

The grit and the glamour

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Before I had children, I had a hazy image of life with kids. I don't think I idealized it as pure ease and smooth delight, but the montage of pictures that would flash through my mind looked much more like parenting's "best of" reel.

Taking them to the playground on sunlit afternoons. Chasing them laughing before bath time. Cuddling up on the couch with favorite books. Watching them learn to ride a bike. Spinning them around the dance floor at family weddings.

My movie montage still sneaks into my head in nostalgic moments. I know exactly why our memories choose to cement the best-of as hard truth. Because the grit which grinds through most of our days is not what keeps us going. **It's the glamour.**

I saw this desire in spades on social media in the days leading up to Christmas and New Year's. Pictures of grinning cherubs in matching Sunday best. Families gathered beneath twinkling trees. Perfect holiday dinner spreads and champagne toasts.

No one shows the screaming toddler before she was wrestled into the party dress. Or the disastrous kitchen mess shut behind the dining room doors. Or the dreaded family dysfunction that erupted hours after the happy photo shoot.

We want to remember the glamour, not the grit.

Writing a book is like this, too. People only see the final product, the shiny cover, the glowing endorsements. *How do you do it?* they ask, admiring. But like curious strangers who ask busy parents how they manage, no one wants to hear about the grit. No one wants to hear that a book is born through blood, sweat, and tears. Hours of sitting in the lonely chair and writing, rewriting, deleting, despairing, procrastinating, quitting, crying, cursing, then writing more.

As a reader, I know this temptation. I imagine my favorite novels poured forth from the divinely inspired fingers of the author with ease and grace. In my mind it's all

glamour. Envable and elusive.

And herein lies the problem. **I see others' glamour, not their grit.** What we present to the world is never the full truth from behind the scenes.

You see my kids at church and compliment us on a beautiful family, and all I want to tell you is how exhausted we all feel and how everyone yelled at each other as we left the house and how this is honestly the last place I want to be.

But you don't have time to hold all my grit. We prefer each other's glamour. (If you don't believe me, try answering honestly for a few weeks whenever someone asks, "How are you?" People are taken aback if you let them inside whatever is weighing heavy on your heart.)

So how do we balance grit and glamour? The answer for me always comes back to calling. Any vocation holds both: the beautiful moments when life shines and the irritating moments when we would gladly trade places with anyone else. This is how it works when we start to make our way in the world. We discover it is harder than we thought and also exactly where we are meant to be.

My hunch is that whatever your life's work, you have felt this same frustration between your well-worn reality and others' idealized perceptions. People see the product but not the process. The glamour of "for better" and not the grit of "for worse."

Right now I'm in the midst of wrestling another book into being. I love it and hate it in equal parts. When the words flow and the paragraphs click, I marvel at how right it feels and how lucky I am to have this be my work. When I'm stuck and stressed and spitting sick of the subject I've been thinking about so long that it haunts my dreams at night, I want to chuck the whole project at the wall and take up woodworking.

But if I remember that callings always come with this tension—the bright and the dark, the affirmation and the desolation—then I can better hold my own grit and glamour together in the same two hands.

So that when you ask me how I did it, how I wrote another book with all these kids underfoot (and two more on the way), I will not simply smile and shrug that I don't know, simply because it's the easy answer, the societal pleasantries. Instead I will tell

you honestly: hard work, sheer grace, lots of sacrifice from me and the ones I love. The exact way we are raising these children.

It's all part of our callings, isn't it? The shining and the suffering. The glamour and the grit.

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