

Planning Your Family

ACCORDING to
GOD'S PLAN

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Church Magazines

Despite your best intentions and righteous desires, your plans for your family likely won't go according to plan. Here are a few things to keep in mind.

When I was younger, I had my life pretty much planned out: attend college, marry young, and get started on having my six or so children—all before I turned 30. Well, with 30 fast approaching, I had graduated college but wasn't married yet. Plans foiled.

When I did get married, my husband and I made a new plan together. But several months and one shocking ultrasound later, there was again an unexpected piece to our plan. The appearance of twins reminded my husband and me that despite your best intentions, things rarely go as planned. (But for the record, if I could have chosen twins, I definitely would have!)

Perhaps you've had experiences when trying to plan out your family—and life in general—did not go as planned. There are surprise babies, surprise promptings, and other surprises that make things complicated (to say the least). Certainly no one really plans on having triplets or a child with disabilities. No one plans on any of the countless medical issues that can delay or deter childbearing. And yet it happens.

So while you can't plan for every situation, here are five things you can keep in mind as you go.

1. The Commandment to Have Children Is, Well, a Commandment

Church leaders have stated, “We believe in children.”¹ It was the first commandment given to Adam and Eve, and it’s the same commandment given to husbands and wives today: “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth” (Genesis 1:28). As President Thomas S. Monson (1927–2018) taught, “It is our solemn duty, our precious privilege—even our sacred opportunity—to welcome to our homes and to our hearts the children who grace our lives.”²

For those who have tried but are unable to have children, the Lord knows your righteous desires. He keeps all His promises to those who are faithful to Him. “Faithful members whose circumstances do not allow them to receive the blessings of . . . parenthood in this life will receive all promised blessings in the eternities, provided they keep the covenants they have made with God.”³



2. It’s between You, Your Spouse, and the Lord

Despite what your ward members, casual acquaintances, people at the grocery store, and all of your relatives might think, your family plans are really not up for public debate or discussion. Elder Neil L. Andersen of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught: “When to have a child and how many children to have are private decisions to be made between a husband and wife and the Lord. These are sacred decisions—decisions that should be made with sincere prayer and acted on with great faith.”

He also added, “We should not judge one another on this matter.”⁴ Even with that admonition, however, odds are that someone, somewhere, is still going to judge you about some aspect of your plans, so just remember that no one besides you, your spouse, and the Lord knows all the intimate details of your life, your health, your unique situation, and the personal revelation you’ve received regarding childbearing.

Likewise, make sure that you aren’t the one judging others—you don’t know all the private details of *their* lives or what trials they might be facing.



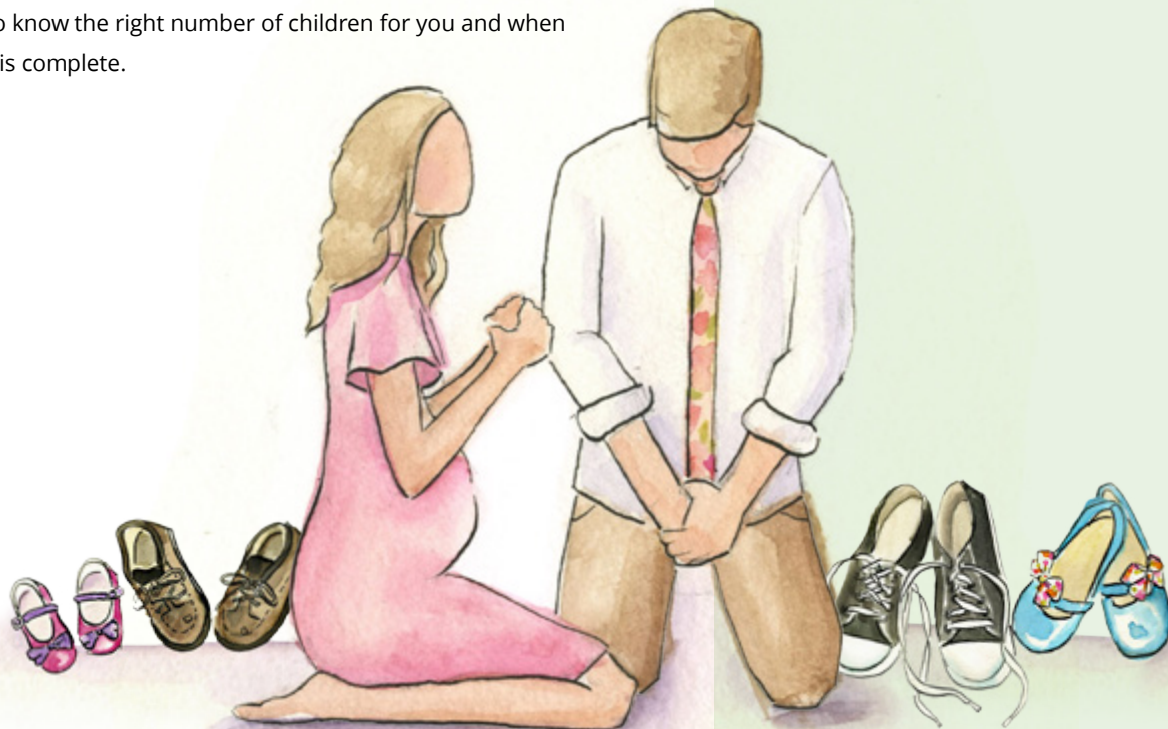
3. There's No Magic Number

As husband and wife, you are commanded to “multiply, and replenish the earth” (Genesis 1:28), but there’s no magic number for how many children we’re supposed to have, and it’s not a contest. For some couples, a large number of children might end up being welcomed. For others, fewer children may complete their family. And that’s OK; that’s wonderful!

President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) taught: “The Lord has told us to multiply and replenish the earth that we might have joy in our posterity. . . . But he did not designate the number, nor has the Church. That is a sacred matter left to the couple and the Lord.”⁵

There are so many factors to take into account when considering the number of children to have: both a husband and a wife’s physical, mental, and emotional health; their financial situation; and more. It’s OK to know your limits when it comes to your “sacred duty to rear [your] children in love and righteousness, [and] to provide for their physical and spiritual needs.”⁶ As you seek His direction, the Lord will guide you to know the right number of children for you and when your family is complete.

“As you face the decision to start your own eternal family, do not wait because you are afraid.”



4. It's a Matter of Faith

Let's be honest, the thought of having a living, breathing human being who is completely dependent on you is kind of mind-blowing. And the thought of bringing children into this increasingly scary world can be overwhelming. But if fear is stopping you from having children, don't let it.

Elder Gary E. Stevenson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles addresses this fear:

"Many of you are . . . waiting to finish school, or pay off debt, or buy a home, or establish your career before getting married and starting a family. . . .

"Satan understands that the family is central to the Lord's plan of happiness. . . . He is striving to sow the dark seeds of fear in your heart, anything to keep you from experiencing the most glorious, rewarding part of mortality: the bright holiness and happiness that comes from finding an eternal partner and bringing Heavenly Father's children into this world.

"As you face the decision to start your own eternal family, do not wait because you are afraid. Remember the scripture, 'be not afraid, only believe' [Mark 5:36]. My marriage and family are . . . a literal personal manifestation of the great plan of happiness for me. I promise you that the same can be true for you. Focusing on the joyous light family life brings will cast out fear."⁷

5. Plan on Things Not Going as Planned

Regardless of our desires, our plans for our family aren't always completely up to us. Many Church leaders have shared how planning their family didn't go as planned. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles recalls: "[Sister Holland and I] wanted children as soon as we could get them, which in our case did not turn out to be as easy as we thought. . . . It took us three years to have our first child, another three to get a second, and four to get a third. And then that was it. A full-term miscarriage for a fourth closed that door to us forever, so we have rejoiced in the three children we have been able to raise. But what would our lives have been like if we had waited or delayed or worried unduly about the economics of it all? . . . I shudder to think of it."⁸

Elder Dale G. Renlund of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and his wife, Ruth, faced an enormous challenge when Ruth was diagnosed with ovarian cancer when their only daughter was just 16 months old. Sister Renlund says, "It wasn't in our plan for me to have cancer as a young woman and have only one child."⁹ She explains, "I didn't expect to have a huge family, but I always thought we'd have more children. . . . Of course, adoption was an option, but because my health was uncertain, we weren't sure if I would be around to raise the child I had. I prayed for guidance, and at that point we knew our family was complete."¹⁰



Ardeth G. Kapp, former Young Women General President, and her husband, Heber, were never able to have children. She explained that to deal with life's unfulfilled expectations, we must accept that there will be trials. "Part of those trials is facing alternatives and making decisions," she says. "For those of us without children, the choices may seem incredibly difficult to make. What would the Lord have us do? To what extent do we seek medical attention? What about adoption and foster children? What about no children? . . . The choices are never simple."¹¹

Regardless of the challenges thrown into your plans, and whether your plans lead to adoption or other options, prayerfully relying on Heavenly Father's guidance will help you know how to adjust your plans. You never know what unexpected miracle He might have planned for your life. As Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said:

"Believe that your life will be infinitely better if you rely on God to guide your steps. He knows things you cannot possibly know, and He has a future prepared for you that you cannot possibly imagine. . . .

"You may not see it until much later, but you will look back and know that the Lord did indeed direct and guide your path."¹²

If planning out your family does go smoothly, be sensitive to those for whom it does not. Try to be aware of them and their feelings. We are to "love [our] neighbour" (Matthew 19:19), and we can better do so as we work to be more understanding and sensitive to the pains and struggles that others are experiencing.

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A Greater Plan

When planning your family doesn't go *exactly* as you and your spouse planned (and odds are it won't!), have faith in Heavenly Father's greater plan. His plan of happiness provides an eternal perspective that we can hold on to when our lives don't follow the path we think they should. President Russell M. Nelson reminds us, "If you've got faith, you can handle difficulties, knowing that with an eternal perspective, all will be well."¹³

What I'm trying to say is this: don't hold on too tightly to the plan you have for your future family. It might include more children than you thought. It might include fewer. It might include adoption, disabilities, twins, medical treatments, or loss. It might include not having children in this life. It will undoubtedly include vast amounts of trusting that Heavenly Father knows you and loves you and "wants your eternal happiness even more than do you."¹⁴

He sent us to earth to learn and grow and to do so in a family. As you and your spouse prayerfully make plans together and with Him for how you will help bring His children into this world, remember that they will be your greatest blessings—whether you have them in this life or in eternity. President Dallin H. Oaks, First Counselor in the First Presidency, reminds us: "The Savior taught that we should not lay up treasures on earth but should lay up treasures in heaven (see Matt. 6:19–21). In light of the ultimate purpose of the great plan of happiness, I believe that the ultimate treasures on earth and in heaven are our children and our posterity."¹⁵ ■

NOTES

1. See Neil L. Andersen, "Children," *Ensign*, Nov. 2011, 28; Gordon B. Hinckley, *Cornerstones of a Happy Home* (pamphlet, 1984), 6.
2. Thomas S. Monson, "Precious Children—A Gift from God," *Ensign*, Nov. 1991, 67.
3. *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (2010), 1.3.3.
4. Neil L. Andersen, "Children," 28, 30; see also *Handbook 2*, 21.4.4.
5. Gordon B. Hinckley, *Cornerstones of a Happy Home*, 6.
6. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, May 2017, 145.
7. Gary E. Stevenson, "Conquer Fear with the Fire of Faith" (Brigham Young University–Hawaii devotional, Apr. 18, 2015), devotional.byuh.edu.
8. Jeffrey R. Holland, "Be Not Afraid, Only Believe" (address to Church Educational System Religious Educators, Feb. 6, 2015), broadcasts.lds.org.
9. Ruth L. Renlund, in Quentin L. Cook, "Elder Dale G. Renlund: An Obedient Servant," *Ensign*, July 2016, 29.
10. Ruth Lybbert Renlund, "Just Call Me Ruth," The Mormon Women Project, May 12, 2010, mormonwomen.com.
11. Ardeth G. Kapp, "Just the Two of Us—for Now," *Ensign*, Feb. 1989, 22.
12. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "The Adventure of Mortality" (worldwide devotional for young adults, Jan. 14, 2018), broadcasts.lds.org.
13. Russell M. Nelson, "Men's Hearts Shall Fail Them" (*Mormon Messages* video), mormonchannel.org.
14. Richard G. Scott, "Trust in the Lord," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 17.
15. Dallin H. Oaks, "The Great Plan of Happiness," *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 75.

