

Every child is a precious gift, and every parent deserves our admiration. Every child demands your time, and every loving parent gives that time because they wouldn't have it any other way. Some children require more. Not every parent gives it well. Madeleine required a lot, and Mitchell and Gabrielle gave her everything. Madeleine required more because she required less. She needed more care than the average child, but over fewer days than the average child.

Madeleine entered the world with one extra chromosome that limited her chances of survival. But she entered the world in the Nickerson family, which increased her chances of care. She received outstanding medical attention. She received unending love from her parents, sister, grandparents and friends.

As her parents wrote, Madeleine carried “a condition that brought challenges but never diminished her incredible strength, nor the immense love that surrounded her every moment of her life.... She experienced a world filled with warmth, devotion, and unwavering love.” She “was able to experience the sun and feel its warmth, hear the birds, and breathe in fresh air with her parents.” Reading those words challenges each of us to appreciate the gifts of every day—the marvels of nature and the unmerited love of family and friends. If we live 100 years, we can never fully appreciate those gifts.

Because children demand so much, some people don't want them around. Even the disciples fell into that trap. Deep in Mark's gospel, Jesus' renown was spreading. Some who listened to him were so moved, they wanted to bring him the people they loved the most: their children. Perhaps those children that day were doing what children do—playing, running, shouting, taking advantage of the sun, its warmth, the birds and the fresh air. It annoyed the disciples, who rebuked the parents. What made them say that? Did they have no children of their own, or did they feel guilty that they left them at home so they could enjoy the presence of Jesus while their wives were tending the kids? Maybe the disciples had forgotten how to enjoy a beautiful day the way children so naturally do.

Mark's gospel sometimes gives us an unpolished view of Jesus, so we're not completely surprised to hear how Mark describes Jesus' reaction to the disciples' intervention: “He became indignant.” Jesus then uttered beautiful words that showed his patience, his priorities, and his love for those who required the most care: “Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.”

You have all supported Mitchell and Gabrielle as they lived those divine words throughout these difficult days. When they learned of Madeleine's condition before her birth, they said in so many words, “Let this child come to us; do not prevent her.” Madeleine came and revealed to them the riches of the kingdom of God.

Madeleine's life reminds us all of Jesus' final words to the disciples that day: “whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it.” Madeleine accepted the kingdom with strength over adversity, joy in every day, and love for those who loved her. Her life will forever influence those who came to know her. She has taught us what to do to enter the kingdom of God.