

Parenting books often suggest that parents determine how their children turn out. The truth is, your child has unique traits—their giftedness—that only they possess. Your job as a parent isn't to engineer a product, but to identify your child's gifts and steward them toward a mature, fruitful life.

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meant to be

The party had begun in Room 540. The guest of honor was front and center, his tiny head swathed in a headband with a gigantic bow that someone thought was cute. The rest of him was swaddled in a generic hospital blanket that his mother couldn't wait to replace. He was perfection, that's for sure—this bundle of wonder, so still and enchanting.

While the little rock star insisted on slumbering through his welcome, his fans were in full celebratory form. The entourage of family could not get enough of their newest member as they obsessed over staring at the baby, holding the baby, posing with the baby. Everyone's joy felt complete.

A "Problem"

Then a kindly hospital worker came into the room, "Just to do a brief screening on the baby's hearing," she explained. The din quieted down as she went to work, bending over the crib several times in an attempt to "get a good reading." When at last she looked up, a roomful of stares made it plain she was expected to report on her findings. "He passed the test in one ear," she announced, "but not on the other side. That's

not a problem. I'll come back tomorrow and check him again." And with that she turned and left.

The baby bliss didn't take long to fade. The word "problem" lingered in the air like some unwelcome guest who had suddenly shown up and was now sucking all the euphoric oxygen out of the festivities. Dismay and worry broke out, leading to endless discussion about what it could mean for baby to have failed the hearing test. That, in turn,

Nothing is worse than being told that there is something wrong with your precious child.

led to more speculation as to which lineage had passed on a history of hearing loss. And finally, what would this new development mean for the child growing up?

The new mother's mother tried to right the ship by contributing her knowledge as a former healthcare professional, reminding everyone—most especially her daughter—how unreliable these screening tests could often be, especially in the early days after birth. They could be erroneously affected by any number of variables. Take the simple fact that he had been born three weeks early. Blah, blah, blah.

But no amount of logical reasoning stood a ghost of a chance of prevailing against the emotional uncertainty of that moment. The mother of the child had received distressing news. And for any mother, nothing is worse than being told, in effect, that there is something wrong with your precious child. Not on the day of his birth, nor on any day before or after. Any mention of a problem cannot be unheard. That moment is felt as a gut punch of fear, followed by a lingering nausea about how little control a parent ultimately has over all the possible things that can happen to their child.

Meant to Be

Yet right here, even in that fog of fear and uncertainty, is the best news we could possibly give you. No matter the situation, that little one you

hold happens to be a declarative statement of, “Yes, this is meant to be.” All of it—this child, exactly as they are made, and you the parent, with everything you have and are, as well as everything you don’t have and aren’t—is joined together in a narrative of purpose that has been planned from eternity and is beginning to live itself out right here, right now before your very eyes. What a privilege to be chosen to participate in the revelation of such a promise!

But that’s not all. There are indelible fingerprints displayed in the unique workmanship crafted into every single person. They are evidence of an intentional design, made for just this space and time. William Wordsworth eloquently described that mystery with the poetic words, “But trailing clouds of glory do we come, from God, who is our home: Heaven lies about us in our infancy.”¹

Those “clouds of glory” show up in a person’s *giftedness*—the unique way in which they were made to do life. A person’s giftedness is like the explanatory notes that accompany a painting in a museum. Or like an owner’s manual for how the person is designed to function.

The Why, the Story, and the Joy

Parenting is a long journey of faithfulness in the same direction, but there are no guarantees as to where that journey will go. Nevertheless, the more you can understand about the giftedness of your child, the more you’ll be able to come up with wise, intentional choices that make sense for *that* child. Every day, with every encounter, you create the kind of relationship you will have with your child for a lifetime. So here are some ways in which giftedness can provide you with a solid framework for that all-important work.

1. *Giftedness gives you a glimpse into the why for your child.* Every baby is here on purpose, for purpose, to be for this time and space as the very person they are born to be. You must never lose sight of

that truth. While there will always be a combination of factors affecting your child's path in life, their giftedness remains the central factor. That returns them home and that lets you know what is most *right* with your child.

Like the stars, your child emanates light. That light may flicker at times, but it always embodies the splendor of a radiance that is all their own. So when you devote time to observing your child's behavior and watching their path over time, you become more attentive to the great wonder of their presence in your life, and to the joy they display in shining their own brightness, exactly as it was meant to be.

2. *Giftedness reminds you of the power of story.* You as a parent have been invited into your child's story, not as the author, but as the trusted representative of the grace that holds your child. You do that by responsibly caring for their needs and shepherding their heart on the path of life, always with the goal of extending radical, unconditional hospitality.

Whether you or your spouse gave birth to your little one, or whether you brought them into your home through fostering, adoption, or some other committed relationship, be aware that your role in their life will always take you back to the immutable truth of their personhood. You don't make that personhood; it comes written into your child's being. That reality should inspire a deep humility, as well as a deep desire for discernment as you contemplate the part you are being asked to play in your child's story. Your presence in it is privileged, and with each and every interaction you have with your child, it is good to remind yourself that you are standing on the holy ground of unique giftedness. Everything you do there matters.

3. *Giftedness is an engraved invitation to joy.* You can read all the child-rearing manuals you will, listen to as many podcasts as

you wish, and absorb as much well-intended advice from other parents as you can handle, but none of that can ever replace the initial wonder and overwhelming gratitude you had at that first moment when you fell in love with this one-of-a-kind person you now know as your child. That child's giftedness will reveal the extraordinary treasure of who they are, restoring you to "gladness of heart" on the days when you weather the very real doubts and demands that come with being a parent. As you watch your child take in the beauty and loveliness of this world for the first time with delight, you discover they are calling *you* to taste and see the goodness of this life as never before, inspiring you to enter each new day with expectancy and hope.

The Why. The Story. The Joy. Think of these three pieces as the scaffolding that supports you in being the parent you most want to be and who your child needs you to be.

After that, most everything else about parenting is improvisational art. There's no definitive "how to" resource that you can order from Amazon or anywhere else that walks you through a DIY process of constructing your child. None at all, because let's face it, your child is someone the world has never seen before!

A Design and a Designated Purpose


But that doesn't mean you're flying blind. No, you have the design of your child to work with, along with their essential presence in this world for this space and time, backing you up as well. So now it comes down to having the immensely fascinating—and, if you let it be, wondrous—journey of walking alongside that little person as they grow and awaken into life. How great is it that *you* get to be there, right beside them, as an integral part of the process!

Make no mistake, in walking beside them you can't help but notice

your child's amazing beauty and brilliance, which to you seem so much brighter than they do to anyone else; but also all of their scribbles of imperfection and inadequacy, which appear so much darker and more worrisome to you than to others. All of that is mixed together in the messy middle of every day. Your choice is to trust that you belong there to play your uniquely positioned role in this story that is being written, as only you, the parent, can.

As you see it all unfold, you have to resolutely believe in what you cannot yet see. Remember, you *receive* the child you are given—along with something of a purpose intended not only for your heart and your home, but for such a time as this in our world. Your child is a part of our future. Their unique presence here now is intended to be a gift to the world . . . to all of us. They were born to contribute something of greater significance and meaning, as only they can.

you're parenting a person, not a product

 ur dad grew up in an era when children were to be “seen and not heard.” Not anymore! In many families, children have become the center of gravity for everything else: What the family does and when they do it. What they spend their money on. Where they live. What they eat. Where they vacation. Who their friends are. What feelings are allowed. And so much more.

Honestly, we see families all the time where the kids are running around, doing their own thing—not always for the better. It doesn't take long to start wondering, *Who's in charge here? Where are the parents?*

The Fear of Parenting

The answer is that in far too many cases, the parents are scared. They're scared they're going to mess up this assignment called parenting. And why wouldn't they? If they themselves are the product of bad parenting, why should they expect to get it right? (That's how they see it, anyway.)

Enter the childrearing “experts.” There's a whole industry of them,

and they are well aware of parental angst. That's why they've produced no end of blog posts, podcasts, videos, books, manuals, workshops, and websites on the hows and whys of parenting.

But is it at all helpful? Not so much. Much of it is unfiltered. A lot of it uses scare tactics: how to avoid this mistake; why you must *not* do it this way; how some longstanding, well-accepted practice will ruin your kid; why this or that approach is far superior to another. Much of it plays to the is-there-something-wrong-with-my-child? worry that parents so often feel. Not to mention the will-my-child-get-left-out-or-left-behind? angst. And what gets sold as "best practice" by one authority is contradicted by another. Which then divides parents into polarized camps over basic matters such as breastfeeding, potty training, discipline, schooling, chores, working moms vs. stay-at-home moms, healthcare, and on and on.

We're not saying all the advice out there is bad. It's just that there's so much of it. Which only adds to a parent's misgivings: "If it takes this much expertise to raise a child in the right way, what hope is there for me to get it right?"

We hear you loud and clear. Remember, like you, we are both parents. We each brought infants home with the thought, *Now what am I supposed to do?*

An Approach That Makes Sense

We wish someone had done for us then what we're hoping to do for you now through this book. Rather than hand you a parenting manual, we're going to show you what amounts to an "owner's manual" for *your* child. And like countless parents before you, once you see how that owner's manual works, you're quite likely to say, "This makes so much sense!"

At that point, our bet is that you'll realize the only "right" way to parent your child is to follow that child's owner's manual. Why would you not?

Well, the biggest reason you might not is because of the prevailing view of childrearing in our culture, which says that all the burden is on you as a parent to “make” your child into a person. In other words, your child is a product. *Your* product, to be more specific. Your assignment or goal is to turn your newborn (the raw material) into an adult (the finished product). How that child “turns out” (a manufacturing term if ever there was one) at age eighteen or twenty or twenty-two becomes a referendum on how well you as a parent have done the job.

That view gets expressed all the time when people say, “I am the way I am today because of my parents.” For instance, someone gets praised for their work ethic. They reply, “Well, that’s because my dad was an extremely hard worker who never quit until he finished the job.” Or, on the negative side, someone is told they’re a perfectionist. They reply, “You’re right. I’m so sorry! It’s just that I never could live up to my mother’s expectations.”

In short, countless people walk around assuming that who they are—or rather, who they’ve “become”—is primarily due to the influence of their parents. It follows, then, that they in turn will be the primary influence on who their kids become. Everyone is the product of their upbringing, right? That’s why parents are supposed to raise children the right way, so they turn out right.

Right? Wrong!

Your Child Is a Person

Without question, parents have a profound influence on their children, as we’ll see. But the flaw with saying a child is a product is that a child is not a product. *A child is a person.* That changes everything!

The prevailing view of childhood in our culture says that all the burden is on you as a parent to “make” your child into a person. In other words, your child is a product.

So what is your purpose as a parent? Instead of trying to “make” your child into someone, your assignment is to nurture the growth of the infant person you have been given you into the adult person they are intended to be. The baby you brought into the world was a person before they ever showed up on the weighing table. Since at least the 1970s, researchers have been studying the remarkable ways in which childhood development begins early on in the womb. By the time of birth, “the newborn infant is both competent and complexly organized.”¹

So said one of the pioneers in this field, the late Dr. T. Berry Brazelton, professor emeritus at Harvard Medical School. He pointed out that “a newborn already has nine months of experience when she is born. She is capable of controlling her behavior in order to respond to her new environment.”² Moreover, she communicates to others

**Pay close attention
to who this new
person is telling you
they already are.**

through her behavior, even if not yet through developed language. And she is also a social creature, an individual with her own unique qualities, ready to shape as well as be shaped by her environment.³

Your child is bringing their own unique personhood into your home, which is now their home, too. It’s not your job to try and tell them who they should be (that’s a hopeless task, by the way). Rather, the better path by far is to *pay close attention to who this new person is telling you they already are.*

We can help you with that, since we’re in the business of helping individuals find their “giftedness,” what they are born to do.

We’re going to tell you much more about giftedness. But right off the bat, here are two game-changing realities you should know about. First, everyone has their own unique form of giftedness. You. Your child. Your spouse (if you’re married). Your other children (if you have any). Everyone.

Second, giftedness shows up very, very early in life—so early that

it may be inborn, though there's really no way to prove that. But we know it's there early on. At The Giftedness Center, people have told us—in remarkable detail for the age they were at the time—stories about activities they enjoyed doing when they were only four, three, even two and a half years old! And those stories dovetail perfectly with a consistent pattern of behavior they still manifest decades later.

Can you see where we're going? Your child brings you something special wrapped up in who they are: their giftedness. As their parent, it's your privilege (as well as your responsibility, we believe) to begin to look for that giftedness, and in turn help your child begin to see their giftedness and treasure it as something special. Doing so will transform the parenting process for you.

Sound appealing? Then here's where we're headed. . .

The Layout of This Book

Part I: Your Purpose as a Parent

In the rest of Part I, we're going to lay a foundation by explaining and showing you what giftedness is and what difference it makes for parenting. You and your child form a pair, a dyad, and in that parent-child relationship both of your respective forms of giftedness interact with each other. But because you're the adult and hold most of the power, you have to be especially aware that you live into your role as a parent through the lens of your giftedness.

Part II: The Early Years

Your child's giftedness starts showing up right from birth. We'll show you a simple method you can use to begin discovering it even during their infant, preschool, and early elementary years. That discovery process will continue through their teenage years into adulthood.

Part III: *Education*

Your child's giftedness profoundly affects how they learn. So in this section we'll help you think through what that means for your child's schooling and how to optimize their learning in elementary, junior high, and high school. We'll also point out ways to use academic and extracurricular activities to make further discoveries about their giftedness.

Part IV: *The Teenage Years*

With adolescence come some challenging changes in your child's life—which in turn pose challenges for you as a parent. But one thing that won't change is your child's giftedness, and that can become a bedrock on which to help them gain confidence and build a positive self-image. During these years, your child will express their giftedness in far more sophisticated ways, which can help you as a parent start to fill in a lot more of the details in your understanding of their core personhood.

Part V: *Getting Ready for Liftoff*

As your high schooler moves closer toward graduation, both they and you as the parent are naturally starting to ponder what's next for them. In this section we'll show you how to pull together your acquired observations about your child's giftedness into a summary form that can help them own and lean into their core strengths, and even begin to develop something of a vision for their life in the adult world.

A Recommendation

Our guess is that you probably want to just flip to the sections of the book that most directly address the age and stage of your child. For example, if you're the parent of a newborn, you're eager to turn to Part II: The Early Years. Or if you've got a twelve-year-old "tween" driving

you crazy, you want to go right to Part IV on the teenage years.

That's understandable. But our strong recommendation is to finish Part I first before moving on. Everything from chapter 6 on is based on chapters 1 through 5. By reading them first, you'll have a proper orientation to everything else we have to say.

And we begin with a story about what it looks like when a parent knows nothing about giftedness.

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