

parent on purpose



A Courageous Approach to Raising Children in a Complicated World

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Introduction

The Decision That Changed Everything

In 2014, my husband Keith and I bought a motorhome, packed up our twelve- year-old triplet sons and eleven-year-old daughter, said goodbye to our carefully constructed Phoenix lifestyle, and left to travel around the United States.

Why would we do such a thing?

Because we had to.

On the surface, life couldn't have appeared more successful. There were A's on the kids' report cards; trophies on the shelves; and money in the bank. Yet, underneath this facade of worldly success, our family was disconnected and drifting apart.

We claimed one reality yet lived another. Our children were accomplished and achieved at a high level while we funded their opportunities and shuttled them around. We rarely gathered around the dinner table or sat together in a church pew.

Although Keith and I said faith and family were priorities, our calendars told a different story. We consistently divided and conquered life apart from one another. With kids in various activities, Keith and I continually sat, separately, on the sidelines of our children's lives cheering them on until one day we woke up to the fact that we were growing apart as a couple and as a family, and we needed to make a change.

We had allowed popular culture to dictate our family narrative. I had wanted to cultivate a more connected family than the one I grew up in, yet how could that ever be possible when we didn't even spend much time together? I wanted my children to grow up in an outward focused home with God at the helm, yet our priorities served ourselves rather than Jesus.

Though it was scary, we knew that bravely saying yes to this RV adventure was precisely the medicine our disconnected family needed. So, Keith sacrificed his position as player development coach for the Chicago Blackhawks. We pulled our kids out of their public-school classrooms and off of their club sports teams, and we resigned from our organized activities. We said goodbye to our friends and life as we knew it, and, for over half a year, our family bonded our way around forty- four states. It was a journey that strengthened our disjointed family and changed our perspectives on parenting.

My blog followers, friends, and family encouraged me to write a book about our adventures, so I began writing this narrative about what I thought you'd want to know regarding touring around our beautiful country. I planned to tell you about the friendly town of Lava Hot Springs, Idaho, and how you should visit the covered bridges of Quechee, Vermont, in the fall. I was going to write about our stay at the unique sheep farm in Montana and about the natural waterslide our kids went down over and over again in Asheville, North Carolina.

But, as I began to write these stories, I realized that this wasn't what I wanted to share with you. I'd already written about our experiences and the places we visited on my blog, so I no longer wanted this book to be about where to take your kids or the best routes to get there.

I realized that what I wanted to share with you was the heart behind our trip—our why. How we became proactive instead of reactive parents, and how we learned to consciously parent on purpose today to cultivate the legacy that we want to leave behind tomorrow.

Just as our family couldn't travel around the USA without a roadmap and a plan, you and I can't aimlessly lead our families without claiming where in the world we're headed or how we plan to get there.

I've written this book as a reminder that we, as parents, only get one shot at raising a child and cultivating a healthy childhood. We get one chance to take the time and make the effort to influence the people who currently live in our care and under our guidance.

Keith and I will soon launch our triplets and our daughter within one year of each other. I don't want to sit at their high school graduations or at college drop-off feeling sad or

regretting that I should have done this or could have done that differently. Instead, I want to embrace the end of full-time parenthood now and make choices today with this inevitable moment in mind.

Parent on Purpose is not about striving to be the perfect mother or father or to raise perfect children. We are imperfect humans raising imperfect little humans. Perfection is never our goal; the objective of this book is to help you become more intentional.

In this book, I share my process of how to better parent on purpose through three simple pillars—LEAD, LOVE, and LAUNCH.

In the first part, LEAD, we will discuss how to strengthen our personal and family identity by taking the time and making the effort to claim who we are, what we believe, and how we can better live what we say to be our truth. In this section, we determine our vision, values, and purpose.

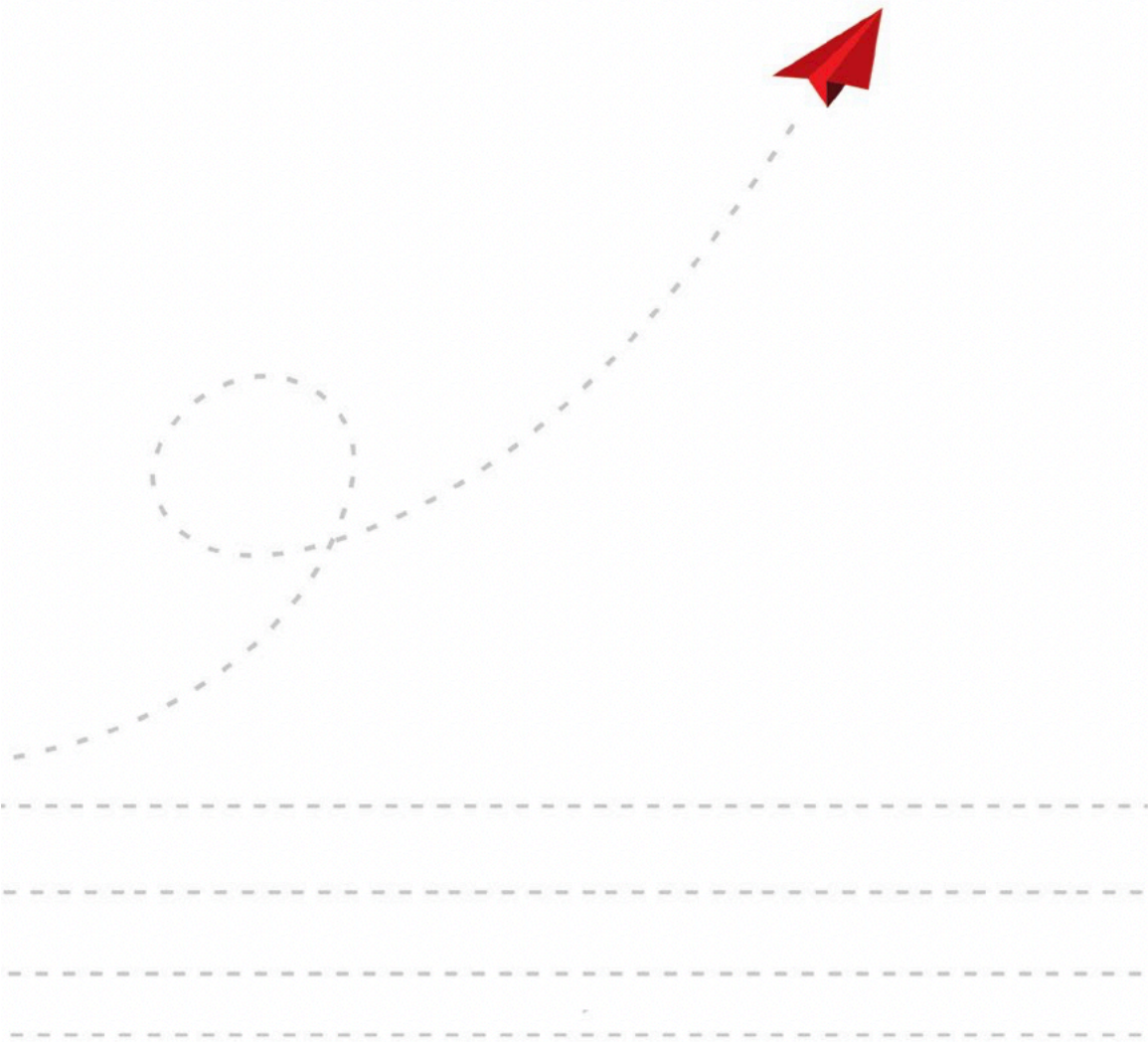
The second part, LOVE, is about purposely strengthening our family relationships by taking the time and making the effort to put down the screens and play more. We'll touch on the importance of developing a unique family culture that is abundant in meaningful traditions and rituals.

Finally, we will talk about how we need to better prepare our child for the LAUNCH into adulthood. We will focus on strengthening our child's life skills and their ability to focus on others rather than just themselves. We will discuss how we can raise hard working, responsible, and empathetic adults.

My hope is that one of the ideas, inspirations, strategies, or stories in here was written just for you. I hope this book inspires you to better parent on purpose today so that you feel more joy and peace raising your child and launching them into the world tomorrow. No matter how many children you have or how many years have already passed, you can pause, pivot, and plan a purposeful course for your family.

Let's parent on purpose today, my friend, while we still can!

Amy



lead on purpose



PARENT  Be proactive
from the end *instead of reactive*



WHERE ARE YOU HEADED?
VISION - VALUES - PURPOSE

Take the time  *author*
MAKE THE EFFORT *your story*



Determine your destination
TRANSFER YOUR VALUES
PRIORITIZE YOUR PURPOSE

Mind
the gap

Childhood  AIM FOR
is not a dress rehearsal adulthood

BUILD YOUR | THINK CHARACTER
value village | OVER COLLEGE

18
YEARS

BE THE EXAMPLE |
WALK YOUR TALK
practice what you preach

make
courageous
CHOICES

ACT
LIKE THE
CEO

Focus on the WHO
instead of the DO





Chapter 1

Visualize the End

Imagine that your loved ones have gathered. Family members and friends have flown into town. Your tribe has reunited to celebrate your baby who graduates from high school tomorrow. You can't believe you've already arrived at this monumental moment.

How did the time pass so quickly? Tonight's celebration will kick off with a film highlighting your family story over the past eighteen years.

This movie won't be the ordinary five-minute montage that we've all seen before—smiling photos set to a sappy theme song. No, imagine that this flick will be about the actual journey of your family, and what the main character, your graduate, has experienced while living in your home.

The buzz of everyone's excitement will calm as the lights dim, and your family reel begins. You're feeling good, smug even. Hadn't you provided your son with everything he needed and more? Hadn't you pushed him to achieve on every level? Stood up for him in every battle?

Get ready for the eighteen-year adventures of your firstborn. Roll 'em.

The film starts off just fine. What a cute baby! And look, what a loving big brother he was as the siblings came along. But, wait a minute. Who are all of these older ladies you keep passing in the grocery stores advising you to enjoy your children as you stressfully push them through the aisles? "Enjoy them. They grow up fast." Sure, you can see their wisdom now, but you were busy, for goodness sake. What did they know about your life?

The images speed up—this class, that class, this team, that team, dinners in the car, dinners alone, parents split up at various events, kids alone with cell phones, tablets, Netflix, and YouTube. What about that vacation we squeezed in the summer between eighth grade and high school? Oh yeah, there it went.

Hey, slow this film down! We had more together time than this, didn't we? We laughed sometimes. I know we did, yet the scenes are showing a different story.

You slouch in your seat as you realize that the family story everyone is viewing on the screen isn't unique at all. The audience is stuck watching a childhood consumed with achievements, accomplishments, accolades, and stuff. They watch your family members divided and disconnected, and you realize, suddenly, how ordinary and boring it all seems. Maybe, those strangers in the grocery store were right. Their hindsight was meant to be your insight, but instead, you chose to ignore their truth.

You begin to feel sad. Guilty. Uneasy. Cheated, perhaps. You realize you want to go back and start over, but it's too late. The way you spent that precious time with your family is over. Your firstborn's eighteen-year reel is complete, and he's now ready to leave the security of your home and head into the real world. You break out in a sweat as you realize you want to stop the movie, but you can't because the actual narrative has already played out in real life.

There is no second chance at creating a childhood. You wonder how nearly two decades flew by without you understanding the depth of this precious season. Until this moment, you hadn't realized that you were actually in charge of authoring this story—that you would be the screenwriter. Why didn't anyone tell you that? Had you understood that, perhaps everyone would have seen a much different story play out on the big screen tonight.

Your head spins as you wonder if you did enough for your child. Or, perhaps, you did too much?

Did you teach your son the things that will sustain him as an adult living in the real world? Did you create enough meaningful moments during his childhood to keep him connected to family relationships while he is gone?

The film ends, and you wish with all of your heart that you had begun your parenting journey with this film in mind.

In today's culture, a strong family story doesn't happen by accident, and neither does raising a strong adult. Both are cultivated by a purposeful leader who takes the time and

makes an effort to turn a vision into reality through intentional action. Our goal, as parents, is to get to that movie theater to celebrate our high school graduate and feel joyful watching his childhood story unfold on the big screen. Our job is to take our eighteen-year screenwriting journey seriously.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Screenwriters begin writing their script with the end in mind so that they can stay focused on how they want the story to turn out. When we know the end goal, as a screenwriter or a parent, we can better create the scenes that will lead the characters in our story to the desired ending. If we just cruise along, reactively writing the narrative as we go, we will most likely be surprised when the ending sneaks up on us and looks nothing like we had intended.

What keeps us from proactively parenting and living out the stories we really want to tell in the end?

The problem starts with the cereal aisle in our local mega-grocery store. Can you say overwhelming? Why do we need over 130 varieties of boxed breakfast cereals to decide between? Back in the day, there was one yellow box of ordinary Cheerios. Now, there are at least thirteen flavors of that brand to choose from.

In America, we are bombarded with too many choices in every aspect of our lives. Our culture has complicated everything, from cereal choices to parenthood. It's no wonder we're confused, stressed, and overwhelmed when raising children today. We don't know which way we're supposed to turn. So, rather than taking the time to figure it out, we just continue in our daily routine, tackling what's put in front of us because it appears to matter the most.

We jump into raising a child and mistakenly spend nearly two decades tackling the urgent, disguised as important. Our daily calendars and checklists distract us from fully grasping the fact that the finish line of full-time parenthood is looming ahead. We forget that the child we are raising today is indeed going to grow up and leave us, even though this is, and has been, the goal for all parents since the beginning of time. Yet, it is all too common today to hear parents express surprise that this phase of life has already come to an end.

Not long ago, as I patiently stood in line to pick up my photos at Costco, I noticed the woman in front of me staring intently at the high school graduation announcement in her hand. In my boredom and desire to connect with another adult human, I thought I'd share in her excitement and said, "How awesome. Is that your handsome son?"

I was not expecting her to turn around, with her eyes full of tears and regret, as she said, “Yes. But, no one tells you that one day they are going to grow up and leave you.” And without hesitation, I replied, “Yes, they do. But we just don’t want to believe it.”

The mother (at this moment) had forgotten the goal was to launch her child and was now feeling some remorse. Perhaps she felt she hadn’t spent enough time with her son. Or, maybe she felt that she hadn’t invested enough in herself while raising him, so she was afraid to face the reality of being without him. It’s hard to know what exactly her regrets stemmed from. When faced with my children’s high school graduation announcements, I hope that the sadness I’ll feel about the end of their childhoods is counterbalanced by an equal amount of joy and peace, knowing that I did my best to launch them into adulthood. This story makes me contemplate what I can do now that will make me feel positive emotions rather than negative ones when I put my full-time parenting role to rest.

God willing, our children will grow up and move into adulthood, as is the natural progression in life. Like it or not, this is an inevitable fact of parenthood. Our particular family reality is that our triplet sons, and subsequently our daughter, will leave our full-time care within one year of each other. As quickly as our foursome entered our home, they will depart from it.

As parents, our “job” is to help our children successfully separate from us at the age of majority and transition into the real world on their own.

I should have told my Costco counterpart not to fret because the chances of her son moving back in with her are pretty good. According to the US Census Bureau, more young adults live in their parents’ home than ever before. One in three young people, or about twenty-four million eighteen to thirty-four-year-olds, lived in their parents’ home in 2015. Of young people living in their parents’ home, one in four are idle—they neither go to school nor work. This figure represents about 2.2 million twenty-five to thirty-four-year-olds.

Given the attention paid to the “boomerang generation” that has “failed to launch,” it is surprising that Americans don’t rate living independently as a more significant step toward adulthood. Only a quarter of Americans today think that moving out of their parents’ home is a vital part of adulthood. This is a problem.

The Carney children fully know that moving out of their childhood home is a prerequisite for adulthood. That’s not to say that they might need to move home for a brief period of time. But the point is that children must grow up with an understanding that living independently is a perk of adulthood, not a curse. If we never have conversations with our

older children about our expectations of them moving out one day, we can't be surprised when they are still living in our basement much longer than we ever intended.

Perhaps you have heard about the lawsuit Christina and Mark Rotondo filed against their thirty-year-old son. They wanted him to move out and get a job but had to take him to court to evict him from their New York family home. Their son, Michael, said that he felt it was "really unfair" that he didn't get time to plan a "good move." It's evident that this man should have been taught much earlier that life, in fact, can be unfair, and that the perks of childhood must come to an end long before the age of thirty. This case is extreme, but a prime example of what can happen when parents have no end vision and don't properly lead their young adults, or themselves, with the imminent launch in mind.

My teenagers continuously say how unfair it is that they can't have this or can't do that. I tell them to add whatever it is to their ever-growing list of things they can make happen when they move out of our house into adulthood. Childhood is the perfect time for our sons and daughters to get used to the bumps and bruises that unfortunately come with living in the real world. Better that children learn to roll with the punches now instead of being surprised by them later.

WHAT'S THE SOLUTION?

Aim for Adulthood

There's no need to guess where we're headed when raising our children. No matter how we decide to play out the details of our family stories, you and I are parenting toward the same goal: adulthood.

Would you ever jump in a rowboat and head down a river without oars, allowing the current to take you wherever it may? I don't think so, yet this is precisely what we are doing when we jump into parenthood without determining an overarching vision. Instead of intentionally paddling ourselves toward our desired destination, we drift along to wherever popular culture decides to take us, which is most likely not where we want to go.

Stop drifting and claim adulthood as the destination for parenting your child today. Get in your boat, pick up the oars, and purposefully paddle your family toward launch day.

STRATEGIES TO CONSIDER

Parent Six Years Forward

Childhood is not a dress rehearsal, and if you are reading this book, then most likely, the production is well underway. Wherever you may find yourself on the parenthood journey, stop and visualize the day you will launch your child into adulthood.

Now, let's breakdown childhood into three six-year seasons. From zero to six years old is the protection season, when it can be tough to do much more than caretake and survive most days. In the middle, we have what I call our primetime season, when raising children between the ages of seven and twelve. The final season, the preparation years, encompasses ages thirteen to eighteen.

What season is your firstborn in now? Claim that, and then parent ahead to the next season. If your child is in preschool, figure out what you will be facing in elementary school. If your child is in elementary school, look at what parents are dealing with in middle school. And so on and so forth—keep looking ahead!

The good thing is, whether you are currently raising a toddler or a teenager, your screenplay is still in progress. You have time to pause, pivot, and plan for changes that you want and need to make.

Define Your Parenting Purpose

#parentinggoals

Companies have mission statements and manifestos to help them stay focused on their purpose, so why shouldn't we, as parents, create one to help our family stay on a purposeful course.

A manifesto stating who we are, what we believe, and why we believe it to be true will help us lead our family from a proactive state. I call this manifesto a parenting purpose statement. It spells out—*This is us. This is who we are. This is what we do and why we do it.*

No one in your family should ever wonder what you stand for or what your beliefs, goals, values, and expectations are.

A parenting purpose statement helps us define what we desire and hope for when raising our children. It is a personal road map to help you proactively make decisions based on your family priorities and purpose.

Get clear on the end goal for raising your child by starting with what it is that you don't want. Knowing what I don't want has helped me figure out what exactly it is that I do want while raising my children.

Claim What You Don't Want:

- I don't want a family who ...
- I don't want to raise children who ...
- I don't want to launch adults who ...
- I don't want a home where ...

• *Now, Claim What You Do Want:*

- I want a family who ...
- I want to raise children who ...
- I want to launch adults who ...
- I want a home where ...

If we, as parents, don't take the time to get clear on our desires, we will spend the journey raising our children in reaction to what happens around us in the day to day, stuck in the urgent disguising itself as important.

Let your parenting purpose statement reflect what you believe and help you make courageous choices and decisions based on what you've claimed.

GET STARTED TODAY!

As parents, one of the most important things we can do is regularly evaluate our family priorities and if we are truly living life in accordance with what we say and believe to be important. Is there a gap between what you desire and your current reality?

Pause

What is your present reality?

Envision being in that movie theater tonight watching your firstborn's narrative on the big screen. What makes you happy about what's played out thus far? What makes you feel regret? How do you want to feel as your full-time parenting role comes to an end?

Pivot

What do you want to keep the same? What do you want to do differently?

What would it look like for you to take your parenting journey more seriously? What changes do you now want to make as a result of seeing where you are and knowing that adulthood is your destination?

Plan

What action can you take to move things in the direction you want to go?

Take the time and make the effort to write your parenting purpose statement. What do you want your young adult armored with as they face life on their own without you? What lessons do you want to instill, and how will you go about doing so?

Want guidance creating your parenting purpose statement? Turn to Appendix A where I share how Keith and I wrote ours.

To continue, order the book *Parent on Purpose* by Amy Carney [HERE](#).