



The Gift *not* Given

When I cry about it, I cry in the shower.

Our Lord has not blessed my wife and me with children. She is barren, and since we are one flesh, joined together by God in holy matrimony, therefore we are barren, she and I together. This state of barrenness is our reality, and it is painful.

It is painful because it is wrong. Something is broken. This is not how God has ordered His creation. God has wonderfully designed man and woman to be joined together by Him in one lifelong union; to care for and to help one another; and to be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth. From the beginning it was so. Barrenness, then and now, is not the way it's supposed to be.

Sin brings countless wrongs into this world. Disease, hunger, injustice, disaster, death, barrenness — as these happen near us, they bring grief. Yet when they happen to us, our impersonal grief becomes very personal mourning.

It's at this point that cries of "Lord have mercy" deepen; that we flood our beds with



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tears, eyes wasting away, weary from the weeping; that we beg the Lord to be near to us and not to hide His face from us.

That's why I cry in the shower: because of the grief. For whatever reason, God has seen fit to give us a painful cross. He is withholding the gift of children from my wife and me.

God gives gifts

James writes that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father" (JAMES 1:17). When we search Holy Scripture for the word "gift," we discover that much of the time the "gift" being discussed is of the spiritual variety — that is, gifts that serve to sustain and strengthen our own faith

in Christ and to edify our neighbor in that same Christian faith.

If we look more broadly, though, we see gifts everywhere in the Scriptures. There's the Lord blessing a widow and her son with ongoing food through His prophet (1 KINGS 17). Here is the Lord giving a meal to 5,000 when they desperately need to be fed (MATT. 14:13-21; MARK 6:30-44; LUKE 9:10-17; JOHN 6:1-15). "[God] makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (MATT. 5:45). The Lord gives "food in due season"; He opens His hand and satisfies "the desire of every living thing" (PS. 145:15-16). As Luther points out in the Small Catechism, He gives "clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children." ...

Sometimes

Yet sometimes He doesn't. Sometimes people are hungry or thirsty. Feet or bodies are bare. Children end up homeless. Men remain single. Women are barren.

Therefore we wonder, "*Why?*" In the face of the abundant generosity, kindness and mercy of God, it strikes us as incredibly ungenerous, unkind, unmerciful and *unfair* of God to dare to say "no." Are we not merely being put to a test? Could God be giving us a chance to prove ourselves by importunately coming to Him until He relents and gives us the thing we *want*? After all, He says, "Children are a heritage from the Lord" (PS. 127:3).

Yet while we pray with the desire that God will give everything to all, we must also remember that He is the one who knows our true needs and provides for them. We don't know what is best for us. But our Father in heaven does.

Therefore we rest contentedly in this certain promise from Him: "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (ROM. 8:28). Has God blessed you with health, with a spouse, with good government or with a child?

Rejoice! It is for your good. Has He not? Rejoice! It is just as much for your good.

Every time

This is why there are many times when I don't cry about it in the shower. Even though the Lord has withheld the good gift of children from me, at the same time He abundantly fills my life with other good gifts. I have eternal salvation in Christ Jesus. I spend my days surrounded by the many neighbors and friends that God has put in my life. As a pastor, moreover, Christ has made me to be a spiritual father, charged to care for these dear children of God here in this place He has sent me. There is no little Michael or little Katie in my home. Yet in my spiritual household there are so many little ones that I can't even begin to keep up with them all. Oh, how He gives in abundance!

Countless times I've begged the Lord to remove the cross of barrenness from us. I imagine I'll continue begging into my latter days. Yet, ceaselessly, God gives gifts. He reminds me of His sufficient grace. "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (ROM. 8:32). This is enough. By His giving and His withholding, by His "yes and His "no," He teaches me to be content in all things, as a good Father teaches His dear child. **LW**



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