctuary. She announces herself as the woman who had prayed for the child.

For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of Him: therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord. And he worshipped the Lord there (1 Samuel 1:27, 28).

In 1 Samuel 1 we see three phrases in parallel: “all the days of his life” (vs. 11), “abide for ever” (vs. 22), and “as long as he liveth” (vs. 28). Hannah lent her mortal child to the Lord. She lent him to the Lord forever, but we see from the varied expressions that she understood that as being only as long as he would live. From a very young age, she gave him into God’s service.

Remember, Eli’s children were corrupt, wrong principles were in operation at the sanctuary, and how badly Israel needed someone like Samuel. But a few years of godly parental influence were enough to prepare Samuel for God’s purposes.

Our title today is “How to loan your child to God forever.” We might also call upon another well known Scripture—Proverbs 22:6: “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” This passage is not saying that through a certain kind of training a child’s free will can be removed, or that the parent can force the child to go in the right direction. Everyone has a free will, and some, in spite of the best influences, choose rebellion to God. But we believe that child training, the influences surrounding one’s earliest years, are of extraordinary value in equipping a child to make godly choices in the long term one day when he has free will to exercise and also the full freedom of the adult.

You can only loan your child to the Lord forever if he himself chooses to be lent to the Lord forever. So what you must do is do your utmost to equip him to make godly choices. You present Christianity in your home, in your work, in your church, attractively, appealingly, voluntarily. Jesus never forced anyone to be a Christian and neither should the parent. But the

parent should make it a special point to place the child in the most favorable circumstances for learning to love God and to choose the right rather than the evil.

Another Influence

The most significant influence of all that we can exert for the benefit of children, is to ourselves be Christians through and through. Consider this counsel:

Be just what you wish your children to be (*Child Guidance*, p. 261).

The power of example is great. In the church, in the workplace, we may temporarily maintain a difference between our claimed experience and our actual experience. But in the home, the whole character is on display. Children are not only supremely impressionable, they are supremely observant. They will echo you.

The other day our little boy was in the bathroom with me and he kept getting into things we didn't want him getting into. So I finally escorted him out of the room, while stating somewhat emphatically, "that is not your stuff." After depositing him in the bedroom with his mother, I heard him repeat my word "stuff," with exactly the same emphasis, the same tone of impatience. I was chagrined. Fortunately, I think his repetition was more mechanical than aware. I don't think he copied the feeling of impatience that was in my words. But it will not be long at all until he might not only parrot the word, but partake of the feeling in the word. The parent must take more care in his expression. If we want our children to learn patience, we must exercise more of it ourselves.

A thousand things more might be said, just in beginning. But here is a start.

For Every Person and Role

What can we say to children today? Children, obey your parents. They are under great stresses, they make mistakes. But so do you. God wants you to learn from your parents. We all influence each other. They want the best for you. They want you to be lent to the Lord forever. But is it not so that you desire the best for them? That you want them to have all the benefits of Christianity? That you want them in the kingdom? Then lighten their load by listening to them, learning from them, asking them spiritual things, even helping them by doing what you can to lift them above the cares of the world.

Your married couples, for you there are great challenges, great pressure and yet great opportunity. You are trying to get by in spite of financial limitations, demands upon your time and energies which seem to exceed the time and energies available to you. You feel you are being spent faster than you are being replenished. What attitude then? Trust in the Lord. He sees. He knows. He will help you. He has great blessings in store for you. He is growing your character. He has lent His child to you. He lent Jesus to Joseph and Mary, and now He has lent your child to you. What a trust! If He takes such care, then you take it too. Spending yourself to train the Lord's children is a great honor. Every energy invested in equipping your children will be repaid when you see them making good decisions spiritually when they have come of age.

Parents with children, you have the benefit of hindsight. Probably, you have made numerous mistakes in child-rearing. God knows you will make mistakes, and has included it in all His calculations. If you trust in Him, He can help you with present challenges. Some of the hardest are making spiritual upgrades in your household. Now that you have drawn closer to the Lord, you want to reform in your household. What you eat, what music is listened to, what

media is played-back, what practices are allowed in the home—these often become very difficult when long years of spiritual sleep have been replaced by wakefulness for you, but the young ones are not anxious to reform. There are hard cases here, but God can help you. You need to seek God with great care and find the tact and wisdom to bring changes in your home the right way. It is not easy. But who every guaranteed easiness? Again, if you seek Him, He will help.

Parents with grown children, you have new opportunities. The kids have left home. They have taken up adult responsibilities, they have learned some things about life first hand now. Given a little time, they should become more receptive to your insights. Example is the optimum thing, but do not make the mistake either of giving up your parental role or of failing to take into account the change in it. Adult children should not be treated as young children. Many dynamics have changed. Role with those changes. Never cease from praying for them as long as you live. Keep pen a channel for talking, gently advising. When they become adults, they are more truly lent to the Lord than ever before. They will make their own decisions and you will not always agree. Guide them wisely and trust them to the Lord.

Finally, singles and couples without children, God knows your heart. He knows your situation. You may have been seeking a godly mate, or be divorced, or as a couple you may have sought children, and in God's mercy and all-knowledge He has not given them. Or you may have had a child who was stillborn. There are many with great sorrow, who have felt alone. What of you? We would say this. God has not forsaken you. Indeed, although it may appear that things are going so much differently than your hopes and dreams, the end is not yet. You cannot see the outcomes that would accrue if you received that for which you have longed.

There are many joys and beautiful things along the path of parenthood, but here are also numerous kinds of sorrow and pain. Your God is wise. He knows just the best thing.

I very urgently wanted to have my own birth children. But it has instead worked out for me to only to be a father by adoption. I do not understand everything about God's dealings with me. But I am sure that they are fairer than fair, and that He knows what is best. And we go forward from there.

The single person or the couple with out children also has a responsibility toward children, especially in the community of faith. You can do much for children by being kind to them, listening to them, encouraging them, offering them a godly example in your life. Sometimes you can assist parents by helping them with their burdens. God has not forgotten you. The end is not yet. And even in eternity, He has laid up for you many beautiful things. There is so little that we know about the next age. There we will find many answers and experience many surprises, and joys long deferred will be experienced or perhaps something even better than we had desired. To you I say see how you can minister to the children of the community of faith. Their guardian angels do always behold the face of your Father in heaven (Matthew 18:10). God sees and knows all. He loves to hear your prayers for His little children, and to act upon them for their good.

Conclusion

Our God has a design in childhood and parenthood and every other kind of role and situation which His children experience. Do what you can. He will lead you. He has not forgotten you. You can loan Him your child forever.