



THE GIFT OF CHILDREN

Children are a gift from God — but to whom?

As we awaited the birth of our first child, everyone said the same thing: “Children are a gift.” Family and friends, neighbors and colleagues, even random old ladies at the grocery store unanimously agreed that the tiny person fidgeting within the womb was a gift from God.

God's gift to parents

Gift, gift, gift. We kept on hearing that word. And we believed it. We pondered the myriad ways in which this gift would benefit us: She would love us. She would look like us. She would smile at our faces and laugh when we played peek-a-boo. She would be our legacy and lineage. She would endlessly crank out perfect little pictures for the refrigerator. She was going to be the best gift we had ever received.

The day we finally unwrapped our little gift from God was perfect. We praised Him for this wonderful treasure wrapped in swaddling clothes. We wondered how six pounds, fourteen ounces could possess such gravity. Though her hands were tiny, she pulled at our hearts with a wild power. God had certainly blessed us with a gift!



We quickly found out, however, that children are a unique kind of gift from God. They poop. They cry. They often do both at the same time. They stay awake when you want them to sleep, and they sleep when you want them to be awake. They could show Houdini how to get out of a crib. And their sticky faces intuitively seem to know when your clothing is dry-clean only.

To be absolutely certain, our daughters have filled our lives with endless love, joy, laughter and pictures on the refrigerator. However, like all children, they are a gift that keeps us giving. And giving. And giving.

God's gift to the world

Children are a gift from God — but to whom? If we think that our children are a gift only to us, their parents, then we will inevitably be disillusioned and disappointed. If, however, we see children as God's gift to the world, then we are more likely to approach parenting in the right way. Luther said it like this: "But this at least all married people should know. They can do no better work for God, for Christendom, for all the world, for themselves, and for their children than to bring up their children well." Note well that parents come after God, the Church and the world on Luther's list.

Other people are supposed to benefit from our work as parents. We are bound to look for a gift receipt if we think that children are God's gift to us. Instead, we must realize that God uses us as He gives the gift of children to our neighbors, congregations, communities and the world.

This is seen in the promise God made to Abraham: "I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (GEN. 12:3). The gift of children that God promised to Abraham and Sarah was not exclusively for their benefit or gain; the gift of children that

God promised to them was for the benefit and gain of the whole world. As parents, they were intimately connected to this tremendous gift, and they themselves benefited in clear ways. Yet the gift of a child was not solely God's gift to them. The gift of children was how God ensured that, "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (GEN. 12:3).

God's gift to Himself

This realization — that our children are a gift of God to the world through us — has shaped our parenting. The dance parties in the living room, the markers on the wall, the tantrums at the grocery store, the ballet classes, the family devotions and prayers and those embarrassing moments spent hauling an unruly child out of the sanctuary are all part of God giving this gift to the world.

Yet we know that God's plans for our children extend far beyond the confines of this world. Every tiny child is a reminder to us of the Child who was born for our salvation and crucified that we might become children and heirs of the heavenly kingdom. God's desire for our children is not only that they be blessings to those around them, but that they come to know the grace and mercy of Christ Jesus. God desires that all children, whether swaddled in rough cloths in a refugee camp or fresh new blankets at a hospital, share in His own life, abundant and eternal.

It is no mistake that Scripture calls us the children of God: "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are" (1 JOHN 3:1A). Like the earthly children He so graciously gives us, God intends for all of us to be gifts. As He pours the waters of Baptism on us, we are more than sponges soaking up His grace and mercy, love and kindness. We are God's children — for the world's good, His glory and our everlasting joy. **LW**

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