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FAMILY TIES

For You, My Child

BY SUSAN E. MURRAY

There are two lasting bequests we can give our children; one is roots and the other is wings. —William Hodding Carter II

My Child,

I read your Christmas letter with tears in my eyes and gratitude in my heart. You, my child, gave me one of my best gifts ever! Let me share some thoughts with you as we begin this new year together.

You can count on me to love you absolutely, unabashedly and forever — no matter what! You can count on me to listen more and instruct you less, teach you skills as we work together at home, enjoy your friends, and make only promises I can keep.

I want to be a skilled parent — teaching, modeling, encouraging and supporting you all the years of your life. I want to be a respectful, responsible, courageous parent, advocating for you and loving you in the ways you need. I am committed to being an askable parent in this coming year. That means you can talk to me about anything on your mind, and I will do my best to listen and then share my thoughts if and when you ask for them. I will do my best to refrain from sucking the joy out of everyday experiences, and I need you to let me know when you hear me doing that! Along with that, I want to be a spiritual partner with you as you deepen your understanding of God and His love for all of us.

Did you know you are responsible for many positive changes in my life? I have been moved past my wants to clarify and assist in meeting your needs. I understand more about my own childhood and appreciate my parents more. Because of you, my world has gotten bigger and better. Did you know I am smarter now that I have you? I am more perceptive (more sensitive to babies' cries and even grown-ups' emotional reactions), efficient (even though I don't feel that way much of the time), resilient (every crisis is not a



calamity, and I am fearless in protecting you), and motivated (to learn more, to take better care of you, myself and the Earth). I have even increased my social skills. I now know how to talk to little people, and am better at getting along with them. I better understand myself, my God and my purpose in life. Thank you!

I know I am not always all you want or need in a parent. Sometimes, my own feelings interfere with my parenting. I let everyday stresses and grown-up concerns seem more important than you. I have been told that, as a parent, I am the single most important influence and resource in your life. But, I sometimes struggle with peer pressure, guilt, fear, a lack of confidence and faith. These are not your responsibilities; they are mine. I am still growing and learning myself!

Here are some things I need from you. Share with me the things you are learning, your hopes and dreams for your future, accomplishments, questions, doubts and fears. Also, be honest with me, and hold me accountable. What a privilege it is to be your parent!

Loving you forever and always,

Your parent

P.S. I know there are some big, maybe unfamiliar, words in this letter. Let's talk about what I have written.

P.P.S. Watch for messages on those bananas!

Susan E. Murray is a professor emerita of behavioral sciences at Andrews University, certified family life educator, and licensed marriage and family therapist.