

Priority Number One

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Dear Friend,

Buried within these pages you will find my naked soul. I have laid myself bare in an attempt to see clearly the tangle of yarn that is my emotions, thoughts and feelings around parenting. I have been carefully teasing apart the knots, trying to avoid making things more of a mess than they already are. I'm pretty sure that the job will never be "done," but that's okay. It's a soothing (and at times, very vexing) process nonetheless.

To be brutally honest, I am writing this book for myself. However, I wouldn't be publishing it if I weren't also writing it for you. In fact, I am going to great lengths to make this book available NOW. At this chaotic stage of my life. Why? Because of what I believe about parenting. I'll sum it up here: Parenting is possibly the most difficult endeavor we will ever face. The human trend is to avoid pain and difficulty at all costs, but, when parents are not intentional with their parenting, the whole world suffers. That effect is not immediate, but it is forthcoming.

I wrote this book because I have had a hard time being a parent. For something that is my job every minute of each and every day, I wanted to enjoy it more. Through writing, I have gained greater perspective and understanding. Through writing, I have been guided to what I needed to change about

myself and my parenting in order to be a happier me. The greatest change came after I sorted out my priorities and put God at the top of my list. My pleasure from parenting has since skyrocketed, as did my confidence in it. My goal is to show you a purposeful path that you can travel to get those same results. I still have days that I would rather not repeat, and so will you, but I know that God will take your every effort and multiply it to your benefit as well as the benefit of your children.

I expect, by the end, that you will have a more clear idea of what steps you can take and changes you can make to your life in order to have a more satisfying and gratifying experience as a parent! The joy of parenting will be easier to behold after adjusting the focus of your life's lenses. Together, we can create lasting, universal change by becoming better parents.

*Better Parents; Better People,
Crystal*

Preface

I wake up every morning to the exciting adventure of raising small humans! Imagine narrow escapes, adrenaline hits, and things “mostly” working out in the end. Our last adventure was just a couple of days ago. I had left my wallet in Tucson, and had a limited amount of time to retrieve it before our airplane departed from Phoenix. Not a single one of us thought we were going to make it, but somehow (magically) we did. Did we run through the airport with a baby in a stroller, a three year old on Daddy’s shoulders and four boys darting in and out of the crowd? Yes. Were we the last ones to board the plane before they shut the gate? Also yes. I was just excited that when we found our seats, all eight of us were present and accounted for.

The stress of everyday life as a parent of little persons is, at times, staggering. Often, I find myself grasping for something, anything, that will help me not feel so vulnerable.

I saw a video of a father taking time to be with his two-year-old daughter. She was in the middle of an epic

tantrum. There was kicking, screaming, and crying while dad sat supporting her through the experience. While it was definitely inspiring, I also felt discouraged. I have six children. SIX hooligans under the age of twelve. There are so many things that I have to get done in a day and so many people's needs to be aware of; it doesn't seem likely that I would ever be able to offer that kind of support to a single child.

I have been listening to parenting podcasts, reading parenting books and taking parenting courses. Every time I come away with new things to try, but there are always parts that I don't agree with or pieces that don't really fit my family. Usually I give up after something doesn't work, compare myself to all the other parents out there, and then I fall. Overwhelm is the pit I usually land in, which, on occasion, has led to deeper, darker emotions. I decided that I needed a book that would strengthen my core, and that I should write it myself.

When I was a teenager I started writing letters. I wrote them to my future husband, my future kids¹ and my future self. The earliest ones are irritatingly adolescent, but I see that they were a way for me to keep my hopes and dreams close when they seemed so far away. Even now, when I am frustrated and overwhelmed I pull out a pen and some paper and start

¹ I know that a kid is technically a baby goat. While baby goats *are* super cute, I will be using the term "kid" to refer to human children.

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to write. Addressing my fears, concerns and emotions in this way has been an invaluable exercise for this stage of my parenting, so I decided to include several letters.

You will also encounter seven prioritization steps. These steps are designed to progressively bring mindfulness to your current lifestyle. This will help you understand what things make parenting so difficult, and give you ideas on what you can do about it.

I also knew that I needed to confront several of the parenting hazards that I have noticed and make my own plans to avoid them. These are potential problems that we need to be conscious of because many good parents fall into these traps and stay there. Each chapter will contain a letter written to myself, a prioritization step for you to take as well as a parent trap to be aware of and avoid.

I hope that reading this book will inspire you to take a look at the life you have created and choose to improve upon it. You have the power to significantly decrease the frequency of hellish experiences that you go through as a parent. You will be more satisfied, more comfortable and more joyful as you create positive change within yourself through the process of prioritization. The world will be a better place and your children will be better too. They need to watch you try. They need to see you exhibit what it is to fail but not lose. And, yeah, you are going to fail (probably often),

but that's okay! You are the best *you* when failure no longer keeps you from continuing to strive.