



What Children Give Us

A culture fluent in parenting's burdens must recover the fuller story by rejoicing in the blessings children bring.

By [Ray Alston](#)

PARENTING

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[“The Family: A Proclamation to the World”](#) contains only one direct quote from scripture: “Children are an [heritage of the Lord](#).”

The word “heritage” stands out as somewhat unusual in current usage. Some translations use “gift,” while others use “inheritance.” The children themselves are the gift. Although the opportunity and responsibility of parenthood can feel daunting, the understanding of children as gifts from the Lord emphasizes both their divine origin and the blessings of bearing and raising them.

As I have written previously, our society often **emphasizes the challenges** of rearing children. I can hardly consider myself an exception, since I am the author of an article on the challenges of raising a child with **special needs**. However, even as I acknowledge the challenges of parenthood, I believe that faith in the Lord and His teachings about the family calls us to recognize its blessings. I hope that such a focus can help change the narrative about raising children, giving those considering parenthood a fuller understanding of its rewards and demands.

What are the blessings of rearing children? Anyone who spends time with them knows there are many endearing moments. Children express love and trust with absolute sincerity. But the blessings extend beyond those moments into the substance of day-to-day parenting. Interactions with children necessarily vary. In that variety lies much of the richness of the relationship. The time I spend with my children is far from **monotonous**. It is often surprising.

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Children learn at a remarkable rate. Consequently, their interests, likes, and dislikes can change rapidly. I am constantly learning more about my sons. Our relationship is continually developing, which is exciting, much like getting to know a new friend.

Not every interaction with children is pleasant. At times, children disobey, demand a great deal just when parents have no energy, and make it clear, both visibly and vocally, that they have not yet mastered basic manners and etiquette. It seems that whenever I start an in-depth or important conversation with my wife, at least two other voices immediately begin begging for our attention. These instances are trying, but they also provide important teaching opportunities. Finding the most effective way to teach my children is a rewarding challenge, like finishing an elaborate puzzle, but more satisfying.

I recently read Psalm 127 to my sons, and I was struck by the final verses: “As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate.” The language here is figurative. The image of arrows speaking with enemies could mean driving enemies away by force or threat—or, as my son said, “Speaking with them in ways they understand.” But I also see the enemies at the gate as more than rivals or thieves: they can represent the struggles of mortality. They include

the perceived meaninglessness of life and frailty of human efforts that lead the writer of Ecclesiastes to remark that “all is vanity.” Children help us defeat these enemies because they are an eternal legacy. Our work with them extends beyond our lifetimes into the lives of our children and their descendants, and into eternity. The gospel gives us the promise of an eternal family, meaning that when we treasure our children, we are choosing “treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal” ([Matthew 6:20](#)).

Raising children also brings indirect blessings. Among these is a sense of common cause or team spirit with other parents. When I was a graduate student, I often struggled to find common ground with colleagues whose lifestyles and values were very different from mine. However, when I attended an academic conference this year, I was pleasantly surprised to find that this was no longer the case. Many of my colleagues now have children or are considering parenthood. Whatever else may differ about our worldviews, those of us raising children share a common love for them and a desire to raise them as best we can. It was much easier to make meaningful connections with these colleagues. Parenting philosophies may differ, but parenthood can unite.

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Another indirect blessing of raising children is an increased ability to prioritize. This clearer sense of priorities stems partly from the fact that raising children requires significant time. There simply isn't as much time for other things. Although having less free time can be inconvenient, it also brings the compensatory blessing of a change in perspective that makes minutes and hours more valuable.

Furthermore, raising children has led me to reflect on what is most meaningful. These reflections have given me the clarity I need to live deliberately. The changes I have made have been so meaningful that I ended a poem about my oldest son's birth with the line “I have to wonder who gave life to whom.” At the same conference, I heard similar comments about prioritizing from my colleagues with children. They said that raising children has helped them eliminate less important things that previously used up their time. They expressed gratitude for the increased focus that comes with parenthood.

One of the most important lessons I have learned from raising children is how much my spiritual growth depends on relationships. The growth, attributes, and strength that I

seek spiritually do not come solely through personal effort or even solitary communion with God. It is in growing together that we follow the Savior. When challenges have pushed me to my limits, I have often found sustaining strength in family members. And increasingly, I find it in my children. Sometimes simply knowing that they trust in and depend on me is enough to sustain me. At other times, their pure faith and willingness to learn inspire me.

Being a parent is often demanding, and although it makes me more aware of my shortcomings, I think it also brings out the best in me. Trying to raise and teach children helps me look beyond myself, be less selfish, and be more caring. It helps me be more patient, not only with my children but with others. It also helps me to see others in a new light. When I am in a difficult situation, remembering that someone loves the person I am dealing with, as I love my children, helps me respond with compassion rather than judgment. Parenthood has changed how I work as an educator, helping me focus on my students' progress and well-being.

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The blessings of parenthood deserve more airtime. For me, paying attention to those blessings is not merely a matter of optimism but of faith in God, whose children we are raising. When we speak honestly about what raising children has given us, we offer those considering parenthood a fuller picture of the life they might choose. These blessings deserve a place in our public conversation as well as our private gratitude.

About the author

Ray Alston

Ray Alston has a PhD from The Ohio State University. He now teaches Russian at BYU-Idaho, where he graduated with a BA in English in 2011. That was also where he met his wife, Megan, with whom he shares three sons and a love of nature, music, and good books.