

My toddler's witness

By [Laura Kelly Fanucci](#)

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His careful movements caught my attention out of the corner of my eye, as I e-mailed and meal-planned and sorted the mail and remembered wet laundry in the washer and half-checked the clock to see when we needed to leave.

Slowly he lifted the oversized magnifying glass to his eyes, peering down at the book on the table in front of him. Gently he brought the glass down towards the page. Then raised it back up again. He turned slightly from where he stood, saw a pencil next to the book, peered down again. Brought the lens up toward his face, then lowered it to watch the perspective change.

For 15 minutes he did this—silently, carefully. Moving gradually from table to chair to couch, inspecting anything and everything that might be of interest: the texture of fabric, the color of pictures, the edges of corners.

At first I noticed. But then I stopped to see.

Our spitfire boy—the stubborn strong will, the coil of energy, the tough temper, the second child slapped with labels simply because he was not the unfettered first forging the way. Here he was the quiet observer, the gentle soul, the patient scientist.

He was mesmerized. He was watching.

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Evangelists extol what it means to be a witness—the bold brashness of shouting truth. Such a shining, staunch ideal: to dig in your heels and declare loudly *this is what I stand for!*

Witness means standing on soapboxes, slapping stickers across car bumpers, screaming from op-ed columns, spamming up online comment boxes. Witness is unwavering, unrelenting, unapologetic defense of the one-and-only way. *Can't you see?*

But I wonder what happened to the eye in witness. The careful, quiet watching it takes to notice truth. The gentle passing of the moment in front of us. The small opening of invitation in which to imagine.

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Slowly I snapped the laptop shut, set down the grocery list, pushed aside the pile of mail. I leaned my elbows on the counter (I noticed it felt cool and hard and glinted in flecks through the morning light), and I looked at him. The same way he watched the world through that huge orange magnifying glass. Intentionally. Openly. Wonderfully.

Of course the mother-guilt snuck in for a second, as it always creeps. *How often do I miss these moments? When am I too wrapped up in my own whirl to see this beauty in front of me? Did I even notice when he got this big?*

But I stopped myself. I let myself sink into the moment and the breath we both held as he observed. The whole house seemed to fall silent—the tick of the clock and the rumble of the furnace and the hum of the fridge and the buzz of the phone and the click of the dog's nails on the floor—and everything, it seemed, was watching him with me.

It was the holiest moment of prayer I have felt in ages.

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*What do you see when you see?*

Our professor used to intone these words from the front of the classroom, over and over again, imploring us behind eyes that had seen decades of change in the church we all loved, urging us to become keener seers of the world around us. *What do you see when you see?*

. . .

I see him now.

I see him reading quietly to himself, flipping pages, staring intently at illustrations that intrigue him. I see him swirling water in the jar for watercolors, dabbing his paintbrush in careful patterns. I see him pushing trucks, watching the wheels spin,

bending his head so far down to see them turn that he nearly rests his forehead on the floor. I see him holding the cup under the stream from the faucet, fluttering his tiny fingers in the rush of cool, pouring and filling and pouring again.

He is a witness. I am, too.

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