

Chapter III–11: *The Benefits of Children*

As we have talked about the family, today we are coming to talk about how Dagbamba live when they are young, when they grow up and live together with their wives or husbands, and when they are old. And so today we are going to continue it, and we will start the talk of children. The talk I am going to talk today shows a lot of things about the family. I can say that if the family is not there, then the child is also not there. And I can say again that truly, for us Dagbamba, when a Dagbamba marries, people will pray that God should let the husband and wife give birth to a child, because the sweetness of marriage is a child. And so it's all one.

Truly, if it were going to be following the way of our custom, I can say that it would be good if we would take the talk of old age and start that one first, and then we would bring in the talk of householders, and after that we would take the talk of children and join. It would be good like that, because in our living, we are following the old people, and the householders are behind, and the children are behind them. But I can say again that these talks all enter one another, and maybe it will be difficult to talk the talks in that way. And so we will start with the children and join their talk to how they grow up and marry and come to be staying in their houses with their wives and husbands. If our talks join one another like that, it is also good. I am just showing you that on the part of our living, an old person is in front of a child. You see household talks and family talks and children talks: they are all one. When they are all joined together, they are one. Their talk won't come and any other talk will enter and spoil it. And so it is also good like that. And it is just like the way the *Samban' luŋa* comes to join the chief's talks, because it is because of chiefs that they beat the *Samban' luŋa*. And so the family, the household, and the children's talks are also all one. And then we will follow and join the talk of the old people, because the old people are holding all of them. And so, if it is joined together like that, that will be better than anything.

And so today, we are going to start the talk of children on the part of the benefits of giving birth to many children. Truly, the benefits of giving birth to many children are very many. We have seen it. And this talk of children, if God agrees and we continue it, I want to talk of how they give birth to a child, how they bathe the child with water, how the child learns to sit down and learns to crawl and to walk, how the mother and father take care of the child, how the child will be in the house and also be roaming outside, and how the child grows and becomes big. All this, if I'm going to talk about it straightforward and correctly,

and it will be nice, it will take some days. It is a long talk, because inside the talk of children, there are differences.

The reason why we like to give birth to many children is that it brings good to you the parents. We give birth to children because the children help us and help the whole family. If you give birth to many children, those whom God says should serve you, they will serve you. And truly, out of many children, some will be bad. Sometimes you may give birth to three children, and among these three children, none of them will be good to you. As they are not good to you, if you give birth to ten children, among the ten children, maybe at least two of them will be good to you. And so when you give birth to many children and there are good children among them, you can forget about the useless or bad children. Today, if you are sitting down eating suffering, out of your many children, some will help you, and you won't have to suffer again. But if you don't have a good child, every day you will be inside shame. If you have useless children, you and the one who has no child, you are the same. And so if you give birth to only three or five, and all of them turn out not to have use, by that time, don't you fall? But if they are many, whatever happens, God will bless some of them. Among the many children, if two are good, these two good children will cover all the bad of the others, and they will even cover the problems of the whole family. That is why we Dagbamba love giving birth to many children, and we also love the children very much.

Let me give you an example. If you are a farmer, if you give birth to many children, some of them will be helping you on the farm. If they are truly helping you, there is no day you will suffer on the part of food. You were in Dagbon here the last time when there was hunger in town. There was no food to buy. If a father is sitting down at a time there is hunger in town, truly, he is thinking many thoughts. This father will sit down quietly, raise up his head and look into the sky, just thinking of the small children and the younger children, thinking of how to feed them. Among the elder ones, God may bless somebody to get money. If your elder children happen to be living in other towns, you will be one day sitting down and somebody from that town will come to you and say, "Your son messaged me to come and give you this bag of corn." The time you hear this or receive this gift, your heart is white like the full moon. This is the profit of giving birth to children. These children — sons and daughters — even if I haven't been seeing anything, I have been seeing this. I have two daughters and each is in her husband's house. One of my daughters is at Ejura. It was four years ago she went there, and every year of the four years, she has sent me two bags of corn, and I use one bag to feed my family and I take one bag to my senior brother. As it is, don't you see that it has covered some worrying talks in the family? If your children are helping you,

you will eat food and be satisfied, and you will leave some and sell. This is how I know it.

When Dr. Busia was ruling Ghana, he was saying that we all should be doing family planning. At that time we started saying some bad prayers on him, and that was the time they drove him out. To us, family planning kills a family. If you give birth to four children, is it anything? What will the children do for you? Somebody will give birth to three children, and they will not have use. Truly, it can happen that someone will give birth to one child, and that child will prosper. But somebody will give birth to three or four children, and none of them will have use. Have use like what? They won't farm for him, and he won't eat food and be satisfied. That is why we Dagbamba say that family planning kills a family. If you don't give birth to a child, what is it? The family will die. And so we Dagbamba, if we could get the chance, we would give birth to a hundred or even more than a hundred children.

As we give birth to many children, we also take care of all the children. We look after all of them because we don't know the ones who will help us. If we were to know which children would be good for us and which children would be useless, we would not give birth to many children. If the children are many, you the father and the mother will be looking after them from the time they are small up to the time they grow up. If the child is still small and sickness catches him, the father and the mother will take care of the child. If the child doesn't sleep, the father and mother will not sleep. And if you the father and the mother were to know that this child who doesn't want to sleep and who always falls sick will not benefit you, you wouldn't waste your time to take care of him. And if you were to know that if this child grows up, he will not follow your talks, you would stop taking care of him. But as for this, we can't know. We have to group the children and take good care of all of them, If your children grow up, maybe they will take the good road. And if you give birth to another child again and he also grows up, you don't know whether he will also take the good road. And so that alone will let you give birth to many children.

Inside giving birth to many children, the time you have many of them and they are still young, you the father will have to be getting clothes and giving to all of them. If you have good wives, your wives will be helping you in looking after the children, and your wives will be helping you in buying clothes for the children. It is those with sense who help, not those with money. As I said it is those with sense who help, it is because sometimes there are rich people and they don't do anything for the children with their money. But a good woman will say, "I don't know whether it is I who will die first or my husband who will die first, and the

children my husband and I are giving birth to, these children will take care of the one who remains.” At that time, such a woman will be helping her husband to buy all the needed things for the children until the children grow up.

If you give birth to many children and God blesses you, you will have the strength and you will have the sense to look after them. In our Dagbon here, farming is the first work. As you are going to give birth to many children, it is not one day that you give birth to all of them. The time you give birth to the first born, you are bending down at the farm. Inside your farming, sometimes you will get your food, and you will eat and leave some, and then sell. The food that you sell, that is the one that will help you look after the child. Before you come to give birth to the second or the third child, you will see that the first child will be following you to the farm while the one following him will be lying down in the house. The one following you to the farm is not going to do anything; he will only follow you to the farm just to be fetching water for you from under the tree, and you will be drinking water while you are farming. This is how the children will be following one another and doing, until the time you give birth to about five. By that time, the first child will be ready to do his own farming. And so when you are alone with your wife, and you are farming food, and you are eating some and selling some to get money, you will take the money you are getting from selling the food to spend on the children you are giving birth to. You can sell some of the food to buy things for the children. And when the first children grow up, you can take some of the money to find wives for the children. How you have spent money on the first children and they have grown up, at that time you will rest. All the small children, it is their senior brothers who are going to farm and sell the crops to get money to use to take care of them. And there is nothing again that will not be enough for you. Even if you have hundreds of children and the first ones have grown up, there is nothing which can defeat your family again.

And inside this farming, somebody can be farming and get enough money to be trading. Farming is our first work in Dagbon here, but if you have money, you can do trading. If you are trading and you give birth to many children, there are certain children you will pull out of your children to be helping you. If you are traveling on the road to make trade, by the time you are old, your children will be helping you in your way of going to other places. Or let’s say the time you are strong, if you buy many things to go to some place and sell, if these children follow you there, it will help you a lot. If it is that you are sitting inside the market, if some of your children have interest in your sitting in the market, they can be around you all the time. And you will find a sitting place in the market for all of them who have interest. And that too is a good thing to you. All that will be

adding more to you the father, and at the same time, people from outside will be giving you respect. People will say, “As for this man’s children, they are good, because their father gets them all sitting places to make trade.”

If these good children grow up to the age of marrying, their goodness will let them get girls outside, and you the father will put your hand and let them get the girls. If you are a farmer and everyday your children are following you to the farm, when these children are coming into their sense, they can be making their own farms to grow crops like okra or tomatoes or pepper. They will be giving these crops to their mothers to sell in the market to get money to help their junior brothers who are following them. If you are trading, as your child is always coming to sit with you and help you with your trading, if you show the child a thing to sell for one cedi, the time you go to some place, he will sell it for one cedi twenty pesewas. He will remove the twenty pesewas to put in his pocket. If he sells ten or twenty things like that, and he gets this small money, he will be keeping it down. By the time you the father want to help this child get a wife, he will bring out all the small money he was keeping down. Sometimes he will give the money to his father and sometimes he will use the money to buy the cloths and other things for the girl.

And what I am telling you, I have seen it in my house. When Alhassan gave his wife a stomach, she was in her parents’ house. And I told him, “I will get my own money and go to your wife’s house and greet the parents.” I got money and I went and greeted the parents, and I told them that it is my son who gave their daughter a stomach. And they told me that their daughter also told them that it was my son Alhassan who had given her a stomach, and they told me that because of me it is all right. So I came back to the house and I told Alhassan, “They’ve given us our wife.” Have you seen our custom? We know in our hearts that a wife is for one person, but according to our custom, one person does not have a wife. And so I told Alhassan, “They have given us our wife.” And I asked him, “And so what do you think about marrying?” In Dagbon here, we don’t marry a girl the time she is pregnant, but when the girl is getting ready to deliver the child, you will bring the girl to your house, and when she gives birth, she will go back to stay in her parents’ house. And when they brought Alhassan’s wife to the house and she gave birth to the child, I asked Alhassan, “How are we going to get corn for food?” He told me that he had already bought two bags of corn. And so here: didn’t he help himself and at the same time help me the father? That is the way of a good child. After that, I told him that he should try so that before the child learns how to walk, we would marry the woman. When this child was learning how to walk, the woman’s parents sent people to tell me that we should come for

her. And I asked Alhassan, “How are you thinking about taking her in marriage?” And Alhassan brought out some cloths that were many cedis worth of cloths, and it was a lot of cloths. If he were not good, he wouldn’t have done that.

And so goodness is with a child. And uselessness is with a child, too. Any time we give birth to a child, we adore the child until the child grows up. If the child grows up and refuses to respect himself, then he is a useless child. And if he respects himself, he is a good child. Respect himself like what? Let’s say he grows up to be getting money, and he knows how to spend money on himself and spend money on his parents: if a child knows how to do this, we say that he knows how to hold himself. He respects himself, and such a child is a good child. But if a child doesn’t want his body to be hot, that is, if he is lazy and he doesn’t like work, then we say he is refusing to respect himself. And if somebody doesn’t respect himself, how will that fellow respect somebody? As for the one doesn’t want his body to be hot, he cannot eat and be satisfied. Will he be able to give to somebody? He can’t. And so this is how children are. If a child has got sense and knows how to hold himself and respect himself, at the same time he will know how to hold his parents, too.

As for that, truly, it’s not coming from anything, except God. If you give birth to a child, sometimes God will help you train the child, and sometimes you the father will have to train the child, and sometimes the child will just grow up with his sense. It’s all from God. Even those whom we train, we say, “God will make a chief well, and a chief will make a commoner well.” Why do we say that? It means that if God does not make a child good, there is nothing that you can do to make the child good. Sometimes you will train your child, but God does not train the child, and by that time the child will become useless: you will talk to the child and become fed up. If God has made a child useless, any time you put your hand to make the child good, the child will become worse. If you see this happening, and you have sense, by that time you will rest freely from your children. And so it is God Who makes a person useless, and it is God Who makes a person good. If you follow it, a useless child becomes a useless old man, But sometimes a useless old man can give birth to a good child. This useless man may happen to marry a good woman, and if the child turns to his mother’s side, he will be a good child. His goodness will even protect the father.

The way we train our children, if you want your child to behave well or to live well, the first thing you will do is train the child on the part of work. For example, if I give birth to a child and the child is a boy, he will learn the work I am doing. If I am a farmer and the child grows up to be coming into his sense, I will call him one day and say, “Let’s go to the farm.” If God has made him good,

you will see that he will follow me to the farm. The next day, if I am going to the farm, I will not call him again. As he is still young, he will come inside my room and ask me, “My father, are we not going to the farm today?” And I will tell him, “Go: I am coming.” If he gets into the farm, he will not be sitting and waiting for me to come. The moment he gets into the farm, he is going to start doing the work I was doing yesterday. Or if I am sitting in the market selling things, that is the work the child is going to learn.

And in Dagbon here, the mothers have their part to do with the daughters and not the sons. The mothers will teach the daughters, “You see how I am with your father and what I am doing for your father. The time you get married, this is what you should do.” And the mother will give examples like, “As I am sitting with your father, you see that whatever your father asks me to do, I never become annoyed. I do it. And also if you get married, you shouldn’t speak useless talks to your husband’s mother or father or brothers. You have to give respect to all of them.” This is what the women will be teaching their daughters before the daughters get to men’s houses. And this is how we train our children.

And giving birth to children, too, if you are doing work like the work we are doing by beating the drums, if it happens that one or some of your children have interest in the work you are doing, then your door in the drumming will never die. And nothing brings that: it is the children who will not let your work die. And this is another benefit of children, because if you give birth to many children and some are good, they can protect the whole family. If you are a butcher or a barber or a blacksmith, and you give birth to children, they will learn how to do your work. They will not leave it and let your door in the custom die. Whatever work you are doing, if it is a work in the way of custom, some of your children will be doing the work with you. If you die, the work you were doing and the children were helping you, it is the same work they are going to continue. Or if it is that your grandchildren are doing it, then it is the same as with your children. It can happen that none of your children take your work, but if only a single one of your grandchildren should inherit your work, whatever happens, your work will not die.

And so the benefit of children is not from only one particular place. Even in the olden days, the only people who were entitled to chieftaincy were those with many children, and they only gave chieftaincy to the people who had many children. They took it that somebody with many children is already a chief because he is holding all the children. And somebody with many children, too, it is good they call him a wealthy person. These children can help him get money, and at the same time having children is just like having money. If you have many children, that alone will give you respect. If you give birth to only two children

and neither of them is good, then it is only suffering that will be there for you the father and your wife. Whatever happens, people will say you've given birth to bad children, and no one will be giving you and your wife respect. But if you give birth to many children, those from among your children who will give you respect and help you will let others from outside respect you. At that time, if you go out and another child is going to demean you, others will tell the child that he shouldn't demean you because you have many children. If a child gives respect to the father, the father will never be nothing. And truly, if you give respect to your father, the time you will also be a father, it will help you. And even, as I've told you that a person can be useless, here in Dagbon we see some old people who are useless, and they are bad too, but they gave birth to many children. Among the children, some of them are good. Any time such an old man does something bad or useless, people will say, "If not because of his good children, we would have gone into that house and beaten that old man." And that too is the benefit of children, because otherwise they would have beaten him.

If you give birth to many children and you are sitting down without having money to spend, at least some of the children will go out and get the means of getting money, and they will help you get money. If something should happen to you which needs spending of money and you have no money, these your many children will help you to do it. If a festival is coming, you the father may be thinking of how to buy a sheep. And truly, sheep cost a lot of money. When the festival is coming, you will just sit down and your children will make one mouth to buy a sheep for you. That is another benefit of giving birth to children. As I have told you about my daughter at Ejura who sent me the two bags of corn, the other one is in this town, and when it was the festival we last had, she came and gave me money to buy a sheep.

Or maybe you are a householder, but you are living in somebody's house. In Dagbon here, we call somebody who has about two or three wives a householder, but you can be a householder and be living in your friend's house. How I am living with my family in this house, we are all renting. Maybe among my children, maybe God will give somebody the way to get money, and he will go and build a house. When he builds the house, he cannot say the house is for him. He has no way to say the house is for Alhassan or Abdulai. He will take me and put me into the house and say, "It is Ibrahim's house." It is another profit of giving birth to children. As I am now building my house at Lamashegu, my daughter in this town last gave me two bundles of iron sheets for the roof. And all this is why I am saying that giving birth to many children is good. It helps you the parents and it helps the family. If I have my house and some of my children go to

build their houses, you know that they cannot just go to stay alone in their houses with their wives. They have to go around in the family and take either their uncles or senior brothers or junior brothers to stay with them in their new houses.

And again, sometimes it may happen that there is a water shortage in a town. We Dagbamba know how to dig wells, and for this digging of wells, every house will come out with its children. They will only come out to dig their own wells and not for the whole town, and that well will stand that it is for this particular house. There is nobody from outside who will come to fetch water from that well. If it happens that you have no children, what is going to happen to you? You can't be sitting down without drinking. Maybe you will be getting water from somebody. But if somebody's wife cooks food and gives you and you eat, you will not be totally satisfied. It will only be: "Your wife has cooked and given me." Suffering will catch you because you have no children. But if you have many children, they will come out with strength and dig a very big well for you, and you will get water out of it. And if newly born children are also coming out from the family, they will also know that "This is our grandfather's well," or "This is our brother's well," or "This is our father's well." And so the work which groups a family to come together and do, it will not die. How will it die? This work these children do, it also stands in the talk of the children.

Truly, the benefits of children are many. The benefits of children can let you reach a place you were not expecting to reach, because sometimes your child will reach there and will help you reach there, too. A child can buy a private car for the father. If the father is a trader, the car will be taking the father to the market, and if the father is a farmer, he can be using the car to go to the farm. We have seen that in Tamale here. If the father is interested in riding a horse, sometimes a child will buy a horse for the father. Sometimes you may not want to be out in the public, and you will give birth to children who will bring you out in the public; if you are a prince and you have children to support you, your children will be giving you money, and the chiefs will be looking for you to give you chieftaincy. You see Alhaji Adam. He himself has no money, but he gave birth to many children. It was one of his children who sent him to Mecca. And the same child took his mother to Mecca. If Alhaji Adam had not given birth to children, would it have come like that? Sometimes one of your children may marry a prince or a princess and give birth to a child and the child will eat chieftaincy. Or one of your daughters will marry someone who comes to eat chieftaincy. At that time, can anything come from the chief's palace to eat you again? Or again, one of your children may become a big maalam, and that alone can protect you someday. And again, your children can buy cows for you, and if you are dead, no one will come

to claim the cows: it is these cows they will use to perform your funeral. The benefit of a child will let you get some clothes you were not expecting to wear. Maybe you were not thinking of having some good food to eat, but because you have good children or many children, you will get that kind of food. The benefit of a child will let you say something which is surprising to yourself, because the benefit of a child will even let you get a wife you were not expecting to have. It can happen that you have a child and the mother died or went away from your house. Because the child is a good child, he will go out and look for a very good woman for his father again. You the father will be looking at the woman and wondering, thinking that if you hadn't given birth to this child, you wouldn't have got this kind of wife. And if you give birth to a child, and the child respects you the father, if it happens that you die and leave your wife, this child will be respecting his mother and helping her. And all this, we've seen it. And so, the benefits of children cannot be compared to anything.

But truly, there are differences among the children. There are differences between the girls and the boys. There are some girls who only give respect to their mothers, but their fathers are there. It is only a few of the girls who give respect to both the father and the mother. But as for a boy, he will give respect to both the father and the mother. The mother cannot say that the boy doesn't respect her, because as the boy goes to the farm to help the father, the mother also eats some of the food, and if the boy helps the father to trade and they get money, the father will be giving money to the mother to buy food for the house. But a girl will only help in that if the mother's clothes are torn, the girl will buy new clothes for the mother. There are some girls who do that for their mothers and they never mind their father. And again, there are some girls who help their father and mother the way a boy helps, because such a girl will buy clothes for the mother and buy clothes and gowns for the father too. And if there is a shortage of food, she can buy food for the father and mother. If the father is a maalam, she can help the father in worshipping God. If she has money, she can send the father to Mecca, and send the mother too. There are certain girls who do this for their fathers and mothers.

But these boys have been doing all that and more than that. Sometimes you will give birth to many girls and only one of them will be good. But as for boys, if you give birth to many of them, however useless or bad they are, by the time they are getting near to marriage, they will cool down and be good to you the father. If you are a boy and you are not cool, and your eyes are not lying on the ground, and you are always busy, whatever happens, by the time they get a wife for you, you will become cool. By then you will become a good person. If you see a young boy grow up to get a wife and he's still behaving like a bachelor, then you have to

know that this is the bad or useless child I have talked about. But even then, if such a child gets a wife, sometimes the wife will be helping the father and mother of her husband. And such a child, too, if you give birth to a child and this child cannot do anything for you the father, sometimes this child will give birth to a child who will grow up to help the father and also you the grandfather. And so children: the benefit of children is too much, and everyone can only know it to his extent; and if you don't have many children, you won't see it, because every child has got the amount of good he will do to the father and the mother.

And truly, I have been hearing maalams say some talk, that if not because of these small children and the animals in the bush, God would not have given us, the people on earth, rainwater to drink. It is the benefit of children. As we are sitting down now and there is rain and we get water, it is because of these small-small children. If it were only to be we the old people, God wouldn't have given us water to drink, because our wrong-doing is more than us. But the children have no wrong-doing to God. The children who are still young children have no sense to speak something against what God wants. And God says that if you abuse somebody and that person doesn't do anything to you, then He God will punish you for that. These small children have nothing to do with abusing people or getting trouble by not agreeing with what God says. And as for the animals in the bush, animals don't know anything: they don't know how to abuse people and they don't know how to do wrong to God. And so the children and the animals in the bush, they are very, very important things in the world.

And so the talk of children is great, and it cannot be compared to anything. And the benefit of children, everybody can only talk about it to his extent. We Dagbamba, we love giving birth to many children. Children bring luck: they bring good luck and bad luck. There are certain children, if you give birth to certain children, you will become weak. And sometimes if you are a weak person or a useless person, if you give birth to certain children, you will become strong. Sometimes a child will come to your house and your house will increase. And you will give birth to a different child and your house will decrease. And if you give birth to another child again, your house will increase again, and if there were not many women in your house, your house will become full of women. Someone will give birth to a child and become poor, and someone will give birth to a child and become rich. All of this, we have seen it on the part of children. And so the talk of children, we will follow it and go, and tomorrow I will talk of how a woman becomes pregnant and gives birth to a child, and how the woman looks after the child until the child becomes big, and how the child too grows up.