

# A REMINDER THAT CHILDREN ARE GIFTS, ARROWS, AND BLESSINGS

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Rachel Jankovic | Mother, Writer,  
& Author of *Loving the Little Years*  
Moscow, Idaho

I think it is safe to assume that most believers are familiar with the many Biblical passages that speak of children as gifts (see especially Psalms 127, 128).

They are considered a blessing, and inheritance, like arrows in the hand of a man who wants arrows, they are referred to as fruit, and as a reward. There are promises surrounding seeing your children's children—with the unspoken expectation that we just can't even wait to see this layer of blessing.

But still, when we come to addressing the actual work of the actual children in our own lives, we fall back on our more understood framework of the culture around us. They are a gift from God, sure, whatever.

But can we afford them?

They are a reward, yeah, but is it one we want? I'm not sure that I am patient enough for kids, so maybe I should aim for something with a lower bar. I'll get a cat! Maybe a gerbil. They are like arrows in the hand of a mighty man, but then again, we aren't super mighty and I'm not really into bow hunting. It seems like we should just not worry about that bit. If anything is clear it is that Scripture does not really jive with what we actually experience in our lives. It just calls them a blessing, and never even mentions the toddler or the teenage years.

## THE BLESSING OF CHILDREN.

And so we find that rather than adjusting our own instincts and desires to correspond to the clear teaching of Scripture on this subject, we tend to let the Bible fade into the background of our own narrative of life—letting the ways of the world and the ways of our own flesh creep to the forefront and shape our behavior. We leave those Bible verses as something someone might have cross stitched for the

nursery, or something you might see on a plaque that you wouldn't buy. But we certainly don't look at our lives, at our children, and at our situation with the wisdom that simply believing these passages would bring.

We treat children like an expensive leisure activity. We think it is only responsible to decide before conceiving a child whether or not you can afford all of the time, money, stress, and responsibility of actually having a child. The world has taught us that this is all our decision. That our fertility is something that we can and should have a mastery of—making the choices that are best for ourselves at all times. But in the background of all of this is the hilarious assumption that we have a clear understanding of what is best for us. As though we are constantly in command of all of the information about our lives and are able to plan our futures with the utmost wisdom. As though we actually know how to discern what is best for us.

## **OH, THE JOY.**

I am currently expecting our baby number seven—an absurd number to shocked onlookers, who consider the round belly to be a dot on the exclamation point—as though it is some kind of over-excited excess. Honestly, the number still surprises us. God just does exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we ask or think.

Maybe in our family we feel the abundance more sharply than some—but we have had the opportunity to feel the true nature of the gift too. These children of ours aren't just a gift because they are cute, or say funny things. They aren't just the sum of their snuggles and their laughter. Though the joy from these things alone is deep, there is so much more going on.

Children are like the best ever investment program. Only God is making the decisions, and what He is investing is our life. Can you imagine a bigger gift than that? But it isn't the kind of gift that feels like a day at the spa. Because it isn't the kind of gift we would give ourselves. Our instinct is to say, "Good job! You earned some time off! That was hard! Put your feet up and kick back this weekend!" But when we look at what God does in our life, it seldom corresponds to this ideal.

## **HOURS WASTED, OR JOY ABUNDANT?**

This gift of a child means no sleeping in on weekends for many years—until you can't anymore because you forgot how. It means coming face to face with your own temptations in a frequently ugly way. Did you have any idea you could be so selfish? So petty? So annoyed? So critical? What a gift! Because it turns us constantly away from ourselves—away from feeling self-reliant and capable, and it throws us onto God. This is an uncomfortable gift indeed.

He sees these empty moments—these hours that you are letting go wasted in your life, and He fills them with an infant who needs tenderness. He replaces what could have been a quiet dinner for two with a table full of children and along with them a hundred opportunities for service, for teaching, for explaining the world. He took your vacant lot of a life and built on it cities, and civilizations. He has given you the gift of a future.

It isn't just the gift of the requirement to do and be more either. God doesn't leave us out there on our own like that—it is also the gift of the grace that we need to do it. As He pours on the requirement, He pours on the grace. His gift to us is throwing us at His mercy—keeping us reaching for His kindness,

His steadfastness, His love in all the daily moments of our life.

It is like that old game of trust where you have to fall back in the hope that your partner catches you. We aren't supposed to look behind us and try to calculate if God can handle it when we fall. We are commanded to believe that He will. That He loves us and that this is good—because He is good. We should be looking forward—looking to the gifts that God is giving us, and trying to brace ourselves to catch them. We can know that the gift is big enough to knock us over – we can know that we can't possibly carry it on our own—and we can know that the One who is giving it to us will not let us fall. This is His gift—joy in our own insufficiency—and joy in His constant sufficiency.