

Positive Parenting
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THE GIFT OF A DANDELION

Four year old Olivia hid behind her mother's legs, stretching out her arm to me, holding a bright yellow dandelion. I commented on how beautiful it was and her mother told me, "It's for you." "Thank you so much," I responded, and was treated to a shy smile. This was a gift given, a gift received.

Years rolled away and I was strolling around the block with my daughter, who was then 19 months old, shortly after we had moved to Minneapolis 34 years ago. I remember Alison's awe and delight as she witnessed the first blooming dandelion of our walk together. With rapt attention, she crouched down to admire it. With wonder, she picked it, smelled it, smiled, and extended it to me in her tiny toddler hand. This was a gift given, a gift received.

A year later, living in our first house, with a yard full of dandelions, I girded to do battle with this prolific weed. Deadly serious, I went out each day with a bag and that pointy weed digging tool. I gritted my teeth and went after them, with a vengeance. Alison danced through the crop of fresh dandelions every day, picking a yellow bouquet with absolute delight. She would extend the bouquet and we would go to find a vase and put it on the table. This was a gift given, a gift received.

That summer, at Eloise Butler Wild Flower Garden, an elderly woman paused to observe, "The only difference between a wild flower and a weed is where it is growing." I had to think about that. This was a gift given, a gift received.

What had I been missing, looking through my lens of weed eradicator? What did two little girls and an elderly woman have to teach me about wonder, beauty, and gifts? They taught me to be cracked wide open to experience abundance and diversity in God's wondrous world.

How true, that we often overlook beauty and wonder because we are looking for weeds and enemies and inconvenience. Yet, I go to art museums to look at beauty in color and shape, in design and harmony. I go to the theater or read books to hear a well-crafted story. I go to hear an orchestra play exquisite music. How might I accept God's invitation to rediscover the breathtaking beauty of a dandelion, the sounds and sights and stories of God's naturally recurring world, of the infinite variety of God's children, in appearance, in gifts, in languages, in passions? Take the hand of a child. Let them be your guide to rediscovering God's gifts.

In five months, a child you know will be awestruck and captivated by the beauty of the first snowstorm, while adults grumble about snarled traffic and a sidewalk to shovel. Can

you let wonder and delight be contagious? Can you greet the world with thanksgiving and appreciation? God bless you with open eyes and ears and hearts and minds. This can be a gift given, a gift received.

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. Listen to children. Listen really, really carefully.
2. Go for a walk with a child. Ask them to tell you what they see. Look carefully, to see what the child sees.
3. Color with crayons with a child and ask them to describe the picture.
4. Sit outside after dark with a child you love and listen to the night sounds. Ask the child, “What do you hear?”
5. Say “thank you” when a child presents you with a dandelion. Say “thank you,” and mean it!
6. Thank God for the gift of a child in your life, for opening your eyes and ears and mind to wonder at God’s abundant, diverse, and wondrous world.