

## The Gift of Children

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I was late to the party.

My husband and I both, we missed out on some of the fun. The laughter, the beauty, even the cringe-worthy moments – we wish we'd arrived earlier. The sad thing is, you can't go back and change it. But by the grace of God, we didn't ultimately miss out on the gifts.

Of course, I'm speaking of accepting God's gift of children. Like I said, we were late in arriving. As young twenty-somethings, newly married, we chose to focus on school and careers, at least at first. Children are something that you drum up *after* you've gotten everything else in order, we thought. We should enjoy our marriage first, perhaps get established in life, go to seminary, buy a house.

A few years went by, then a couple more. No children. Around our fifth anniversary we finally decided it was time. To our surprise, we found out on Christmas Eve in 2010 that we were expecting a baby. We told our parents right away, and they were thrilled. The first grandbaby on both sides of the family. I knew in particular that my mother-in-law was looking forward to becoming a grandmother more than anything. What a gift this child would be!

In February of 2011, we learned that this precious baby had gone on to be with our Lord just before the first trimester was up. To say we were all devastated would be an understatement. Had we taken this gift for granted? What had we done wrong? Had we sinned by waiting so long? Time felt like it was ticking even faster now.

After a difficult seven months, we found out we were expecting again. This baby was developing right on schedule, and everything seemed to be working out well. Unfortunately, now my mother-in-law – the joyful and patient grandma-to-be – was battling an aggressive form of cancer. She passed away in January of 2012, just months before her first grandchild would be born. We were so thankful for the gift of a child and yet were also so heartbroken that she wasn't there to share in this gift with us. Why had we waited so long?

We hoped to add to our family again right away. Now that we'd made the decision to have children on our time, we'd make it happen. Sadly, we experienced three more losses before a second child would be added to our family here on earth in 2015. By the time this special little guy arrived, so had we. We finally – albeit, quite late – arrived at the conclusion that we should have grasped from the beginning.

*Children are a gift.* They're pure joy, given by God Himself in His own wisdom and timing, and we are humblest and wisest when we're open to this gift in marriage.

Having now just welcomed – again, by the grace of God – a fourth baby to our family, we only wish we had started sooner. My husband and I both have come to know how much joy children bring to a home, to a family, to a church, to a community.

There is nothing quite like holding your babies for the first time. Or witnessing their baptisms as they're brought into the Lord's family through water and the Word. It's a blessing to watch them grow and learn,

to see something for the first time and – oh, how much more beautiful the world becomes when you see it through their eyes! The way love multiplies as a family grows is just unreal. It's so unexpected, so undeserved, so divine.

It's a joy to know and feel even a bit of the love that our own heavenly Father has for us. In loving and raising our own children, we partake in the joy that God has in loving and raising us, His children.

I thank God every day that we didn't miss out on His gifts entirely because of our own foolishness. While He may not give the gift of children to every couple, and we pray especially for those couples, we are wise to always be *open* to His gifts, nonetheless.

As we celebrate this Year of the Family, even in a culture that is simply *anti*-family, let's rejoice that Christ has given us new life through His death and resurrection and has redeemed us to live lives that reflect His family, His joy, and His love. Receive His gifts in joy and gladness! It's not too late.

“Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.” (Psalm 127:3–5)