

SWEETER BY THE DOZEN

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Making Jesus the Lord of Our Family Size

RANDALL HEKMAN



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Sweeter by the Dozen
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FOREWORD

My friend of many years, whom I respectfully call Judge Hekman due to his God-honoring work as a judge in our community, is a no nonsense kind of guy. I treasure my friendship in Christ with him. He is a joy to be with, but I warn you in love: his views are biblical and strong when it comes to subjects like the need for prayer and revival, the atrociousness of baby-killing in the womb (which we rather politely call abortion), and our calling to surrender all of life to the lordship of Christ—including the area of our family size, which is the subject of this rather provocative, challenging, yet winsome book.

Judge Hekman writes on this volatile subject from deep personal experience as a father of twelve children. He felt led by God to give up some of his greatest personal ambitions in order to submit to Christ's lordship with regard to having more children, if the Lord would so direct. His story is winsomely told in these pages (Part One), after which he unpacks what Scripture has to say about childbearing and childrearing (Part Two). In the final part of his book, he responds to ten kickback arguments that husbands and wives (including a goodly number of Christians) have against letting Christ be the Lord of the number of children He wishes to loan and bequeath to them to be raised for Him.

There is a good way and a bad way to read this book. The bad way is to pick apart every statement that the good Judge makes that you don't immediately agree with, so that you miss the forest because

you are examining every tree so closely. The wrong way to read this book is to say that the author believes that everyone should have ten to fifteen children, if at all possible, regardless of any circumstances. In our own case, for example, my wife and I were blessed with three children, and desired to have more. The fourth child miscarried. By that time, my wife was near the end of her childbearing years, and we had to ask ourselves this question: should we continue to try to have children when my wife's migraine headaches continued to get more severe and more frequent with each pregnancy? We finally settled on a middle approach in those last few years of possible pregnancy: we wouldn't use any artificial means to prevent pregnancy, but also wouldn't strive to achieve pregnancy either for the sake of my wife's health dangers and complications. In other words, we would have loved to have had more children, if that had been God's will for us, but we also had to bow under His sovereignty in this matter. I don't believe for a moment that Judge Hekman would condemn us for this approach, given the severity of my wife's migraines. The question in such cases is this: *are you limiting your family size because you want to live selfishly to achieve your own goals or are you bowing under God's sovereignty and acquiescing with His will to limit your family size due to compelling circumstances?*

The right way to read this book is to talk to yourself like this: "I don't need to agree with every detail that the author writes to get the major takeaway from his book: will I, or will I not, let Christ be Lord also of this important area of my life that we call childbearing? *Will I continue to follow the world's way of childbearing, namely, that my spouse and I will try to achieve pregnancy only as often as we feel like it, and have only as many children as we want, or will we bow before God's sovereign lordship, and have as many children as He provides us if there are no compelling extenuating circumstances that prevent us from trying to have additional children?*" Letting that question sink in is the right way to read this book.

This is a book that needed to be written. Too many Christians today view children as something that gets in the way of what they desire out of life, so they end up living selfishly by striving to limit

the number of children they bear to coincide with their all-too-frequently selfish plans. Too many Christians also fail to grasp the beauty and the joy of a large Christian family—if the Lord sovereignly provides for His own honor and glory!

By the Lord's sovereign grace, let me illustrate from my extended family. I have two brothers and two sisters. They are all God-fearing and all have God-fearing spouses, and they all have blessed marriages. My brothers and their wives have 13 and 5 children respectively, and my sisters and their husbands have 9 and 5 children respectively. My mother, who was an only child and became a remarkable prayer-warrior for her family, died seven years ago at the age of 92. When she died, she had 92 great-grandchildren (as well as 5 children, 35 grandchildren, and 1 great-great grandchild)! (Our God-fearing father died on the pulpit while leading a church service nearly three decades ago.) Nearly all of the grandchildren, by God's amazing grace, are now walking with the Lord, as are many of the great-grandchildren. My parents' prayers at the throne of grace are still being answered today! I cannot put into words for you the beauty and joy of being part of a large Christian family that fears the Lord in spirit and in truth.

So please, do not read this book wrongly; Judge Hekman is not just trying to put you on a guilt trip. But read this book rightly. Get on your knees before the face of God, and let Him be the Lord of your family size. Let your prayer be, "Lord, not my will, but Thy will be done!" In fact, let Him be the Lord of every area of your life. Surrender all to Him. Live by the maxim of Martin Luther, "Letting God be God is more than half of all true religion," and you will also taste the beauty and joy of genuine Christian living which yields all honor to the sovereign lordship of our amazing Savior who now sits at the Father's right hand as victorious Prophet, Priest, and King, and is coming again soon on the clouds to bring all His numberless children home into the eternal family of God in heaven. Then, heaven, which is as Jonathan Edwards said, "a world of perfect love," will render perfect glory forever to the Lamb who sits on the throne and through Him to the triune God forever and ever. Do

you belong to this blessed, eternally joyful family and long to be in this perfect and large family forever? Bend the knee before King Jesus, repent of your sin, and believe in Christ alone for salvation (Acts 16:29–31).

—Joel R. Beeke

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am so grateful to God for joining Marcia and me together in marriage over fifty years ago. Anyone who knows Marcia agrees she is truly an amazing person. Not only is she beautiful and a true helpmeet for me, but God also uses her to touch many other lives as well. Marcia's spiritual gifting is evangelism. Thank you, Lord, for my awesome wife!

But about the subject of this book, Marcia was the one who, after we had four lovely daughters and I was of the mind that four kids were "plenty," prayed that dangerous prayer: "Lord, if you want us to be open for more children, please change Randy's heart." God answered that prayer in a huge way, and I will be eternally grateful He did! Because now that I know these precious children—each uniquely crafted in His image—I can't imagine how impoverished I (and many others in this world) would be were they not here among us.

Part One

NEARLY MISSING THE
TREASURE!

CHAPTER 1

Where Would My Children Be?

“Where would my children be if I insisted on being my own boss and deciding how many children to have?” This is a question I’ve asked myself many times. Face it, before your children are born, you don’t really know what you are missing. But once you get to know their unique personalities, you don’t want to lose them. *Not ever!*

Continuing my self-talk, I added, “Where would David and Suzanne and John and Scott and Laurie and Daniel and Angela and Nathan be if Jesus didn’t do a miracle in my life?” You see, not too many years before—when we only had four children—I was ready to call it quits. I was looking for a compelling reason to justify putting an end to our childbearing and “get on with life.” It’s not that our oldest four children were a problem. Far from it! Michelle, Renee, Alicia, and Marianne are super special! While my wife Marcia’s labors and deliveries for these four were far from pleasant for her, the girls were a true delight to both of us. We were so proud of them. They were respectful, intelligent, talented, cute, funny, huggable, and kissable. While not perfect, they came very close to perfection for us. We loved them a ton. But four children these days is a big family! Each child was born about two years apart, more or less fitting into our plans as we attempted to space our children with the use of birth control devices.

So there we were. Like tens of thousands of other Christian families, we were rapidly approaching what I thought should be the end of our childbearing years. It’s not that we were seeking to avoid

God's will for our lives. On the contrary, we had been seeking His will for our lives since our college days. Fact of the matter was, we really didn't think God cared about our family size. We figured it was all up to us.

Marcia and I had met during college days over summer vacation, when each of us separately did a stint at the Campus Crusade for Christ headquarters in Arrowhead Springs, California. I was attending a one-week session to learn more about my responsibilities for the coming year at my Boston area campus of M.I.T. Marcia, an education major at Northern Illinois University, was at Arrowhead Springs for the entire summer. We didn't know each other at the time.

I had just broken up with a succession of college girlfriends (none of them were serious relationships), and was literally overwhelmed by the sheer number of attractive Christian coeds attending the sessions at Arrowhead Springs. I found myself wondering if, in this large cadre of Christ-following young women, God had "the one" in mind for me.

After a few days, I grabbed hold of myself and said, "Look, you came all the way from Chicago (where I was living) to Los Angeles to learn more about the Lord and sharing your faith in Christ. Are you going to waste all of your time looking for the perfect wife, or are you going to live for God?" For the first time I can ever recall doing this, I sincerely gave this area of life over to God. I told Him something like this: "Lord, I leave it up to you whether or not I will ever get married. I'm willing to be single the rest of my life if that is your choice. I simply want to grow stronger as a Christian, and not waste my time being preoccupied with a frantic search for a wife, unless that is your choice for me."

God is amazing: on the very afternoon of the day I prayed this simple prayer, I walked into the Crusade bookstore and saw this lovely young woman shopping there. Without sufficient time to scheme, and certainly having neither the reputation nor the innate ability to come up with a world class "pickup line," I nonetheless found myself talking out loud in front of the postcard rack. "I

wonder what kind of postcard my mother would like.” It was my hope that this young woman would hear my plaintive cry and come to my “rescue.” Providentially, she responded and picked out her favorite postcard. “This is a nice card,” she said innocently. For some reason (I later learned, to her chagrin), I actually bought a different card. Be that as it may, I doubt my mother ever actually saw either card. Sorry, Mom!

Our small talk soon led me to ask the young woman (whose name turned out to be Marcia) to join me for the meeting that was scheduled for that evening. This sort of “speed dating” was pretty common at Arrowhead Springs. I later learned that Marcia was not all that interested in me at that point; I, on the other hand, was eager with anticipation. After the meeting, Marcia and I met at a snack shop and talked over a coke. While I admired her blue eyes and long blond hair, what really impressed me was the sincerity of her words. “Don’t you just love Jesus?” she asked with genuine wonder and awe. While I answered in the affirmative, I inwardly doubted whether my ardor for the Lord equaled what I was seeing in her. The evening’s activities went like a blur. Soon I was saying goodbye, but I wanted to see her more. I asked if we might be able to meet the next evening for the scheduled *Athletes In Action* basketball game. She said that could work, then turned and walked away.

As I walked to my room, I felt as though I was floating on air. My spirit literally soared heavenward. I had never felt so excited to meet someone in all my life. She was so Christ-like, so special, so wonderful. As I crawled into bed, I thanked God I had met Marcia. I chuckled as I reflected on my prayer earlier in the day, giving over to God my marriage plans. Maybe she really *was* the one! How could anyone else on earth make my spirit so exuberant?

The next day, I could barely wait for the basketball game to begin. Arriving at the gym, I glanced at my watch, impatiently wondering when Marcia would show up. Unknown to me, Marcia had a last minute change of plans preventing her from attending the game. She attempted to send a message via other friends, but it never reached me. I continued to pace, frantically looking around

the large crowd. Where was she? Didn't she care? Hadn't she felt the same special feeling I had the night before? Could she have forgotten about me so soon?

I looked again at my watch. It was time for me to leave for the airport on a commuter helicopter. I love to fly, and this was to be my very first helicopter ride. Under normal conditions, I would have been excited at the opportunity. Instead, with my spirit sagging, I climbed on board the chopper, found my seat, and barely looked outside the window as we headed to LAX. I had been *so close* to finding my true love! I didn't even get to know her last name, address, or phone number. What could I do?

It was always depressing for me to leave home at the end of a summer and travel by plane back to Boston and the rigors of M.I.T. But this year was particularly painful. I simply could not get Marcia out of my mind. Her face, her person, but especially her heart and spirit overwhelmed me. Maybe you've had this experience too. Everywhere I would go, I would often see a young woman from a distance with long blond hair and wish it was her, but knowing it couldn't be. Deep down, I knew the real Marcia was really back somewhere in Illinois, probably not even caring that someone miles away wanted to see her again. My heart was sick.

I did have a glimmer of hope—but it was slim. Prior to boarding my helicopter, I had hurriedly scratched my name and address down on a slip of paper and gave it to someone with the instructions of getting it to “a girl named Marcia who is here all summer.” But our wise God was obviously in all this. My message actually made it into the hands of Marcia, who tucked it away in her suitcase. Weeks later, after returning to her campus at DeKalb, she came across this slip of paper and, almost on a lark, wrote me a short letter. Meanwhile, I had been frantically asking every Campus Crusade staff person I could find in the Boston area whether they knew this girl named Marcia who was at Arrowhead the summer before. Finally, one of the staff members came back with the information I had been seeking. I had her full name and address. But would she have any interest in me?

Not knowing if she would even remember me, I wasn't sure what to write in a letter to her. As I spent a couple of days thinking about this, Marcia's letter arrived at my fraternity! My hands trembled as I opened the blue and white envelope with a gold cross sticker on the back. My heart leaped for joy as I read:

Dear Randy,

September 12, 1967

I feel sort of funny writing to you because by now you may not remember me. However, today I started thinking about our visit at Arrowhead, and I think the Lord wanted me to write....

*I still can hardly believe that my summer was for real. It was almost like experiencing a taste of heaven. Our Father has certainly given us some great brothers and sisters, and He loves each one of us so **very** much!*

If you want to write, I would really enjoy hearing from you. Sorry I couldn't make it to the basketball game, but our dinner got a little "involved" that night.

*Because He lives,
Marcia Bealer*

Did I *ever* want to write her back! The same day, I responded as follows:

Dear Marcia,

Sept. 16, 1967

Thank you for your letter; it came at the right time. I've wanted to write you for a long time but never had both your name and address at the same time. In any case, Marcia, your letter reminded me that our Father does love us....

We talked about "the Lord shall give you the desires of your heart." I learned so much those two hours we were together that it is my desire to get to know you better. You and I are in the Lord's hands, so I am confident that my desires are His.

*Love,
Randy*

And so began our courtship, largely facilitated by the U. S. Postal Service.

Surprisingly, in marked contrast to the excitement of our first meeting at Arrowhead Springs, for a period of time, our subsequent get-togethers on vacations were somewhat disappointing to me. Yet I couldn't get Marcia out of my mind and heart. I distinctly remember a time during our dating while sitting next to Marcia in a church service when, seemingly out of nowhere, it was as if the Lord was saying to me, "Just as I am one with you, so you shall be one with Marcia." That unforgettable moment made me both elated and a bit scared!

One of the most exciting times in our growing relationship occurred when I visited Marcia in January of 1969 at Northern Illinois University. It was bitterly cold and blustery outside as we walked together to her classes. But, almost like a heart transplant, God Almighty instilled in me a genuine love for Marcia that has endured through thick and thin ever since. This love is like an impenetrable, unshakable rock that has withstood the test of time and trials. I do not know how anyone can stay married without God's infinite, limitless love as a free gift of His grace. To me, it is easily worth the price of admission to Christianity merely to have that kind of love for your mate. I believe that anyone who truly asks, believes, and obeys can have it. God is more committed to our marriages than we are. At any rate, Marcia and I were married in her home town of Fenton, Illinois on June 14, 1969. The wedding was fine, but far more importantly, the marriage has been super!

At M.I.T., I had been in the Navy ROTC program, and by God's grace, I was assigned duty in the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. So that's where we began our married life together. For our honeymoon, we had planned to spend a few days in historic Williamsburg, Virginia. But after using our meager savings to buy household goods (like ironing boards, silverware, pots and pans), we had no money left for travel. So our "honeymoon" began rather ingloriously in an unfurnished apartment, made even more spartan by the fact that the moving company was two weeks late in delivering our furniture!

For those two weeks, we slept on cheap thin mats on the hardwood floor. Our table consisted of a long ironing board box supported by two other boxes. What a life! How happy we were when the *real* furniture finally arrived. As the moving van people set up our king-sized bed, newlywed Marcia raised a few eyebrows with her understandably gleeful expression, “Oh, great, a bed!”

God graciously provided a job for Marcia teaching business subjects at a local high school (Thomas Jefferson in Fairfax County) while I was engaged in computer policy management for the Navy at the Pentagon. Adjusting to all these changes was challenging, but we were so aware of God’s help. Many times during that first year (and periodically since then), we have reached times of impasse in our relationship. At those moments, rather than going off in disgust, or doing something even more destructive, we prayed that God would love the other partner through us and solve the problem in His own way. Every time we humbly approached God in this way—and I do mean *every* time—we have experienced God’s merciful hand of help.

While Marcia was employed as a teacher during the first two years of our marriage, she made it clear that she would much prefer getting pregnant instead. To me, it made more sense to delay children for a while to help us get our feet on the ground. Prior to our marriage, we gave very little thought to how large a family we should have. I figured we would copy our own parents’ choices by having three (Marcia had two sisters and no brothers) or four (I had three sisters and also no brothers) children, but I didn’t feel strongly about it at all. I simply told Marcia she should probably get on the birth control pill since we *obviously* didn’t want her to get pregnant right away. I sincerely felt the issue of how many children to have was our decision. I didn’t even think to pray about it.

If you had told me then that in twenty-four short years I would be the proud father of twelve children, I would not have believed you, nor would I have been eager for that to happen. But that is part of the amazing work God did in changing my heart in this area. And now that we have these infinitely valuable children, I

shudder to think how impoverished we (and our world) would be if we never had the privilege of bearing them, knowing them, loving them, raising them, and eventually releasing them to God's call on their lives.