



BE FRUITFUL *and Multiply*

by Lucas Woodford
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God's first command to humanity is, "**Be fruitful and multiply**" (**GEN. 1:28**). It's a command not only to reproduce children, but to reproduce families. There's much talk about the decline in the Church today, and for good reason. My assessment is that if the Church would boldly celebrate the vocations of life, particularly the virtue of family vocations, where we have countless natural opportunities to pass on the faith to family and neighbor alike, there would be an increase of discipleship and growth in the Church. Regardless, even with all of the talk about the need for evangelism and the shrinking size of the Church, it seems to me that there has been far too little said about the decline of our family sizes, and how that has not only contributed to the numerical decline in the church, but to the decline of the family as well. Mary Eberstadt tracks this quite compellingly in her recent book *How the West Really Lost God*.

A large part of this concern comes with those couples who desire few to no children. In fact, fertility replacement levels are actually now a worldwide concern. (Fertility replacement is the average number of children per family that need to reach adulthood in order to replace the population and sustain a country. 2.1 is the needed replacement level of any country.)

Countries without families have fewer children. Fewer children mean fewer workers, less production, a smaller tax base, a smaller economy and a smaller army. In fact, in Jonathan Last's recent book *What to Expect When No One's Expecting*, he examines America's current 1.93 percent fertility rate and explores what he views as "America's coming demographic disaster." In short, he observes family is not a priority and therefore children are not a priority. Family is out and consumerism is in. People in America would rather buy toys for themselves than have children.

In the face of this, we can celebrate the family—that there is something inherently good about sustaining traditional families—where having children is seen to be virtuous and a desirable thing. We can be bold about lifting up the common good of "family." We can be audacious about teaching what Christian families stand for and how they contribute to the public good. And we can be active in providing resources for our Christian families to be bold and confident about their virtues and vocations. The family is a blessing.

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