

Down Home: Grace through my grandson's eyes

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Every time we're together, Ezra helps me understand why I love being a grandfather.

My grandson also stretches my memory a generation, and he reminds me why I love every moment I've been a father.

The pure, simple, untamed love of a child is a grace-gift—from God, but also from that child. Its magnitude dwarfs infinity. Ezra's mama, Lindsay, and Aunt Molly loved me like that. (They still do, of course, but adult love is more dynamic and complex.) And I reciprocate their love as fully as a grown man's heart can stretch.

Grandparents enjoy making jokes about grandparenting. You've heard them all; so have I. Their humor juxtaposes the responsibility of parenting with the freedom of grandparenting. Their banality deflates the spectacular originality of each child into the bland commonality of generic childhood.

Is grandparenting better than parenting?

Most grandparent jokes circle around the premise that grandparenting is better than parenting. The standard line, delivered in myriad forms, claims grandparenting is better because grandparents aren't required to do the hard or unpleasant jobs of raising children.

That's true to a degree. But I happily have taken my turn at changing poopy diapers for two generations of our family. And I eagerly have played games with my daughters and my grandson over and over and over until my eyes crossed. I now engage the tedium of grandparenting as willingly as I

engaged the monotony of parenting. Because, ultimately, that's when you truly show a small child your deep and abiding love.

Still, most grandparents (the exceptions are the ones who actually raise their grandchildren) relinquish some of the hard responsibility of childcare to parents. Eventually, the grandparent or the grandchild has to go home. I'd say that's a trade-off to parenting. Sure, a parent rarely gets a break. But a parent also gets to be there all the time. A parent hears the first word and watches the first step. A parent glimpses the light of understanding click on. A parent shares splendidly serendipitous moments.

All that aside, one quality of grandparenting eclipses parenting: Thanks to the poignant gift of experience, a grandparent truly appreciates the fleeting nature of childhood. That knowledge sanctifies every second. It infuses the present with a joy too sweet to be savored fully and completely the first time around.

A grandparent understands exactly how rapidly each phase of life flees. A grandparent realizes that in five blinks of an eye, this 3-year-old will be heading off to college. While a parent must move on to the next task, a grandparent enjoys the luxury of drinking deeply at the fountain of in-the-moment awareness.

Not always easy

Not that it's always easy. Two-year-olds still throw tantrums. Three-year-olds get too tired and go ballistic. Four-year-olds get fed up and show their hind-ends to anybody anywhere. But grandparents know this, too, shall pass. It did when that child's mama was his age; it will today.

Grandparenting Ezra, in particular, reminds me this gift is fragile, not to be taken casually.

Ezra's other grandfather, Gary, died a little more than two weeks before

this child was born.

After Lindsay married Ezra's daddy, Aaron, I worried how I would compare as a grandfather. Gary built homes. He knew how to do stuff. He hunted and fished. He souped up and drove fast cars. He was godly, gentle, generous and kind. He even had a full head of hair. And he was an experienced and terrific granddad to Ava years before Ezra came along. How could I possibly measure up?

Of course, grandparenting isn't a competition. If Gary had lived, we would be complementing each other in the love and affection we pour on this little guy. Now, I miss Gary when I look at Ezra, who looks so much like his daddy, who looks so much like his own daddy. All I can do is try to love and enjoy Ezra enough for two grandfathers.

And that is pure bliss. Especially when Ezra calls my name. When he asks me to play trains, shoot baskets and throw a ball. When he laughs, "Hugs, but no kisses." When he wakes from his nap and calls out, "Marvo, where are yoooooooo?"

Yep, grandparenting is great.

It's all about perspective.