

Gifts to Our Children

Merry Mary

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Newborns do not come with an owner's manual—a reality that has caused many parents to stress out about the “right” way to raise their children. While there's no shortage of parenting guidelines dispensed by educators, psychologists, and clinicians in books and magazines, sometimes the simplest advice comes from the most unassuming source: a parent. Merry Mary, author of *Gifts to Our Children*, defines herself as a parent who believes that children are entitled to respect, encouragement, and unconditional love and support from their parents and guardians. Her advice in this faith-based book accomplishes the same goals as the articles and books written by professionals but it is refreshingly free of clinical jargon, statistics, and case studies.

Mary divides her slim volume into chapters with titles such as “The Gift of Unconditional Love;” “The Gift of Responsibility;” and “The Gift of Gratitude.” Each chapter begins with an anecdote that relates to the chapter subject. The second section of the chapter discusses the importance the “gift” you can give to your child. In chapter one, “The Gift of Unconditional Love,” she begins by telling about her constant “striving to succeed” and attributes it to a void left by never feeling unconditional love. In the second section she describes unconditional love and petitions parents to lavish love on their children so that they feel loved no matter what. The book's format is inconsistent. In some chapters, the second section has a numbered list of points that she explains; in others, several paragraphs describe the gift and suggest ways for passing it along to your child.

Throughout the book, Mary emphasizes the critical importance of parents as positive role models. Because children often learn by imitation during their formative years, it is incumbent upon parents to pay close attention to their own behaviors, she argues. As Mary points out, “When you complain endlessly about your dead-end job that you never quit, you are teaching your children to pledge allegiance first to others and last to themselves.”

“Invest time in being a parent to your child” is perhaps the core takeaway of *Gifts to Our Children*. In a perfect world of a two-parent household, financial security, and a loving extended family, this goal is both admirable and necessary to a child's sense of well-being and security. Unfortunately, factors such as divorce, unemployment, substance abuse, and teen pregnancy—problems alluded to but not addressed in depth in this book—make it more challenging for parents to guide, teach, play with, and listen to their children. This faith-based book would make a thoughtful gift for new parents as well any adult looking to make a positive difference in the lives of children who have been born into less than desirable environments.

The *Gifts to Our Children's* cover design is colorful and charming, the structure of the book's content is well conceived, and Mary's writing is sincere and conversational—as if one were having a chat with an old friend over a cup of coffee.

CHRISTINA HAMLETT (January 29, 2013)

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