

Dressed Up Moms' Devotions to Go



Moms' Devotions to Go Series

Dressed Up Moms' Devotions to Go

Developing Qualities that Reflect Christ's
Beauty

Marilyn Nutter

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means— electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other— except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Copyright Marilyn Nutter, 2012

All Rights Reserved

Published by Simple Joy

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version, ® NIV. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

Scripture taken from the Good News Translation-Second Edition, Copyright © 1992 by the American Bible Society, Used by permission.

Scripture taken from THE MESSAGE, Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group

Quotes for Dressed with Cosmetics taken from Words Begin in Our Hearts, Moody Publishers, ©2003 by Rhonda Rizzo Webb. Used by permission.

G: Randy, Heather, Susan and Katie

You have taught me much about dressing God's way.

Dressed up Moms' Devotions to Go

Every morning Moms get dressed. Whether we wear jeans to run errands, sweats to exercise, or professional clothing to go to work, we are not fully dressed unless we wear God's designer wardrobe. Dressed up Moms' Devotions to Go will nourish your spirit and inspire you to develop qualities that reflect Christ's beauty so that we can enjoy life to the fullest and positively influence our world. Join me in the following pages as we look at God's custom wardrobe, one that will enable us to:

Reflect lovely accessories,
dress appropriately as we confront challenges,
enhance our relationships and
display beauty to others.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Dressed with a New Wardrobe | 8 |
| Dressed for All Seasons | 10 |
| Dressed with Contentment | 12 |
| Dressed with Compassion | 14 |
| Dressed with Gifts | 16 |
| Dressed with Accessories | 18 |
| Dressed for Crisis | 20 |
| Dressed with an Enlightened Heart | 22 |
| Dressed with Praise | 24 |
| Dressed with a Designer Label | 26 |
| Dressed with Strength | 28 |
| Dressed with Wisdom | 30 |
| Dressed with Fragrance | 32 |
| Dressed with a Complete Ensemble | 34 |
| Dressed for Genuine Friendship | 36 |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Dressed with a Fruit Pattern | 38 |
| Dressed with a Coordinated Outfit | 40 |
| Dressed with Humor | 42 |
| Dressed with Purpose | 44 |
| Dressed with Imitations | 46 |
| Dressed with Discernment | 48 |
| Dressed with Grace | 50 |
| Dressed with the Proper Hemline | 52 |
| Dressed with Shoes for a Perfect Fit | 54 |
| Dressed for Tough Times | 56 |
| Dressed with Cosmetics: Lip-Gloss | 58 |
| Dressed with Humility | 60 |
| Dressed with Love | 62 |

Dressed with a New Wardrobe

“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” 2 Peter 3:18 (NIV)

“Mom, you really need new jeans.” Immediately following Katie’s comment, her sisters chimed in. “We’ve made plans to shop with you when we make our Christmas returns.” “No,” I protested. “My jeans are fine.” As if on cue, the girls—well, not really girls, they’re grown women now and one is a new Mom, said, “No they’re not. They’re out of style. We’re going shopping.”

We made the Christmas returns a few days later and I was hoping we were running out of time when Heather said, “Now let’s look for your jeans.” At a department store and on a mission, Susan passed over particular shades and styles and found several pairs of jeans. With a stack in her arms, she led the way. “Okay, let’s try them on.” I rejected the first few pair. “They’re too long. They’re too tight,” I protested, getting more and more exasperated. “I look ridiculous. I’m not in my twenties like you are.” I looked in the dressing room mirror and then headed to the three-way mirror down the hall. I pleaded to check out some other styles. “Okay,” said Susan. “Go out there. Just like on ‘What Not to Wear,’ you know the rules. Stretch, boot cut, low rise, flattering fit.”

I came back with several pair, none of which worked. I went back to the originals, tried on a pair, and sought a vote of approval from my husband, patiently waiting while this extreme makeover occurred. “Beautiful,” he acknowledged. “They really look good. I wouldn’t mislead you.” He was right; he wouldn’t. I began to wear my jeans with more confidence. Would I dare admit that the jeans did flatter my figure and make my thighs look thinner? I had succumbed to family pressure, reluctantly agreed with their assessment, and purchased the jeans.

I learned a lot trying on jeans that day. Being out of style and the need to maximize my appearance were accompanied with frustration, knowing the rules and eventually, confidence. The results were an attractive makeover. How many times am I out of His style, not following His lead, or communicating in His style of

love? Frustration sets in as a wife, Mom, and friend. I try again, hoping to get it right. In my appearance a glowing expression and inner peace are minimized, and sometimes even erased, by my anxious thoughts and futile attempts to do things my way. The rules? I know the "rules." God gives me direction to show me what's best for me and to protect me from making mistakes. He's provided a guidebook, yet how many times do I think I know what is best?

Where do I place my confidence, in my effort or in God? Where do I seek advice --a popular magazine article, the Bible, or a trusted friend who has past experiences to help and wisdom that only God can give?

My wardrobe changes and extreme makeover are a work in progress. I'm not quite there, but as I go on my journey God tells me He loves me, shows me His wardrobe and delights in my new styles. Following His lead, I'm changing and growing, wearing a new look made by Him, even if it means a lesson in getting used to new jeans.

*Prayer: Father, thank you for being patient with me and helping me to grow and change. In Jesus' name,
Amen.*

Dress Up!

What style is God seeking to change in you? An attitude? Patience? Accepting and adjusting to a change in your life? Look for Bible principles and promises that can encourage you in your makeover. How can you establish a regular habit of Bible reading? Write one thing you will do this week to work at establishing that habit.

Dressed for All Seasons

“There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven.” Ecclesiastes 3:1 (NIV)

We came home from the band banquet and breathed a sigh. It had been a long season beginning with summer practice and ending with the November football playoffs. Four years of marching band were a commitment for our daughter and the whole family. Football games, competitions, overnights, and fundraisers—all occupied spaces on the calendar that left little time for anything else, but it was worth every minute. With this season behind us, we were about to enter another one, the holidays! Seasons continue.

As parents, our children's seasons of activities involve adjustment, flexibility and anticipation for the family. We move from selecting the right pre-school to choosing the right college and everything in between. We're excited with our children's new discoveries and interests and when they sign up for an activity, it means that we sign up too. Our seasons include carpooling and working through friendship skirmishes and struggles. We glow when our children accept an award or solve a problem. We hurt with their disappointments. We grow with them through each season and leave part of ourselves behind as we evolve into the next phase of life.

But Moms have their personal seasons apart from our children's. We have seasons of close friendships and seasons of loneliness. We may enter the workplace or leave it. Talents and skills are unleashed as we take on new responsibilities in the workplace or parent organizations, sometimes filling roles we never thought we could. Sometimes our self-esteem has been lifted and occasionally left a bit damaged, but we learn. We grow and we may even glow.

I remember my decision to leave teaching after 23 years. It was not an easy decision to make. My children were grown. I was full of uncertainty. Would I be lonely? Would I be bored? What will I do with my time? The answer came one day as I was sorting through drawers and found one of our daughter Susan's wedding favors. Attached to her favor, she and Jon had chosen a Bible verse that reflected their confident anticipation as

they began married life: Isaiah 42:16 (NIV) “Along unfamiliar paths I will guide them.” There it was, an encouragement for my changes, coming from my daughter as she approached her new season. There is a time for everything...a season for every activity. With each seasonal change, we can wear the key style. We can dress in confidence because He leads us along each unfamiliar path. We grow and yes, even glow.

Prayer: Father, thank you for your faithfulness in the seasons that I have passed through. As I enter new seasons, help me to do so with anticipation and confidence, knowing that you are with me in each unfamiliar path. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Dress up!

Begin to keep a journal. Record your seasons of change and lessons you have learned. How can that help you as you anticipate new seasons to come? Find a Scripture verse that will be an encouragement to you for your current season. Record it in your journal and on a 3x5 card that you can keep in a prominent place as a reminder.

Dressed with Contentment

“But godliness with contentment is great gain.” 1 Timothy 6:6 (NIV)

“This is for you. Just a small gift to say thank you for all you’ve done this year.” Lori handed me a decorative jar filled with banana cake. Our conversation was interrupted as the president approached the microphone and called the final meeting of the year to order and I placed the jar in my briefcase. At home I shared the sentiment of the gift and Lori’s appreciation with my family during dinner. My family was fascinated with the notion that a cake could be baked in a jar. So was I. The jar was lovely. It started out as a canning jar, but by the time Lori had finished, it displayed a charming gingham cover, raffia bow, a decorative label, and a tag with a scripture verse on it. She had taken a lot of time to express her thanks in a personal way.

Katie suggested we make a pot of coffee and cut into the unusual cake for dessert. As the coffee was brewing, I got out the mugs and dessert plates. I pried open the jar and saw the top of a perfectly baked cake. The cake’s aroma erupted. “Wow,” Katie said, “that smells delicious.” I took a dull knife and carefully ran it around the edge of the jar, then attempted to invert it on to a plate. Nothing happened. I had never tackled a cake in a jar before so I thought I’d insert a spoon and spoon it out. As I pulled it out, cake batter dripped from the spoon. “Oh my goodness! It’s not cooked,” shrieked Katie. We looked at each other and laughed. “Great way to get salmonella!” The coffee was ready. I returned the plates to the cupboard and we sat around the table and talked as we had our coffee without dessert. The contents of the jar went down the disposal and I put the canning jar into my dishwasher.

Some life experiences are like my banana cake in a jar. We had admired the gift, appreciated the sentiment, anticipated enjoying a slice of cake but met with disappointment. Doesn’t life often bring us people, experiences or situations that we look forward to, only to be disappointed? Things just don’t turn out the way we imagined or planned. Expectations, like our vision of a cup of coffee with a tasty piece of cake that turns out to be unbaked cake batter, aren’t met. When life hands us those experiences, we make choices. We can

grumble or we can go on and have our cup of coffee minus dessert. Happiness is contingent on happenings. Contentment is a quiet resolve that though things may appear one way and turn out another, we can remain stable and be contented, empty jar and all.

Prayer: Father, there are times when my expectations are high or unrealistic and aren't met. Help me to focus on you and with quiet resolve, remain contented. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Dress up!

To help distinguish between happenings, happiness and contentment, start a section in your journal that focuses on contentment. Record experiences that teach you contentment apart from happiness and happenings.

Dressed with Compassion

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion..." Colossians 3:12 (NIV)

"Mom?" The knock at the bathroom door surprised me. "Just a minute," I said, thinking that I was well past children interrupting my bathroom time. I opened the door to my daughter's sullen face. "We broke up." "What?" I said. "What happened?" "Nothing. He just doesn't want to continue a relationship."

There were no "signs." It seemed to be a sudden decision. We walked down the hallway to our spare room. I sat on the floor and we talked; well, she talked. I asked a few questions. She answered. She talked. We reasoned. We couldn't put the pieces together. It just didn't make sense. Her eyes filled up with tears and mine fell to my cheeks. In between the conversation, I silently thanked God for a daughter who would seek me out to share a very personal moment. My mind went back to childhood days when knocks on the bathroom door interrupted my private time of two whole minutes. Times when my daughter needed me to remedy a crisis --- she couldn't find her doll or her puzzle, or needed help with homework. Now she found me because she had another crisis. She was trying to find her way. I thought back to a broken bone and a trip to the ER where an expert fixed it "back to just like it was." I remembered scraped knees, when a kiss and a band-aid fixed everything. I recalled that when my daughters would fall and begin to cry, I'd use a diversionary tactic and say, "check the sidewalk; is the sidewalk broken?" Immediately they'd check the ground and they were distracted from their hurt.

There were no distractions from hurts that would work today. We're on to bigger things now. Mothers can't fix those kinds of life interruptions and disappointments. We can't bring it "back to just like it was" nor can we offer any creative distraction. But we can be there and listen, offer hugs, and shed tears. Even in our silence we can be clothed with compassion as we hand our child and her disappointments over to the "expert," and with our compassion, we can pray.

Prayer: Father, thank you for being the God of all comfort and compassion. Help me to be more aware of the people around me who need comfort and help me to show compassion in specific ways. In Jesus' name, Amen

Dress up!

Read 2 Corinthians 1: 3-7. How does this passage encourage you and help you see a purpose in your challenges and difficult experiences?

Dressed with Gifts

“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.” 1 Peter 4:10 (NIV)

Christmas has changed at our house. Our two married daughters live out of town; one actually lives 2,000 miles away, so our whole family celebrates Christmas together under one roof every other year. It’s been an adjustment, but we have managed to maintain some of our traditions including matching pajamas and enjoying a special Christmas breakfast of cherry bread and sticky buns. Yes, matching pajamas even at age 30. One year I started what I thought would be a new tradition to put a little fun into a now “adult” Christmas. I composed short poems and placed them on gifts. I thought it would make the gift opening last longer and it did. My family howled at my corny poems that were hints as to what was inside the packages. I think they secretly enjoyed the poems. “What, Mom, no poems on the packages this year?” was the question raised last Christmas.

The gifts and the zany poems were tagged with a person’s name and meant especially for them. Clothing gifts suited the personality and color, style, and tastes of the each person. Sometimes the gift added to a hobby or collection. I can always buy Jon a book. Susan collects snowmen. Her house has a variety scattered inside and out all winter long. I can give Randy anything related to fishing. Katie, a traveling teacher, appreciates Starbucks cards. Heather enjoys scrapbook supplies and Paul enjoys gift cards to make a clothing selection. The one thing I know about the gifts I give is that they are not put away in a closet. They are used. I’ve seen Jon read his books. I’ve enjoyed looking through Heather’s scrapbooks and I see Starbucks cups in Katie’s car.

Like my personalized poems and gifts especially intended for my family, God has chosen gifts and given them to us for special purposes. Whether we teach, help, administer, or extend hospitality, each gift is equally important in the church body. There is no one gift that is more important or special than another. His gift is handpicked just for us. God expects us to wear our gifts well to enrich our lives and serve others, not hide them

away in a closet. Have you determined what your spiritual gifts are? Do you use them or are they tucked away and unopened? Go ahead and wear them. The tag has your name on it.

Prayer: Father, thank you for the spiritual gifts you have given to me. Help me to use them well to serve you and others. Thank you for those who use their gifts and bless my life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Dress up!

Read Romans 12: 3-13 and 1 Corinthians 12. Identify your spiritual gifts. What encouragement do you find in these passages? How can you use your gifts to serve others?

Dressed with Accessories

“Get rid of all bitterness...along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ, forgave you.” Ephesians 4:31-32 (NIV)

Susan walked into the room looking like a million dollars. “You look fabulous. I love the pin on your jacket.” “Oh, this?” Susan said, looking down at the flower pin. “I found it on a clearance table. It was marked down from \$10.00 to 75 cents! I thought it matched the outfit and I couldn’t pass up the bargain.” Match it did and it pulled the outfit together. I remember finding the exact shade I needed when I was shopping for my mother of the bride shoes. It made the dress “work.” Yesterday Katie was wearing a pair of earrings that complimented her sweater and it looked as if they were sold together, but they weren’t. She had purchased them at different stores. Accessories can make a difference.

But aside from a pin, shoes, or earrings, we all wear accessories from time to time. Although we often wear humor, joy and encouragement, we may, on occasion, select some unflattering accessories. Sarcasm, a critical spirit, or bitterness are accessories that can break a conversation or a relationship. Eventually, they may break us.

In Hebrews 12:15 Paul encourages us to keep the root of bitterness from springing up in us. When bitterness springs up, it spreads, and reaches others. It also can hurt me. Haven’t we seen a hurt become a sore spot, develop into a major issue, and evolve into bitterness? We harbor an offense or incident, dwell on it, speak about it, and eventually wear it as a prominent accessory. Despite being noticed by those who come in contact with us, bitterness is an accessory that is always out of season, doesn’t compliment any outfit, and doesn’t look good on anyone. Why, then, do we seem to favor it as an accessory? I might feel better for the moment as I dwell on an injustice, retell it or lash out at someone, but the clearance price of venting is hardly worth it.

Are you harboring hurtful issues? Seek to resolve them. Maybe they are issues you can overlook. If not, pray about talking to the person who is involved in your hurt. Clear up issues and see if you bear any fault. Get rid of the accessory of bitterness. Put it away in the drawer where you won't find it. It's not a bargain and it's not worth wearing.

Prayer: Father, I know that I have worn the unflattering accessory of bitterness. Help me to resolve issues that are lingering and to remove bitterness from my life. In Jesus name, Amen.

Dress up!

In Ephesians 4:22-32 Paul discusses some accessories that should be replaced with others. Make two columns on a sheet of paper and write the characteristics and Paul's recommendations. What speaks to you most about the accessories in this list? Is there someone you need to speak to about resolving a conflict that is developing into bitterness? Check the resources on peacemaking given in the notes at the end of this book.

Dressed for Crisis

“Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile.” Exodus 2:3 (NIV)

With Pharaoh's decree to kill male Hebrew babies, Jochebed knew that her new baby boy Moses was in grave danger. Facing a crisis, she devised a clever plan. She made a papyrus basket, placed her baby Moses in it, and set the basket afloat in the Nile River. Hardly a place for a baby's bassinet! Yet with faith, courage, and grace, Jochebed released Moses from her hands and placed him into God's. Rescued by the princess, Moses' life was preserved and Jochebed became his nurse during his formative years. She trained, taught, and loved him. Yes, she had to release him again, but not before she had infused into him his Hebrew identity and surrounded him with her values.

On September 11, Mary watched TV as the Twin Towers crumbled knowing that her daughter worked a few blocks away from the burning buildings. That morning she remembered the story of Jochebed and Moses. In prayer, Mary placed her daughter in a basket that day. She trusted God to give her daughter strength and courage if she needed it; to spare her if that was His desire; or, if He chose, to take her to heaven. Mary, like Jochebed, released her daughter into God's hands.

God often calls us to exercise faith and courage by placing what we hold precious in baskets, and present those baskets to Him. Sometimes we need to offer Him our difficult or disappointing relationships. Sometimes we have to release a goal or a dream that is not yet realized and we move on with grace. Sometimes we must give Him circumstances that seem hopeless. But like Jochebed, an ordinary woman who used an ordinary item to release her son, in faith, we can release what we hold into the hands of an extraordinary God. Acting in love and wisdom, God will fulfill His purposes as we leave results with Him. With faith and courage in our offering, we can be dressed for crisis.

Prayer: Father, help me to draw on faith and act with courage and grace as I face challenges and crisis. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Dress Up!

Read Exodus 2:1-10. Jochebed must have experienced a roller coaster of emotions during this crisis chapter of her life. What can we do to develop stability during times of crisis? What is God calling you to release as you act in faith? Is it a disappointment, a relationship, impatience in circumstances, financial challenges, an overwhelming daily schedule? What steps can you take to release what you are hanging on to? How can you develop a more regular prayer life? Can you find a prayer partner? Can you find a Scripture that holds encouragement and offers stability and confidence for you?

Dressed with an Enlightened Heart

"I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened..." Ephesians 1:18 (NIV)

Moms are great at looking around. I know I always went looking around when the house became a little too quiet. "What are you doing?" I asked Katie and Susan on one of those occasions. "Just playing," was their answer. Later I discovered a clump of hair in Katie's closet and my suspicions about the unusual quiet were confirmed. Susan had granted Katie's request for a haircut. We look around and guard our child's safety on the playground and move just in time to keep him from taking a tumble. I recall one time, catching our three-year-old as she was about to jump into the deep end of a swimming pool. I looked around just in time. Moms are accused of having eyes in the back of our heads. You know, you're in another room but you have a sense that your child is taking a snack and about to spoil his dinner. You know you're right as you hear the noisy cellophane from a bag of cookies.

But Moms sometimes look around in other ways too. We play the comparison game with our dress size, appearance, house, furniture, finances, or our children's academic or athletic success. In the workplace, we compare our performance with that of co-workers. We look around. We compare and compete. We feel and sometimes fear, that we don't measure up to others. We buy into myths that our culture defines as success and passes off as necessary for our happiness.

In Ephesians 1, Paul speaks about looking -- looking with the eyes of our heart. It seems unusual to associate those anatomical parts, but Paul is praying that we look with our inner self. Instead of looking around, he wants us to look up and look within. The eyes of my heart: to see with my inner self. Paul's discussion includes the accompaniment of an enlightened heart: hope and security of our eternal future. He reassures us of God's great power for us who believe. No need to look around. My security is in a God who loves me. My hope is firm in One who has great power. I can dress by using the eyes of my heart to give me an enlightened perspective. The outfit doesn't include looking around, making comparisons, and thinking that I don't measure up. My enlightened heart lets me look up and have hope. It encourages me to look within and have joy. Dressing with

an enlightened heart is the perfect seasonal wardrobe of confidence and includes accessories that offer a fresh new look.

Prayer: Father, Help me to have an enlightened perspective in my relationships and as I work, learn and play.

Thank you for being my security and offering hope. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Dress up!

What myths have you believed that have caused you to play the comparison game? What steps can you take to remove yourself from playing that game and develop security?

Dressed with Praise

"...a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair." Isaiah 61:3 (NIV)

I'm a person who's moved a lot. Although moving can be exciting as you anticipate new opportunities, it also presents challenges and difficulty. Just yesterday, I talked with a newcomer who was suffering from "relocation blues." She was lonely. Last week, I had lunch with another newcomer whose eyes filled with tears as she relayed that her children were having a difficult adjustment. The schools weren't the same, the neighborhood wasn't the same, and she wasn't the same. Moving is hard. I've lived in the same community for thirteen years now and it's gotten better, but there are still times when I am physically part of a conversation yet not really there. Maybe you've had that experience where women share histories that are unknown to you. There's also a part of you that is unknown to them and there's a hole in your relationships.

My moving represented loss. I struggled with the mundane of arranging furniture in my new house, and became frustrated because it wouldn't fit. A favorite comfortable piece was relegated to the basement. I registered the girls for school and the procedures and policies were different from our previous school system. We visited churches, looked for dentists, doctors, and a piano teacher. I struggled with loneliness. I had left my full time job and now stayed at home in an empty house while everyone else left for school and work. The family had come to something, not me. I saw only my loss. Stress, time and fatigue became my focus. I often looked back with longing at my former location. I missed my friends, my house, shared histories, reminiscing, and the familiarity. My longings were the perfect ingredients for a pity party. But without being too hard on myself (and maybe you), they were real, and a process I needed to work through.

I remember continuing for months, okay--- a couple of years, to see the crooked seams and irregular stitching on the garment I was crafting. God, on the other hand, had a perfect design in mind. He also had a pattern that would help me, and I was ignoring it: a garment of praise. Could I really praise God for my difficult adjustment? No, I couldn't praise Him for it. He wasn't asking me to do that. He was asking me to wear a

garment of praise to Him, to get rid of my self-pity and complaining and look at Him, not my stress or loneliness. It was something I had to intentionally do and I began to do it. The more I began to focus on Him and praise Him for who He was, the less I looked at myself. It was a garment with a perfect fit, much more comfortable than what I had been wearing. I began to look at my move from God's viewpoint. Adjustments still needed to be made and my circumstances didn't miraculously change, but I did. Up to that point, I had been wearing the wrong clothes. Putting on the garment of praise was the perfect design, with pressed seams and perfect stitching.

Prayer: Father, there are times when I am discouraged, but I praise you for who you are. When I praise you, may I also see you more clearly. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Dress up!

A question to think about: how does praising God change you? Write your reflections in your journal. God's names reflect His character. Have you ever done a study on the names of God?

Dressed with a Designer Label

“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)

April and May are prom season in Pennsylvania. In our girls’ school it was called a junior-senior banquet, but it still meant tuxedos for the guys and fancy dresses for the girls. I enjoyed shopping with my three daughters. With seven years difference between them, it was interesting to see the changes in colors and styles. I can’t remember how many stores we visited as we shopped for this special event, but at one bridal shop in particular, I spotted the gowns behind the glass doors. “What about those?” I asked our sales clerk. “Oh, those are the designer labels.” Say no more. Translation: “pricey.” We continued shopping and never even thought about asking her to unlock the glass doors.

When we hear the term “designer label,” a number of things come to mind besides pricey. Celebrities wear exclusive one of a kind gowns that carry a designer’s trademark and touch. Designer clothing is a beautifully crafted product that shows expert workmanship. Even at the presidential inauguration, much publicity was given to the designer suits and gowns worn by the First Lady and her daughters. Their quality wardrobes were uniquely created giving careful attention to their figures, personalities, and color and style preferences.

Hand made by the Master Designer, we are one of a kind. Crafted with a particular body, mind, personality, and talents, we carry high price tags and special touches. Just as designers have a plan and a specific vision when making an outfit, our Master Designer used the same approach. As a model wears a fashion designer’s creation, the designer stands back and admires its beauty. He checks to see if it is functional and fulfilling its purpose. Will it wrinkle? Can a woman sit comfortably in the outfit? Are the sleeves too tight for dancing? The designer may keep working on his product until it represents his vision. He may even discard a part, add some color, or rework some spots.

Created with a specific plan and purpose, God looks at His creation and enjoys what He sees. God enjoys me. What a thought! He may choose to straighten my life by allowing unsettling circumstances and problems that deepen my prayer life. He may work on my rough spots by ironing the seams and remove or replace accessories of attitudes that don't compliment His intentions for me. He may choose to rearrange the fit and lead me in another life direction. But in the process, I know that I wear a designer label. I'm one of a kind. I have a high price tag. God stands back, looks at me and sees beauty and purpose. My Designer loves who He sees.

Prayer: Father, thank you that I wear a designer label. Show me the work that you have prepared for me to do. May I bring you joy and delight each day as I do it. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Dress up!

Read Colossians 3:17. In what ways are you doing the work that God has called you to do? Have you discovered your gifts and talents? Make a plan to look for resources that will help you develop and use them.

Dressed with Strength

"...the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit which is of great worth in God's sight." 1 Peter 3:4 (NIV)

The interview was going well. Micki asked the usual professional skills questions and gave a few scenarios to evaluate critical thinking and judgment. Then she asked her question designed as a gentler variation of the usual clincher, "What do you see as your greatest weakness?" "So, Carol, in what way would you like to improve personally or professionally?" Carol thought for a minute and then answered, "Well I'm not a very strong person. My friends are all so outgoing and they tell me I'm too quiet. I guess I'd like to become a more outgoing person." Micki sat back in her chair and thought of her college days. "So, you think that because you're quiet, that means you're not strong?" "Yes, I guess you could say that. I know I'm a good teacher and love working with children, but I'd like to be more outgoing. I probably won't be seen as a very effective teacher because I'm quiet, so I'd like to change that part of myself." Carol wondered where this conversation would go next. She figured she had just helped her interviewer place her resume into the wastebasket.

"Well, let me tell you about my college roommate. We roomed together for three years including graduate school. I was the outgoing one—I never knew a stranger. Mim on the other hand, was quiet. But behind that quiet personality was a contemplative person and a much more private person than I was. She was able to listen, reflect and analyze and when a crisis came, she was levelheaded. She had strength. Mim surprised a lot of people. As she gained experience and confidence in her profession, she added a style of assertiveness that retained her quiet personality. I like to call it 'quiet strength'." Micki leaned forward across her desk, "Strength was there, but in a different form. It was tempered with confidence, and it appeared when it was needed. Don't underestimate yourself. Being introverted doesn't mean you're weak. There is no one best personality for teaching. Work at developing your style and being you. Who knows if your quiet personality is just what a child in your classroom needs?" Micki smiled, "Wouldn't it be boring if we had only one ice cream flavor?" With a nervous laugh, Carol agreed. "Thank you for telling me that." Carol felt reassured and in that brief exchange realized that she shouldn't change to be like her friends. She would probably never be the life of a

party or be assertive, but her quiet personality could develop into strength that fit her style and the fit would be perfect.

Scripture tells us that we are made differently, fashioned with different styles. God designed us to wear our style with a perfect fit. Some are quiet, some more outgoing. Some are reserved, some dominant. If you are a “quiet one,” know that you can dress in confidence. Your quiet personality can be quiet strength and God can use you as He designed.

Prayer: Father, help me to be contented with the way you designed me and trust you to use that design in special ways. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Dress up!

Embrace your strengths and look for someone you can encourage like Micki did. Do you have an area that you considered a weakness but you can now see as strength? How can you develop your weaker areas, not to be like someone else, but to become your best you?

Dressed with Wisdom

“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all...” James 1:5 (NIV)

All three of my daughters sang in a children’s choir during their upper elementary and middle school years. One hundred plus voices strong, the choir often traveled out of town to present concerts and programs. Fast food stops, coordinated outfits, exceptionally talented children and new experiences were part of the package. I sometimes chaperoned their bus trips. But one thing that stands out in my memory was a song about wisdom. In that song, wisdom was defined as seeing things from God’s point of view. Sure, we can acquire knowledge, we learn through experiences, and we certainly have feelings, but wisdom is in a category all its own.

The New Testament book of James describes counterfeit and real wisdom. In the “get ahead” and “you deserve it” mentality of today, we sometimes think that we are doing the wise thing when we are ambitious, work hard and put ourselves first. Yet James doesn’t think that is particularly wise thinking. We may confuse knowledge with wisdom and think that because we know something, we are wise. James appeals to us to ask God for wisdom. It is a request that God never refuses and He responds generously.

If any group of people needs a generous amount of wisdom, it is parents. With so many voices shouting at us as we parent, it is often difficult to determine which to listen to. If every square on our children’s calendars is not filled in, we are led to believe that we aren’t providing the best opportunities for them. If we say “no” to an activity, we may be pressured to reverse our decision, because we don’t want our children to be left out. Yet we need to make wise choices that are compatible with our children and family. Perhaps being a “stay at home Mom” is the best choice for you and your family, and the consequences are a tight budget and shopping at second hand stores. Yet you sense pressure to dress your children otherwise. Maybe the best choice for you and your family is to work outside the home and you meet with criticism. Our children’s education also presents choices: home schooling, private, public and Christian schools. With so many voices ringing in our ears, how do we make decisions? James answers: wisdom.

In the verses that follow, James describes God's wisdom as pure, considerate and full of good fruit. It is the wisdom that comes from God's heart, so it is good. God desires to give wisdom so that we make decisions from His point of view. If we ask for wisdom, He gives it. When we accept and apply it, we can wear His wisdom generously.

Prayer: Father, thank you for the gift of wisdom. Help me not to go my own way, but to look at life from your perspective and seek wisdom as I make decisions. In Jesus' name, Amen

Dress up!

Read James 3:13-18. How is wisdom described? What decision are you currently facing? Distinguish between knowledge and wisdom as you work through the decision making process. How can James' descriptions help you?

Dressed with Fragrance

“But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him.” 2 Corinthians 2:14 (NIV)

We were in Idaho for two weeks last summer helping our daughter Heather and her husband Paul with a local move. While our granddaughter Elli took a nap at the new house, I arranged the kitchen cupboards. Heather’s friend Judy stopped in to see the transformation of a house that had been gutted and now looked like a page out of House Beautiful magazine. Noticing that our Elli had awakened, she picked her up and carried her into the kitchen. “The house is beautiful. What a change you’ve made,” she said with delight. She completed the house tour and then had to leave for an appointment. “Enjoy your new room, Elli,” she said smiling. One final hug and she gave me the baby. Holding Elli, I noticed a sweet fragrance on Elli’s hair. What fragrance was Judy wearing? I really liked it and made a mental note to ask her next time I saw her.

What fragrance do we wear? What fragrance do we spread when we enter a room, go into a meeting, or greet our family after a day at work or school? Does our fragrance linger? Is it one that attracts or offends; one that causes people to seek our company or avoid us? Is it a fragrance that reflects beauty or annoyance?

In 2 Corinthians 2:14, the apostle Paul reminds us that we spread fragrance as we spread the knowledge of Christ. What does that look like or, what does the fragrance smell like? Is it a fragrance that will cause someone to wonder and ask, “What fragrance are you wearing?”

Years ago, as a young parent, I heard a seminar speaker say that we can capture moments with our children and teach Biblical truth in everyday experiences. In Isaiah 28:10 (NIV) we read “here a little, there a little.” A moment enjoying the wonder of a rainbow, a story with a principle for living, or a lesson in kindness and sharing are the “here a little, there a little” moments that spread Christ’s fragrance to my children. Offering a listening ear and relating personal experiences are the fragrances that meet a friend’s hurts, so that she knows

she is not alone. In offering my time and my heart, I spread His fragrance as I make myself available and show concern.

Fragrance lingers. Like lilacs placed in a vase that take over a room, or simmering spices spreading fragrance throughout my home on a rainy Autumn day, Judy's fragrance lingered and extended beyond her perfume. Her visit to Heather's new home spread love and encouragement. Others who came to help paint, build a pantry, and install lights spread the fragrance of kindness. One friend brought delicious homemade cinnamon rolls for the work crew and spread encouragement. Another couple had us for dinner one night so we wouldn't have to take time to cook and extended the fragrance of hospitality. Like Judy's fragrance against Elli's hair, we have to ask ourselves, "What fragrance are we wearing and will others be pleased that my fragrance lingers?"

Prayer: Father, Thank you for the opportunities to wear your fragrance. Show me each day where I can spread the fragrance of your knowledge to others. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Dress up!

Pray about some specific ways that you can spread His fragrance to others. Are there acts of kindness you can show to a co-worker or neighbor? Can you spread His fragrance to your children in a "here a little, there a little" way? Be intentional this week about spreading the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ to someone.

Dressed with a Complete Ensemble

“Therefore, put on the full armor of God, so that ...you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.” Ephesians 6:13 (NIV)

Our committee gathered for its monthly planning meeting. I looked around the table and smiled. Each confident and gifted woman held a role in the organization that fit her to a “t” and offered her a great opportunity to use her skills and talents. Was it possible that we could become too satisfied in our own strengths and gifts and forget our Source? Before we began making the year’s plans, we needed to look in the mirror and make sure that we were fully dressed.

In Ephesians 6: 10-17, Paul speaks about being fully dressed. At first glance, it doesn’t seem to be particularly stylish for women, but the armor of God is a complete ensemble that readies us for any situation we encounter. It’s a promise: Paul tells us to wear this necessary outfit so that we may be able to stand our ground.

In his head to toe fashion show, each piece has a specific purpose. Paul asks us to wear a helmet to protect our mind. Can’t our thought life run away with us? Jealousies creep in as we compare ourselves to other women’s resources, popularity or talents. Our protective helmet keeps our minds focused on the way God made us, what He communicates to us, and how He has gifted us. His belt of truth is my standard, frames my thinking and is the foundation for my viewpoints. His truth is consistent and reliable. His breastplate covers my heart, my feelings, and my emotions.

We are sometimes fragile, hormone dependent women. Intentional or unintentional comments from others or lack of affirmation can hurt us. Hurting hearts need His breastplate of protection as we might make an impulsive choice or an unwise decision. Yet His breastplate also freely allows me to act as an extension of His love to others. Shoes designed to carry peace guide me on my way and are the perfect match for my ensemble. Wearing shoes means that I am ready to go out! As I go in peace, I can do a better job of self-monitoring my

commitments. Saying yes to everything won't result in peace, but will result in shoes worn with irritation and frustration. Just like rainwear that protects me from the elements, His shield of faith protects me from attacks of discouragement and counterfeit thinking. Finally, a sword is my security and the offensive part of my outfit. Carrying scripture with me whether in my mind as remembrance, in my heart for reassurance or even in my purse to pull out and read as I have a few minutes of down time, offers me hope and confidence because scripture is truth.

The women around the table? Well we are a gifted bunch, but in order to maximize who we are, enjoy good relationships, and fulfill our callings we must be fully dressed. Our fashionable ensemble dresses us with security in our faith, inner peace, sensitivity toward others, wise thinking, and reliance on God. Showing up for our meetings without God's armor and working with our own strengths and talents is like showing up dressed only in our underwear. Grab on to your custom made ensemble. It has no holes or mismatched seams; it's a trustworthy selection. Be ready for the challenges and opportunities of your day. Be fully dressed; you will stand tall and look great!

Prayer: Father, Thank you for designing a custom made ensemble with nothing lacking. Help me to appropriate each part as I walk through my day. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Dress up!

Ephesians 6: 10-17. What part of the ensemble are you most likely to neglect wearing? Moms, how can you encourage your child with the words, "having done all, stand" as he wears this ensemble?

Dressed for Genuine Friendship

"...but why am I so favored...?" Luke 1:43 (NIV)

"So where are you from?" the tall brunette asked as I was leaving the small country church. "New York. We moved here two weeks ago." "We have Bible study on Tuesdays and we have childcare," she continued. "Can you join us?" A simple invitation was the beginning of a friendship that has continued for twenty-eight years. Despite moves that separated us by thousands of miles, our friendship proved that we could pick up our conversation where we last left off, whether weeks or months intervened.

Sleepovers as kids, high school girlfriends, college roommates, coffee with a neighbor, or a gesture of welcome; friends enter our lives. They may stay for a lifetime; relate to an activity in our lives; or appear for a season, just when we needed them, and move on.

A beautiful example of friendship is found in a brief conversation between Elisabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, and Mary. Only a few verses describe the visit between Mary and Elisabeth, yet they show how a spiritually older woman offers friendship to a young girl. As a young woman faced with an unusual pregnancy, Mary sets out alone, traveling the dusty roads to visit her older relative. Can you imagine the thoughts racing through her mind? "How will I explain this to Elisabeth? What will she think? How can she help me?" But if Mary had any doubts about being welcomed, they vanished the minute Elisabeth opened the door. "Why am I so favored?" Elisabeth asked. What a gracious welcome! Just think how we would feel with such a warm reception.

Elisabeth's first words usher in many traits that model genuine friendship. Elisabeth greeted Mary with verbal affirmation and Mary knew that Elisabeth was approachable. As she put her own needs aside and concentrated on Mary, Elisabeth opened her home and her heart. Hospitable and available, Elisabeth took time to talk when Mary needed it. Elisabeth didn't consider Mary's visit an inconvenience or an intrusion, but a privilege. "Why

am I so favored?" she asked. What a gracious expression of value and respect! At a time when Elisabeth could use support and strength too (she was pregnant in her old age and her husband was speechless, so there wasn't much conversation going on!) she strengthened Mary and put her first. Their conversation wasn't about "how" and "why" and "what if", but Elisabeth offered encouragement, "Blessed is she who believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished." Elisabeth reminded Mary of God's faithfulness and Mary responded with a song of praise!

God had prepared Elisabeth for Mary's visit and Mary was encouraged by a display of love and genuine friendship. Busy Moms often put personal friendships in the back seat as we shuffle schedules and meet family needs. Yet genuine and special friendships are essential for our personal growth and enrichment. Women need the company of women. Friendships are gifts waiting to be opened. Can you be that gift to someone?

Prayer: Father, Thank you for the gift of friendship. Help me to be aware of women who need a friend and help me to be a genuine friend. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Dress Up!

Read Luke 1:39-56. What characteristics stand out to you about Elisabeth's genuine friendship: approachability, respect, availability, encouragement, challenge? What qualities do you admire in a friend? Is God preparing you to be a special friend to someone? What qualities do you want to develop so that you can be a genuine friend? Did a friend encourage you to pursue a particular career or vocation? How did this come about? Perhaps someone mentored you in the workplace. How did this person help you to develop your gifts and potential? Can you pass that on to someone?

Dressed with a Fruit Pattern

“But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, goodness, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” Galatians 5: 22-23

Unless you've seen a woman on a tropical island balancing a basket of fruit on her head, being dressed with fruit is an unusual concept. But really, we can wear fruit. The fruit that Paul speaks about in this passage refers to the fruit of the Spirit, the qualities that resemble God. In Elisa Morgan's book, *Naked Fruit*, she comments that wearing fruit isn't about being nice. We can yell at our children and then in the next breath, be cordial as we say hello on the telephone. We can all manufacture nice or pleasant when needed, but we can't manufacture the fruit of the Spirit. That fruit is hand picked by God and worn after it has been put into us.

My friend Bev is a great example of a fruit-bearer. She was diagnosed with cancer a year ago. While she waited for test results, biopsy reports, and surgery, Bev had an unusual peace about her. I'd often ask, "Are you okay?" "Yes," she said. "I'm fine. I just have an amazing peace and joy. I really don't understand it. I'm waiting to crash." The crash never happened. Even after being told more extensive surgery was needed, she continued to have that same peace and joy. The best part about her peace and joy was that it reached others. That's one of the purposes behind God's fruit, to nourish others. I ate from Bev's fruit and I was replenished. Liz ate from Bev's fruit and she was encouraged. Sue ate from Bev's fruit and it ministered to her during a rough day.

Bev literally led us to joy and peace on her journey. She showed us that as fruit wearers we feed others. Our goodness, kindness, and the other seven fruit of the Spirit look different each time we wear them. Just as fruit grows in different climates and requires different nutrients, fruit as it is developed in our personalities, through circumstances and in challenges, develops a unique flavor. It ripens as needed and satisfies those who feed from it. My patience with a six year-old learning how to read is different than my patience with a telemarketer calling at the dinner hour. If you have a quiet temperament, gentleness looks different on you than it does on an outgoing person. The nine fruit make a pattern and an unusually appealing addition to our wardrobes. Anyone

can wear pleasant, nice or cordial; it's like "black tie optional," you can wear it if it's convenient. Wearing fruit is different. We wear fruit because God's Spirit gives it to us and in the giving, we share it with others. It's a wardrobe selection that will turn heads when you enter a room.

Prayer: Father, I desire to be authentic not merely pleasant, nice, or cordial. I want to wear your fruit and nourish others. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Dress up!

Read Galatians 5:22-23. What do these qualities look like on you? To think about: Why does it take so much effort to be cordial and nice rather than wear the fruit of the Spirit?

Dressed with a Coordinated Outfit

“And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men.” Luke 2:52 (NIV)

“But why do you have to go out to lunch? I want to go with you,” eight year old Jenny whined. “I’m sorry honey, but this is my Mommy time. I need to do this. When I take a couple of hours with my friends it helps me to be a better Mommy.” I listened as my friend relayed this conversation over our lunch and I thought “what a wise answer.” She’s right—when we take time to develop who we are and take time to replenish, we become better wives and mothers; we become better daughters and we become better friends. I learned that lesson late. One of the biggest mistakes I made as I was “growing up as a Mom” was not to take time for me. I used to think that if I took time for myself, I was selfish. That was misguided thinking. My friend Sue had learned her lesson early. Good for her!

In Luke 2:52, Jesus provides us with a pattern for a coordinated outfit, dressing with balanced mental, physical, social, and spiritual development. One of the reasons I’ve tried new things is so my children will have the confidence to do the same. I remember going alone to a conference. One of my girls asked, “Who are you rooming with? I answered that I had no idea. I was assigned a roommate and would make a new friend. My daughter learned between the lines, that it’s okay to go to a new place where you might not know anyone. If Mom did it, then she could one day do it when an event crossed her path. That gave her confidence. When our children see us reading a book for pleasure or learning something new, we model intellectual growth and model that learning doesn’t stop because we’re no longer in school. If we take time to exercise, eat right, and get enough rest, we communicate physical responsibility in taking care of our bodies. If our children see us go to a Bible study or attend a conference, they see that our relationship with God isn’t reserved for Sunday, but needs ongoing development. If we cultivate friendships then we model the importance of friendships for our children. We teach them that relationships are important and people have value.

If we're out of balance we have holes in our clothing and that reduces wholeness in our life. In dressing with a coordinated outfit, one that includes physical, spiritual, intellectual and social development, we are balanced, and in our balance, we set fashion trends to influence those around us.

Prayer: Father, help me to live a balanced life, to develop the gifts that you have given me, be an example to others and to take time out to spend time with you. In my busyness, help me to discover my priorities and to separate the urgent from the important so that I can live a balanced life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Dress up!

Are you living a balanced life? Do you need to adjust your thinking? Which of the four areas are out of balance? What can you eliminate, reduce or add to your life to achieve balance? Record your thoughts and a plan of action in your journal.

Dressed with Humor

"A cheerful heart is good medicine..." Proverbs 17:22 (NIV)

"Aw c'mon. It's really not that bad," my husband said with a smile. I held up my skirt and it could have fit one of my daughter's dolls. "Not that bad?" I asked. "Do you expect me to wear this?" Reluctantly, Randy agreed that the skirt was ruined.

My husband and I had accepted teaching positions at a university conditional on having opposite schedules. He taught afternoons and an evening. I taught mornings. We wanted one parent at home with our preschoolers and at home when our seven-year-old arrived at the end of the school day. Part of the "plan" included a division of household chores, grocery shopping, meal preparation, and laundry. Although things may not have been done to my specification, I was appreciative. So what if the spatula wasn't exactly where I would store it? Scavenger hunts are fun. And did it really matter that the chili was a little too spicy? Lots of water and a box of saltines were good for us!

But back to my skirt. Randy hadn't read the care instructions on the label. The "dry clean only" skirt went in with the darks and came out sized for a cabbage patch doll. Well, maybe that was an exaggeration. It could have fit my four-year-old. Once I recovered from the shock and disappointment over losing a favorite skirt, we all had a good laugh.

Laughter is good medicine. Scripture endorses it, psychologists prescribe it, and health practitioners acknowledge that laughter releases endorphins that give us a feeling of well being. A remedy for a plethora of situations, laughter's been known to interrupt awkward moments, restore relationships, help work proceed faster, make the most of difficult situations, and make memories.

Aside from good medicine, laughter is a perfect accessory to any wardrobe. Appropriate for any season or age, it coordinates with many fashion styles. Whether a person tends to be serious-minded, shy, or personable, laughter wears well. It fits children, teens, adults and senior citizens. Laughter can alter our attitudes, brighten our spirits, change our outlook and improve our surroundings.

So, what about my skirt? I tossed it into the trash. The laughter looked better on me anyway.

Prayer: Father, thank you for the gifts of laughter and humor. Help me to see the humor in daily living and help me to be an instrument of spreading laughter to others. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Dress up!

Read Proverbs 15:30. How has laughter brought joy to your heart? At tonight's dinner table, reminisce about some of your family's most humorous moments.

Dressed with Purpose

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)

We took our seats in the concert hall and leafed through the program. This was the last concert of the season and we had enjoyed each one, but tonight's would be different. A “modern” piece was featured as the symphony closed the season with an eclectic program. I don't appreciate what I think is dissonance in new music, yet I know in the composer's ears, it is music. Our family is much more into the traditional Bach and Mozart. Nonetheless, we have had some experiences with modern music. When our girls' took piano lessons, each year their teacher had them learn a contemporary idiom. Notes that seemed out of tune were almost difficult to play. It was as if the girls naturally wanted to fix the dissonance and make it sound harmonious. Yet learning to play the dissonance was part of their discipline in developing their piano skills, learning about “new” music and becoming musically literate.

The concert and our piano lesson memories remind me somewhat of dissonance in life: the notes that I think don't quite fit, that seem out of tune, and hurt my ears. Yet in the Master Composer's plan, they are intentionally placed, designed and allowed to make music in my life. They're part of the composition. Whether it's struggling to meet a budget, not getting a job promotion, meeting with an unforeseen detour in our life, or working through hurts and struggles, the notes in my composition are in the right place. I may cringe, cover my ears, want to step back, or try and fix things on my own, but the notes and rests have been perfectly placed.

Jeremiah 29:11 reminds us that God has plans for us. His plans enrich us and are designed to give us hope and a future. Our challenges may not be resolved in our time frame or as we would orchestrate, but we can dress with purpose as we look to God for His plans. We can play His composition, including what we think are dissonant notes, and make beautiful music.

Prayer: Father, I have doubts about the way the present is playing out and I question the future. Today I exchange my doubts for confidence in your plans and purposes. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Dress Up!

Read Romans 8:28-29. Think back to a situation that didn't work out the way you had hoped, but you now see was part of a plan and for the best. Commit a situation or struggle you are currently facing to working together for your good. Write out a prayer of confidence. Put it on a 3x5 card and keep it handy as a reminder. Memorize Proverbs 3:5-6 to encourage you.

Dressed with Imitations

“Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children, and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” Ephesians 5:1-2 (NIV)

Now that we have to be at airports two hours ahead of scheduled flights, we usually have extra time to wait. Rather than sit at the gate, we've often spent that time walking. Our airport has an air-mall that rivals small shopping malls and we window shop. But there's one store in particular that sells jewelry and handbags for \$10 or less. The merchandise looks nearly identical to expensive brand names. I've been tempted to make some purchases, but had a problem with too much carry on luggage, so I've refrained. Later, when my daughters and I spot a “look alike,” we sometimes wonder if it is the real thing or an imitation. Imitations spark my interest. After all, if you can buy an item for half the price of the genuine article and it still looks great and serves the same purpose, why not?

But, what about imitations in everyday life? Sometimes we wear imitations. A friend asks how we are and we answer “fine,” but we're hurting. We smile and seem pleasant but harbor resentment. We compromise in a disagreement, giving the appearance of resolution, but leave with unresolved conflict. We hide our insecurities and wear a mask. We may even pretend to be who we're not and work hard at not letting down our guard. We succumb to peer pressure and try to fit in. Our air of confidence gives the impression that we can manage on our own. Me, ask for help? You're kidding! In our pressure to wear imitations, we might look great on the surface, but like the imitation handbag, the quality just isn't there. It won't hold up over time and neither will we.

Scripture reminds us, though, to be imitations...imitators of Christ. Totally transparent, Christ was honest, loving and genuine. We are told to follow His steps and imitate His character. He sought out those who were needy, wore compassion, and demonstrated unconditional love. Totally obedient to His heavenly father, Christ was real and didn't seek people's applause. Finding security in God's love for us, we can be real. At the same

time, we can dress with imitations. We can look at Jesus' model and imitate His character, and we will hold up over time

Prayer: Father, thank you for Jesus' example. Help me to place my security in you and not try to imitate others but to follow your steps. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Dress up!

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:4-10. What were the results of becoming an imitator? Read Proverbs 29:25. How can you use this principle as you help your children cope with peer pressure?

Dressed with Discernment

“The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out.” Proverbs 18:15 (NIV)

The idea that “one size fits all” puzzles me. How could size two and size sixteen women possibly wear the same outfit and both look “good”? The concept doesn’t make sense.

Yet I wonder how often I looked at my girls and thought “one size fits all.” How many times did I have them try on an outfit that had been their older sister’s but wasn’t the right fit or style, even though they were at the same age or size? The outfit just wasn’t intended for them and they didn’t wear the outfit well. Did I have the same expectations as my girls grew, that they would be involved in the same activities, have the same interests, or learn the same way? We learned quickly that the same type of discipline couldn’t be used with all three. We could just look at one daughter and say we were disappointed in her behavior. She would burst into tears. Another? Well... One was involved in a lot of activities and another satisfied to concentrate on one or two. Even their social needs were different. One was contented to stay at home, while for another, the more friends the merrier! Even after high school, her friends’ reunion during a college break was at our house.

So as a Mom, when it came to raising my girls, I tried to avoid the “one size fits all” rack, even though it may have been the convenient and most economical thing to do. Heading to another rack with the appropriate sizes and styles was going to provide the best fit and create the best look. But what was I looking for? A wise friend once told me she prayed that the Lord would call to her attention things she needed to know about her children as individuals. She may not have always liked the answers, but she received them.

As Moms we need to be dressed with the right size: discernment. Once we have discernment that comes from prayer about our children, we know how to best meet their individual needs. Psalm 139:14 reminds us that each child is unique and individually designed. With that individuality comes unique needs, talents, learning styles,

temperaments, and interests that require an individual approach. One size doesn't fit all—with clothing or in raising children.

Prayer: Father, Thank you for creating my children with individuality. Call to my attention their unique needs and interests. Help me to discover how I can best mother them in a way that cooperates with the way you have designed them. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Dress up!

Read Psalm 139:13-14. Have you determined which temperament styles exist in your family? Go to a bookstore or library and find resources on temperament styles. How will understanding different temperaments help you as you seek to understand your children and respond to them? What is your temperament or personality style? How does your temperament affect family interaction?

Dressed with Grace

"...My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." 2 Corinthians 12:9 (NIV)

We listened to the news story in disbelief. A 75-year-old woman watering her hanging plants and baskets on her apartment balcony lost her footing and fell five stories. When rescuers reached her, she was alert and talked with ambulance drivers on the way to the hospital. It was remarkable that she emerged with only a broken ankle. How could that happen—falling fifty feet and only breaking an ankle? It seems that a canvas canopy below had caught her and broken her fall. She landed on a soft surface and was spared from major injury or worse.

We may not literally fall from a one or five story building, but we fall. Life is full of falls. We have good intentions that are misunderstood and result in interpersonal conflicts. We thought we'd stay at a job until we retired, only to be terminated due to downsizing or not quite meeting our employer's expectations. We came up with a brilliant idea for our organization, only to be shot down by a vocal group that had another agenda and we feel unappreciated. We fail at what we try to do and become discouraged. We resume a habit we thought we had conquered and feel that we've failed again. We fall. How do we emerge from life's falls? Is there anything to break our falls? Our friends fall too. Can we help break our friends' falls?

Grace breaks falls. Grace, God's unmerited favor, breaks falls. God extends grace to us and out of that grace we extend grace to others. The Old Testament refers to grace as favor. Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. That favor was grace and it included faithfulness. God is faithful to us. He never stops being faithful; He is consistently present. He is there to be our soft canopy when we fall. He softens our blows with His presence, forgiveness, and love. Falls happen but His grace breaks our falls.

Our friend learned a valuable lesson and is thankful for her canopy. Accept your canopy today. Wear His grace. It will break your fall. Is a friend falling? Be a canopy, extend kindness. Be a faithful friend. Dress with grace.

Prayer: Father thank you for your inexhaustible grace. Thank you for picking me up when I fall or hurt. Help me to be there when those I love are falling and to be ready to extend grace to others. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Dress up!

Read 1 John 1:8-9 and 2 Corinthians 9:8. How do these verses strengthen you? What encouragement do you have knowing that God's supply of grace is inexhaustible? Memorize Ephesians 2:8-9.

Dressed with the Proper Hemline

“... a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind Him and touched the edge of His cloak. She said to herself, ‘If I only touch His cloak, I will be healed.’ Jesus turned and saw her. ‘Take heart, daughter,’ He said, ‘your faith has healed you.’ And the woman was healed from that moment.” Matthew 9: 20-22 (NIV)

I picked up the afternoon mail and sorted through it. The spring sale catalog from a department store caught my eye. I wondered what styles and colors would be fashionable this season. Would we have bold prints, pastels, or new shades? Will I need to re-do my entire wardrobe for this season or will some of my clothes still be “in”? What about hemlines? Where would they sit—at the knee, above, or below? I’m not too fond of showing off my legs—they’re a little chunky...and I’m not getting any younger.

In Matthew 9: 20-22, a woman in the crowd found Jesus’ hemline and it made a significant difference in her life. She knew that by merely reaching out and touching Jesus she would be healed. She did; by touching Jesus’ hemline in faith, the ailing woman was healed.

How can we touch Jesus hemline? We may not be able to sit for an hour and study each day, but we can be creative and touch Jesus’ cloak. By adopting a few simple practical ideas, we can practice being in God’s presence throughout our day. Using a calendar with scripture is helpful. If you read “My grace is sufficient for you,” (2 Corinthians. 12:9) would that get your day off to a fresh start? What would happen to our outlook if we meditated on that verse throughout our day? A friend of mine writes Bible verses on 3x5 cards. While she’s waiting for her children in a school parking lot at the end of the day, she memorizes them. Reading the Proverb for the date offers guidance. You can do the same with the 150 Psalms. In one month you will have read all of the Proverbs and in five months, the entire book of Psalms! Playing Christian music during the day, whether at home or running errands will lift your spirit. If you use a study book, don’t think you must finish each lesson in one sitting. Pace yourself and stop when a truth ministers to you. Use a basket or bin to organize your Bible,

notebook, journal, devotional or study book so that they are easily accessible and you don't waste time gathering everything you need. Minimize your distractions. Make a list of the things you need to do that day before you begin your devotional time so you aren't distracted by thinking about writing a list.

Each year our lives become more complicated. A twenty-four hour day is available whether we are twenty-five or forty-five. There is no one season in life when we will have more time than another. In making creative choices to reach out and touch the hem of Jesus' cloak, we, like the woman in the crowd, will be restored and refreshed. Our faith will be renewed and we will find peace, power, and joy for each new day. Daughter, your faith will make you well.

Prayer: Father, help me to have the discipline to use my time wisely so that I can have a meaningful quiet time with you. Help me to see your presence in every part of my day. Show me the Scriptures that I need for today.

Amen

Dress up!

If you haven't done so, organize a bin or basket with all of your devotional tools. Choose two of the suggestions above that will work for you to establish a regular devotional time.

Dressed with Shoes for a Perfect Fit

“Stand firm...with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.” Ephesians 6: 14-15

(NIV)

I remember the first time I wore high heels in seventh grade. They were a tad higher than flats but I thought I was all grown up and sure that I looked inches taller. Gradually, I evolved into slightly higher heels, but with envy, checked out the spikes worn by the high school seniors. I couldn't wait for my next passage. There have been lots of shoe styles and fashion fads since then. I chose to wear some and avoided others. Sometimes I look at old photos and ask, “what was I thinking when I bought those?”

Have you ever struggled to get into a shoe size that is just a half-size too small, hoping for a fit because you just loved the shoes? We check out the back of a shoe as we walk around the shoe department and wonder if a pad would keep our heels from sliding. We find the perfect shoe only to learn that it doesn't come in our size or the color we needed. We look for the shoe that coordinates with our new outfit or gives enough height so pant legs don't drag on the floor. We might buy a pair, wear them once or twice, regret our purchase because they're uncomfortable, and the shoes remain in our closet. The perfect shoe with the right fit is often hard to find.

Paul speaks about shoes with a perfect fit in Ephesians 6:15. He tells us to have our feet fit and ready to walk with peace. Peace may be an elusive term for Moms and an even more elusive experience. It's hard to have peace with a screaming toddler or a “To Do” list with ten things that need to be done now. We don't experience much peace as we run carpools or drop children off and rush to work only to get held up in traffic. For many, peace is abstract. Yet, peace has been bequeathed to us. Jesus said, “My peace I leave with you.” (John 14:27 NIV) It's an inheritance that we can draw from now. In Isaiah 26:10, we are told that we will be kept in perfect peace when we keep our eyes on the Lord. He is the source of peace, my peace-giver.

Our verse in Ephesians reminds us that when we wear our shoes of peace, we will be ready--ready for our day, for what lies ahead, for projects, and ready to experience peace. Dressing for your day? Slip your shoes on. The fit is perfect. The shoes of peace aren't a fashion fad. Don't avoid them. Go with peace; the peace that is your inheritance.

Prayer: Father I thank you for bequeathing peace to me. Help me to share the Gospel of peace with others as I walk in peace. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Dress up!

Do you find peace elusive? What changes can you make in your schedule to relieve stress, increase joy, enhance your relationships and live in peace? Take an inventory, evaluate your schedule and priorities and determine to make adjustments that will yield peace.

Dressed for Tough Times

"May you be blessed for your good judgment..." 1 Samuel 25:33 (NIV)

As Moms who participate in our children's activities or are members of organizations, we are bound to come across "sign-up" sheets. We volunteer to bake cookies for a party, chaperone a field trip, or serve on a committee. There are other things in life that we don't sign up for, but we get them: meeting difficult people on a regular basis, coping with unforeseen circumstances, or working through a life script that isn't playing out the way we would have written.

Abigail is an Old Testament heroine who was in a situation that she didn't sign up for: marriage to a difficult person. At a time in history when marriages were arranged, it appears that Nabal, a wealthy herdsman, was a good catch. In reality, he was a "piece of work." His name translates "fool" and scripture shows us that he lived up to his name.

In 1 Samuel 23 we read that King David is camping near Nabal's property and while there, protects Nabal's hired help. David makes a request for food and supplies as remuneration for having taken care of Nabal's servants. Nabal refuses and hurls angry insults in return for David's kindness. Abigail's servants inform her of the situation and she recognizes that her husband's poor judgment has placed them in jeopardy. Scripture says, "She wastes no time." With wise thinking, resourcefulness, and good judgment, Abigail enlists the servants' help to do the right thing and offer food and supplies to David. Abigail's transparency is obvious as she approaches David. He responds to her presence by saying, "Praise be to the Lord God of Israel who has sent you today to meet me. May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed." (1 Samuel 25:32-33 NIV)

Abigail was a woman who rose above her circumstances. She chose to become a survivor rather than a casualty and a victor instead of a victim. Abigail's provision of supplies, her humility and expressions of peace are the

examples of good judgment that were appropriate for the situation and averted the destruction of her household. But Abigail, the peacemaker, did none of that in her own strength. She enlisted the help of others, developed self-control, and promoted generosity because she had developed a relationship with God. She was secure in what she knew God wanted her to do. Her tough situation brought out the best in her because the best had been put into her.

We may be tempted to act impulsively out of frustration, but difficult people and tough situations call for good judgment, strength, and resourcefulness. They also call for company. God doesn't intend for us to do life alone. Seek the support of others as you go through tough times and nurture God's companionship to walk with you and direct you. Be dressed for tough times with good judgment, peace, and friendship. Wear His best.

Prayer: Father, right now I am going through a tough time. Help me to find support in you, to exercise good judgment, and walk in peace. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Dress up!

Review Abigail's story in 1 Samuel 25. If you are going through a tough time, pray about finding a friend who can be a spiritual support to you. Perhaps you can decide to arrange a weekly prayer time or Bible study together. You may want to read a book together for encouragement and discuss it over a cup of tea. Perhaps you can be a support to someone who is going through a tough time. Ask God to direct you to that person.

Dressed with Cosmetics: Lip-Gloss

"Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones." Proverbs 16:24

The last stop on our cruise was Curacao. Everyone heard that the shopping there was fantastic, so people waited to shop there instead of on other islands. On the morning we were supposed to anchor, we watched and waited as the crew tried to sail into port. Someone made an error and our ship ran aground. By the time we were able to get off the ship, the shops had closed. It was late afternoon, New Year's Eve and touring was unavailable. Shops were closed and opportunities were missed. Our final stop was a disappointment.

Speech is one of the most powerful gifts and privileges that God has given us. Like the wrong steering, wrong direction, and wrong anchor on the cruise ship, James 3:1-12 shows us that communication steered in the wrong direction can damage relationships, lead to tremendous disappointments, and wreck lives. On a positive note, our speech is also compared to a water fountain that refreshes and gives life.

James weaves through his discussion urging us to communicate responsibly. Malapropisms may cause us to break out in laughter, incorrect word usage can result in misunderstanding, and spelling errors from wrong keyboard strokes might cause us to wince. Yet words can also cause deep wounds. Apologies can be made and forgiveness extended, but forgetting hurtful words is like putting toothpaste back into a tube.

James also compares speech to the presence of a freshwater fountain. Just as a freshwater fountain represented critical necessities in James' day, speech represents a fountain of life-giving water. We can't be healthy without water. People who are dehydrated can become lethargic and confused. Just as water quenches our thirst and refreshes us on a hot day, our words can comfort and offer healthy refreshment.

Moms can communicate and steer our children in the right direction and anchor them securely in the right place. Our words like water, can affirm, encourage and give life. As I dress each day, cosmetics are accents to enhance

my look. Offering life giving words that steer in the right direction not only enhances my appearance, but my carefully applied lip-gloss will refresh relationships.

Prayer: Father, Thank you for the gift of communication. Help me to choose my words wisely and use them as fresh water in the lives of others, especially my children. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Dress up!

Read James 3:1-12. What aspect of the tongue “speaks” to you? What can you commit to this week as you carefully apply lip-gloss to enhance communication in relationships? In *Words Begin in our Hearts*, Rhonda Webb describes “fast forward thinking.” She suggests that we ask ourselves, “if I say this, will I be glad I said it? What will happen if I say it? Will I wish I could take it back?” Can I cultivate listening to others rather than control a conversation? Can I evaluate my words and purposely speak those that are life-giving and have a positive influence?

Dressed with Humility

"...clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." Colossians 3:12 (NIV)

"That group had so many strong willed women in it. No wonder it folded." Our small group was discussing the demise of a women's book discussion group. "Well, they didn't have a leader either," said Laura. "There just wasn't anyone willing to take leadership and organize." Sue chuckled, "Maybe they had too many leaders." "What do you mean?" asked Kay. "Just look around. Our group is full of strong-willed women who are leaders and leaders who aren't strong willed." Carol was puzzled, "I don't get it. Why then, has our group survived for six years?" The conversation continued. Sue was right. Our group has been a fun group and yes, full of leaders. Ellen added, "Maybe we deferred leadership to our coordinator. Maybe each woman in the other group was so strong-willed she couldn't handle not being in charge. Maybe everyone wanted to be in charge so no one was in charge." We seemed to be satisfied with our assessment and then moved on to plan next month's meeting.

Leadership, strong will, and humility. If we were taking a test and asked to circle the word in the group that didn't belong, we might circle "humility." What do you think; would it be marked correct or incorrect? The Good News Translation says that we should "put on the apron of humility." What a word picture! We wear aprons while we're serving others. Leaders serve; they look around, see a need, and meet it if they can. They listen, assess, validate others, and pool thoughts to help a group come to a conclusion. Leading with gentleness and patience, leaders put others' interests ahead of their own. In Colossians 3, The Message reminds us to "be content with second place." Strong willed leaders? I've seen them thrust their agenda on others and take their marbles and go home when things don't go their way. Other leaders manage, are great organizers, and let others shine. Look at the three words again: leadership, strong will, humility. Which one doesn't belong? Leaders serve with kindness and patience. As they wear aprons, they serve with humility and gentleness. Sounds a lot like Moms.

Prayer: Father, thank you for reminding me that humility, patience, kindness, gentleness and leadership are words with actions that belong together. Help me to lead and serve with humility where you place me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Dress up!

Which aspect of humility is the most difficult for you to dress in: patience, kindness, or gentleness? Write a specific goal for a specific situation where, with God's help, you will lead and serve wearing an apron.

Dressed with Love

“And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.” 1 Corinthians. 13:13

(NIV)

Sometimes it's just hard to love people. We know we're supposed to, but it's not easy. Last week while grocery shopping my cashier wore such a sour look, I couldn't wait to finish my purchase. I could barely utter a “thank you” and “good-by.” Wish her a good day? You're kidding! Sometimes we go to work preoccupied with family issues and love is not the outfit we took from our closets to wear that morning. Maybe fulfilling obligations for an organization you joined is causing stress and you don't wear love to the next meeting. If you've been hurt, disappointed, annoyed or betrayed, love isn't on your mind, in your heart, or in your wardrobe selection. These are the occasions when love remains in the back of our closets and we rationalize that wearing it isn't even fashionable.

God is love and if I am a model of God's qualities to others, then the conclusion is that I love. Love isn't a gushy, feel good emotion, but as Elisa Morgan says in Naked Fruit, a commitment to be there no matter what. It's a decision to represent the God I say I love. Because He is always Love and He is committed to me, I demonstrate that character to others. When I'm the sour personality, God faithfully loves me. When I shirk responsibilities, God doesn't stop loving me. When I fail, God still loves me. That's the way I'm expected to act toward others. Love no matter what.

My decision to love wears a pallet of colors and patterns. In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he describes what I look like when I wear love. “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.” (1Corinthians 13: 4-7) Paul goes on to say that love protects, trusts, hopes and perseveres.

Love is always the correct fashion choice. It wears as patience with the grocery store clerk, perseverance in fulfilling my responsibilities, kindness instead of irritation or sarcasm, and looking for the best in others. Love is the wardrobe item that is appropriate for every weather forecast, body type, personality, and every occasion. It is the garment that ties everything I wear together. Love is the most extravagant wardrobe choice from your closet, but it never wears out. It's a perfect fit because love never fails.

Prayer: Father, there are people in my life who are hard to love. Help me to love them like you do. Help me to see my own weaknesses and be willing to have you deal with them so that I may be lovable to others. Thank you for unconditionally loving me and for being there no matter what. In Jesus name, Amen.

Dress up!

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-13. The Message translates "love never fails" as "loving extravagantly." Who can you love extravagantly? What will that love look like?

Resources for Wardrobe Selections

Barthel, Tara Klena and Dabler, Judy Peacemaking for Women. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005.

Morgan, Elisa Naked Fruit. Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 2004.

Partow, Donna This Isn't the Life I Signed Up For. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2003.

Sande, Ken The Peacemaker. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997.

Webb, Rhonda Rizzo Words Begin in Our Heart. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2003.



Shop the entire line of Simple Joy books from the comfort of your home!

[My Simple Joy Cottage](#)