

# Stay-at-Home Moms' Devotions to Go



**Transforming  
Spare Minutes  
Into Personal  
Time with God**

**Angie Peters**

Moms' Devotions to Go Series

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Transform Spare Minutes  
into Personal Time with God

**Angie Peters**

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Note:

All Scripture passages, unless otherwise indicated,  
are from the New International Version

## Letter to Readers

Dear Stay-at-Home Mom...

Have you ever wondered what could possibly make sense about having the job title of “stay-at-home mom” when you’re in your car so much? The pediatrician, the ball game, the grocery store, the school...your list of errands and activities never ends when you have growing kids on board.

Because you’re constantly on the go, it’s easy to allow yourself to run down. Failing to keep a close eye on your physical, mental and spiritual energy levels can place you at risk of overheating, burning out, and running out of gas. You may not have gauges to indicate when you’ve hit that point, but the signs are easy to spot: exhaustion, irritability, a sense of hopelessness, or a feeling of exasperation.

When you’re in this condition, it’s tough to smile at the delights of mothering and it can be hard to find any fulfillment as you travel the miles mapped out for you. And as far as going the “extra mile” when circumstances warrant? No way! At least, not when you’re in this shape!

But that’s not the way any of us wants to mother. So, here’s some good news: You don’t have to settle for running on empty! Just as you keep your vehicle filled up and tuned up so you can make it to all the stops on your list of errands and activities each week, you can make it a priority to keep yourself—body, mind and spirit—filled up and tuned up so you can run the roads with joy.

That’s where this little book comes in. Okay, it can’t ensure your physical body stays healthy—you have to do that yourself by eating right, drinking lots of water, getting plenty of rest, eating a good diet and doing some regular exercise. But tuck your copy of Stay-at-Home Moms’ Devotions to Go over your visor or slide it under the driver’s seat. The next time you find yourself idling in the pick-up line after school, flipping through the worn magazines in the waiting room of your pediatrician’s office, or parked in front of the soccer field waiting for the coach’s whistle to bring practice to an end,

mute your cell phone,  
take a deep breath, and  
flip open this book.

Then top off your tank with a few moments of peace, Scripture passages, and prayer.  
After a time out for fellowship with your Maker, you'll be ready to roll...again!

**Blessings,**  
**Angie Peters**

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## Section 1

### Changing Lanes

The “slow lane,” “Plan B (aby),” the “mommy track”—no matter what you call it, choosing stay-at-home motherhood changes everything!

## Letting Go of the Wheel

*I know, GOD, that mere mortals can't run their own lives, That men and women don't have what it takes to take charge of life. Jeremiah 10:23, The Message*

Diana shifted the solid weight of 9-month-old Trey from one hip to another as she surveyed the kitchen and living room from where she stood: A tumbled-down tower of blocks was strewn across the spotted carpeting; a heap of wrinkled laundry spilled off the corner of the couch; a jumble of board books covered the coffee table; and sour-smelling dishes filled the sink.

“I used to put together budgets, supervise a staff, plan meetings and still have time to get my grocery shopping done and house clean,” she reminded herself as she sat the baby down on the kitchen tile, handing him a couple of chunky wooden cars that had rolled under the table so she could try to tackle the overflowing sink. “So why can’t I keep the toys picked up? Get my laundry done? Balance the checkbook? Get on the treadmill? Finish a cup of coffee before it gets cold?”

As she held her hand under the cool stream pouring from the faucet, waiting for the water to become hot enough to rinse off the dried-on food, she fought against the familiar frustrating thought: “I can’t get control over even one area of my life.”

Do you have days—or weeks, or months—when you, like Diane, can’t seem to get a firm grip on a single category of your life? Whether it’s your marriage, your parenting, your schedule, your housekeeping, your finances, your health, your work, your friendships or your spiritual growth, you just can’t seem to keep the vehicle of stay-at-home motherhood between the lines.

When your control over circumstances crumbles and chaos reigns, remember this: by its very definition, the career of mothering puts people first. And whenever people are involved—even when they are the little people

you bathe and diaper, tote and feed, discipline and shuttle—schedules will be disrupted, plans derailed and activities delayed. It's inevitable. But instead of letting the disarray make you feel like a disappointment, try to learn to view these circumstances as a sign of success in your important task of caring for your kids.

Then take to heart this liberating truth: God knows what you're facing. He knows what you're facing because He's right there with you. He's not sitting in the back seat wearing a stern look because you have graham cracker crumbs on your floor or because you ordered take-out instead of cooking dinner last night; He's seated right beside you with love in His eyes. He's asking you to slide over into the passenger seat and let Him take the wheel. Replace your worry about losing control with the peace of knowing you're riding with a God who doesn't!

## Road Work

What expectations did you bring into stay-at-home motherhood? How can you adjust those expectations so that they're more realistic and reasonable? What practical steps can you take toward turning the wheel over to God?

## Relax! You're with Family

*...where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 2 Corinthians 3:17*

Toes in the sand and SPF 30 on my skin, I was sunbathing with the seagulls and doing some serious people watching over the top of my book while my husband and kids played in the surf.

A group of teen girls passed by, each with her shoulders thrown back, chin tilted up, and chest thrust out. No muscle, it seems, was left untensed. The girls' self-consciousness was as stark as their dark tans, and they seemed to be more concerned with impressing other beachgoers than with enjoying their day at the shore. Frankly, they didn't look like they were having much fun.

A few minutes after those teens had passed, a girl who appeared to be about 14 showed up with a much older woman—her grandmother, I gathered—and a young boy—her brother, surely. The teen was beautiful, but what made her most stunning wasn't the shape of her legs or the color of her hair. It was in the comfort of the strides she took alongside her grandma. It was in her relaxed shoulders, her swinging arms, her light step.

After stopping here and there to pick up a shell, the girl spread out a beach towel for the older woman, who sat to watch her grandchildren play. And play they did! When the teen reached the water's edge, she kicked off her flip flops and grabbed her little brother's hand to help him jump over the low breakers cascading against the shoreline. The girl's laughter would have warmed my soul even if I hadn't already been basking in the sun. Clearly, she was having a great time. But then, why shouldn't she...after all, she was with family! She had no prowess to prove, no peers to impress. The task before her was simply to enjoy the day with the people who loved her.

As God does His own "people watching," I suspect we moms fall into similar categories. Some of us are constantly flexing our mothering muscles in an effort to impress onlookers, while others are relaxing into the freedom of knowing we're "with family." Which group does God find you in?

## Praying for the Power

Lord, as your loving gaze falls on me today, may you find me freely enjoying the life, the love, and the little ones you have given me.

## Buckle Up!

*The Lord will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore. Psalm 122:7-8*

You may remember, like I do, a time when there were no seatbelt laws. Buckling up was an option, not an order. While it probably seemed like a fine idea to most of us, at the time no one was fully aware of how many tragedies we could prevent by taking that one simple step. Statistics tell us now that countless lives each year are saved when drivers and passengers take the simple step of buckling up.

The danger we face on the road isn't unlike the peril we encounter in our spiritual lives. Frustrations threaten to undermine our faith. Too many commitments drain us of energy and skew our sense of priorities. Temptations dart in front of us and bad decisions can send us skidding off the road and into ditches.

The existence of both physical and spiritual hazards makes it critical that we “buckle up” in the safety of God's protection. He has designed for those who love Him all kinds of security systems, including shelter from life's storms, protection against our enemies, strength in our weakness, and even an angelic entourage of heavenly sentries whose only job is to do the Lord's bidding concerning our care.

As you're running the roads, “coming and going” as you cart kids and carry cargo, isn't it nice to know you're safe—body and soul--in God's embrace of protection?

## Road Work

Have you buckled your spiritual seatbelt today by spending time in prayer, meditation or Bible study? Start letting the “buckle up” light or bell in your car serve as a reminder to whisper a brief prayer of thanks for God’s protection.

## They Don't Teach This Stuff in College!

*Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. Jeremiah 6:16*

Could I construct a cohesive paragraph? Absolutely. Write copy for a hypothetical advertising campaign? Sure. Analyze a major work of fiction? With relative ease. To earn my bachelor's degree in English I did, after all, have to do all the above and more.

But what about formulating effective and consistent discipline strategies? That wasn't in my degree plan. Breast or bottle? Not a hot topic in the lecture halls. Managing an intensive potty training program? Not in the curriculum. Building a child's self-esteem without building an imbalanced attitude of self-importance? Must have missed that day. Teaching humility without damaging a child's self-esteem? Hey, wait a minute! Is my degree even worth the paper it's printed on?

Of course it is...when I'm vying for a writing assignment or an editing project. But when it comes to my day job, my full-time career of mothering, I learned early on that I needed more education than money can buy. I require some one-on-one tutoring, mentoring, or personal coaching.

Society may suggest that asking for help is a sign of weakness, but in God's program, asking for help shows strength and wisdom. So when mothering has you stumped, don't let your lack of knowledge make you feel foolish or inadequate. Make a smart move by following the good advice given in the Good Book. Ask a trusted and godly person who has traveled this road before you—your mom, an aunt, a neighbor, or a friend—where “the good way is,” then walk in it.

With peace.

## Road Work

What women among your acquaintances do you admire and respect? Why not invite one of them to join you for lunch? Then use that time to ask questions and seek advice about mothering matters that have been close to your heart.

## A Heavenly High-Five

*Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ. Galatians 1:10*

A wave of heat inside the sun-baked vehicle engulfed Kathryn as she opened the door and slid into the driver's seat on a chilly Friday afternoon. She was thankful for the warmth and relieved to be heading home. Having lunch with a couple of her former co-workers hadn't turned out to be much fun: Instead of catching up on the news in her old office, she had spent much of the time fielding questions: Are you ready to come back to work yet? Aren't you overqualified to be a full-time diaper changer? Is the boredom driving you mad? Are you sure you know what you're doing? Whatever are you doing with all that time?

Kat had known when she stepped out of the workforce and signed on to stay-at-home motherhood that she would be swapping her salary for sale shopping and her prestige for playground duty. She had found those to be fairly simple adjustments. What she had discovered harder to handle was the sense that few of her friends understood or respected her decision. At a time when she craved her former teammates' high-fives, they seemed like members of a rival team with little to offer but criticism and skepticism. A dreary mood settled over her as she made her way home.

Pulling into her driveway, however, cheered Kat instantly: the curtains in the living room window were rippling behind two grinning faces, noses smashed against the cold panes. Her twin toddlers, who had stayed home with their dad, were wriggling all over they were so happy to see her. They clapped, jumping up and down at her feet when she walked through the front door. Kat stooped to give her boys each a high-five and gather them up in her arms.

## Road Work

Although the number of stay-at-home mothers has increased in recent years, one fact remains: We're still in the minority, and that's not always a comfy place to be. How do your friends and family regard your decision to stay home with your kids? How do you handle any opposition or lack of support they express? What can you do to stay focused on winning the approval of God, rather than of people?

## Traveling Tip

### 10 Things Every Stay-at-Home Mom Should Know

Stay-at-home parenting is a job ... and just like any other job, it requires planning and perseverance, creativity and confidence.

Giving up your salary doesn't make life as difficult as you might think...after you take out expenses such as childcare, transportation, and wardrobe.

Your conversion from workplace to home will also affect your marriage...as you adjust to realigned responsibilities.

Being a professional mom isn't synonymous with being a "perfect" mom... because there's no such thing!

Staying at home, especially when your children are babies, can be an isolating experience... so it's important to connect with other stay-at-home mothers (your church, your library and your school are great places to start).

You should remind yourself periodically why you chose to become a stay-at-home mom... so you don't end up spending more time cleaning house and serving on committees than you do interacting with your kids.

Try to keep your professional skills sharp ... putting your skills to work for your church, school, or nonprofit organization can help you reenter the workforce if you choose to do so down the road.

You will find it easy to over commit...so be selective in the number of activities you decide to get involved in at church, at school, and in your community.

You will need breaks...so regularly take time to get out of the house, step away from the kids, and do something else you enjoy.

The quality of your child-care hinges on the quality of your self-care... so exercise, eat right, and establish a regular quiet time during which you can nurture your spiritual growth through prayer, meditation and Bible study.

## Section 2

### Have You Got Enough Gas?

Taking care of kids? It can be quite simple.

Taking care of yourself while you're taking care of the kids?

It might be one of the biggest challenges of your career!

## Making More Sandwiches

*...He had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Mark 6:34*

The children gathered around her and reported all they had done that day. Jake needed permission slips signed, Melissa wanted her to sew the patches on a uniform before the meeting that night, and Ben needed a pep talk because some kids had called him names on the playground at school today.

Deanna kicked into gear signing slips, sewing patches, and soothing hurt feelings.

Before she knew it, hours had passed and she realized she had taken care of everyone but herself. Physically and mentally worn out, she hadn't even had a chance to eat.

She needed to get away to a quiet place to get some rest.

As she grabbed a magazine to take out to the porch swing on the back deck, the kids happened to see where she was going—and they ran to get there ahead of her. Greeting their mom with insistent expressions, “We’re hungry,” they said expectantly before she even had a chance to sit down.

Sound familiar?

Check out the entire Scripture passage from Mark 6:30-34. The above words reenact almost word for word an episode from Christ’s life—only the names of the people and places have been changed to drive home a point: When they’re about to drain the last bit of our energy with that one last, childish demand, we may be tempted to tell our kids, “Too bad. I’ve maxed out. I’m takin’ a break. Clocked out five minutes ago.” But that’s not the action Christ took. Instead, with compassion, He fulfilled His need-meeting role in the lives of the people. Then

He went on to prepare a dinner party that was certainly more extravagant than any we'll ever be expected to throw!

## Praying for the Power

Lord, the next time I feel too tired to make another sandwich, clean another face, read another story, pick up another mess, or listen to another playground tale, help me to step up to the challenge of being the “need meter” you selected for each of the precious children you’ve placed in my care. Help me to draw comfort and strength from my relationship with the “need-meeter” you have given me in your Son, Jesus Christ.

## Space for Peace

*...seek peace and pursue it Psalm 34:14*

I muddle my way through most harrowing experiences and rough days without shedding a tear—at least until I’m safely parked on the couch in front of Steel Magnolias with a king-size bag of M&Ms in hand.

But at a bookstore one morning, a simple misunderstanding about an order made me cry. As I felt the hot drips push their way into the corners of my eyes, I bowed my head, blinking and gulping to try to stop them before the clerks noticed.

No use. A tiny snag in the fabric of my day had completely unraveled me.

“I don’t usually do this,” I said through sniffles as the clerk worked to resolve the problem. “Stretched too thin...up all night...doing too many things at once...running late...a little stressed...” My excuses sounded lame but I felt like I owed some sort of an explanation, because I got the feeling she didn’t quite know what to do with my soggy self. When, to her relief and mine, she finally bagged up the books, I tucked them under my arm, grabbed my kids’ hands, and hurried out of the store.

What bothered me about what happened – aside from “what they must think of me” for blubbering over a book order--is that I had been on the verge of tears without even realizing it. I had been oblivious to the emotional time bomb ticking just under the surface of my feelings. Who knew? Where was that light that should have flashed a warning like the one in my van when it’s on the brink of a breakdown?

I may not come equipped with service lights, but had I slowed down enough to read the writing on the wall—in the oversized squares of the calendar hanging by the fridge in our kitchen—I would have surely seen hazard heading my way. In addition to the everyday responsibilities of caring for my kids, I had allowed appointments,

events and deadlines to spill into the margins of each day for the past month. They had simply, finally, scribbled chaos over the peace that God intends for me to enjoy.

I'm not the only one in this shape. Take a good look at your calendar. If you see more ink than paper, slip an extra pack of tissues into your purse so a stranger won't have to fetch you one when you start to blow at a cash register or a gas pump.

Better yet, join me in cutting back. Practice saying, "No, I can't do that this time," and "Thanks for asking, but I have other plans." Then get out the White-Out. Paint some space onto your crowded calendar to make room in this oh-so-short season of parenting to enjoy peace at home with your family.

## Road Work

Are you stretched too thin and worn in spirit? Do something about it today. Pare down your obligations so that your “to-do” list reflects only the activities that are your highest priorities.

## Battle Plans

*... if you wage war, obtain guidance. Proverbs 20:18b*

The damp pressure of your just-awake toddler nestling her sleepy head into the curve of your neck each morning. The sight of your 12-year-old son striding down the soccer field on a sun-saturated Saturday afternoon. The sound of your third-grade daughter's clear and confident voice singing behind the closed door of her bedroom.

These experiences and more bring Ephesians 3:20—about God being able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine--into living color. What a blessing, motherhood.

But you don't always feel blessed, do you? Some days, your toddler can be standoffish, unaffectionate or just plain stinky! That pre-teen son can get so obsessed with soccer that he rarely remembers it's his job to carry out the trash. Or that angelic songbird of a daughter can use that beautiful voice to do some very unmelodic complaining.

On days like those, you may feel like you're at war as you wage battles over boundaries and standoffs about studying, confrontations about curfews and disputes about household duties.

Today's verse presents us with a valuable and practical battle strategy. To fully equip ourselves to triumph through the trials and tests of parenting, we need simply to consult God, the strategist with the best advice we'll ever be able to get our hands on. His Word "is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness" so that we can be "thoroughly equipped" for the work He's cut out for us (see 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

## Road Work

Spending time in preparation and continuing education is essential for success in every profession. Your job is no different. Are you setting aside time regularly to physically and spiritually prepare for the coming day, week or month of raising your kids?

## Under Construction

*I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*

*Jeremiah 29:11*

I don't commute to work each day, but I'm on the interstate almost as much as the next person. With our dentist, orthodontist, and the mall at the other end of a 17-mile stretch of interstate, this corridor is as crucial to the care and upkeep of my family as hot tea and chocolate are to the care and upkeep of me.

Imagine my excitement when several years ago our state's highway department announced it would be rebuilding more than 300 miles of our 655-mile interstate system, with nearly 17 miles of that being "my interstate." Crews would be transforming the very road I and about 63,000 of my neighbors race up and down regularly when we go "into town."

From the time the work crew rolled its first orange barrel into place, we had to learn to deal with long delays. Coming to a halt in bumper-to-bumper traffic serves up miles and miles of much-needed "think time" for someone who claims she never gets enough of the stuff. A person can pick up some heavy-duty lessons about life when traveling a road that's under construction.

For example, I noticed that making something better often requires that it be taken apart first. Cracked roadways, eroded shoulders, damaged guard rails...workers can't simply pour or erect the new over the old; they have to deconstruct before they reconstruct.

Sometimes the stress of 24-7 parenting cracks up our sense of peace. Caring for a sick or teething child night and day stoops our shoulders with fatigue. Financial realities seem to demolish our dreams. But maybe we should consider the following when those kinds of events steamroll their way through our lives: We just might be "under construction" ourselves. As inconvenient and at times dangerous as these intrusions may seem, they

just might be paving the way for better things to come. Today's verse not only tells us that the things that happen to us are not accidents, but that they are part of God's promise of major improvements coming our way.

May we remember that promise with trust and hope as we inch our way past those orange barrels!

## Road Work

Has a circumstance or event threatened to discourage you, or made you feel as if God has abandoned you? Today, claim His promise of hope by choosing to regard those circumstances or events as a sign that God's at work.

## Have You Got Your Hands Full?

*...she extends her hands to the needy. Proverbs 31:20*

A chewed piece of gum in a wadded-up tissue, an empty water bottle and an ink pen. These are the reasons I almost broke a leg getting out of the van one Sunday afternoon.

Anytime we're in the van—or anyplace else for that matter—I must resemble a shelf, or maybe a trash can, because my hands are the place my kids put things they don't want to hold or keep.

We pulled into the driveway after church, my husband at the wheel and I in the passenger seat. Because I was clutching the three things my kids had handed me, plus my purse and my Bible, on top of which was balancing a craft my youngest daughter had made in Sunday school that wasn't quite dry, I didn't have much to work with in the holding-onto-the-door department. I managed to open the door with my elbow, but...

Lying on the couch that afternoon with my back against a heating pad, I determined to find some kind of hidden truth in my near-body-cast experience. Discovering even a scrap of deeper meaning on this rollercoaster ride of family life is what revs my engine most days.

So here it is: People hand me things all the time. They might want me to hold something small and inconsequential, like a little Bubble Yum-filled Kleenex. Or it might be larger, and fragile, like the Noah's ark. Or it might be something I can't touch, that will have much more of an impact than a crumpled tissue: a new project someone has asked me to take on or a problem a friend has shared with me in confidence.

Yet I only have two hands. I fill them pretty full with parenting chores, errands, freelance work, social obligations, church commitments and such. But I better not take on too much, or something will start sliding off the top of the pile. I'll bend over to pick that up, and drop something else in the process. I'll lose my balance,

and before I know it, I'll find myself in a heap of a mess on the driveway. Not only will I have hurt myself, but I'll also drop some of the things people have handed me. The child-made Noah's ark might tear into pieces or the ministry project could fail to get off the ground. The deadline will go unmet, the secret will slip from my lips.

To my thinking, coming up with the right answers to the questions, "Which things do I hold?" and "Which things do I put down before I let someone hand me something else?" should be something I spend much time praying about.

The right answers to those questions can prevent lots of messes and determine whether I'll have a free hand to steady myself next time I start to slip, to hold my husband's extended hand, or to clutch the bouquet of flowers my kids pick for me from our back yard. And perhaps most importantly, the right answers can determine whether I'll have a free hand to reach out to someone who needs my help.

I'm going to start trying harder to keep at least one hand free.

## Praying for the Power

Lord, you know my heart like no other, so you know how difficult it is for me to say no when someone asks me to do something. Yet you also know my future like no other. Please help me be prepared for what you have in store for me in the coming days. Keep my hands free of inconsequential clutter so they will be available to serve others for you.

## Traveling Tip

9 things you can do just for you while waiting in the car during  
(you fill in the blank!) practice

Relax your muscles with some gentle stretching and ease the tension in your shoulders with head rolls.

Call a friend for an overdue chat.

File those ragged fingernails.

Clean out your purse.

Listen to a CD of YOUR choice.

Treat your hands and arms to a relaxing rubdown with some luxurious lotion you've stashed in your purse.

Go catalog shopping.

Read a good book.

Spend quiet time reading a devotion or mulling over a favorite Scripture passage.

## Section 3

### Moms, Marriage, and Money

Maintaining your marriage, managing your money, mothering your children:

It's a magnificent, monumental balancing act!

## Right Lane, Right Time

*I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free. Psalm 119:32*

The sign for the exit ramp zipped out of my field of vision as I realized I hadn't eased into the right-hand lane soon enough to get off the freeway at the right time. My only option was to take the next exit and make a huge circle just to get back to where I needed to be. In rush hour traffic, that meant being a half-hour late for picking up my daughter at a skating party and then missing the first half of my son's soccer game.

What headaches I could have avoided—and how much gas I could have saved--if I had only been in the right place at the right time!

Sometimes being in the right place at the right time can save us more than the anxiety of running behind on our schedules or the expense of a few gallons of gas. It can give us peace beyond measure.

When I became a mom, I had a strong sense early on that the right place for me to be was in a rocking chair instead of in an office chair and in my kitchen fixing lunch for my kids at noon instead of in a break room eating lunch apart from them. Even though walking away from my job jarred our sense of financial security and called for us to make many sacrifices, few decisions in my life have yielded anything near the serenity that one step has given me.

Agreed, home isn't necessarily the right place for every mom, but I know it's exactly the right place for me. Apparently you feel it's the right place for you, too, or you wouldn't be reading this book!

So let's help each other remember to draw joy from the thought that each time we face struggles—whether they relate to our marriage, our money, or other matters--because of the decision we've made to stay at home, they're a small price to pay for the freedom we enjoy in knowing we are in the “right place” at the “right time.”

Have you noticed fast your kids are growing up? You won't get a chance to take this exit again!

## Road Work

Think about some of the struggles you've had to face as a result of your decision to stay at home. Now think about the blessings you would have missed out on had you not been at home. Not a bad trade-off, is it?

## What's Cooking?

*He has made everything beautiful in its time. Ecclesiastes 3:11*

If a stay-at-home mother designed a stove, she would probably put at least four burners, maybe more, on the back row--since that's where so many of our pots and pans end up when we decide to leave the workplace.

On one of those back burners our plans for meeting professional goals have settled from a boil to a slow bubble; on another one rests trips we intend to take. A third burner keeps warm our plans for buying a new home, and on a fourth simmers a dream we hope to pursue or a hobby we aim to take up.

Often we see these plans simmering on the back of the stove as a drawback of our home-based, kid-centric, scaled-back lifestyle. Along with stretch marks, worry wrinkles, and a shrinking bank balance, they're simply battle scars of motherhood.

But simmering on the back burner isn't really a bad place at all. In fact, it's an excellent spot for our grandest plans, our wildest dreams, our most cherished hopes. Why? Because simmering serves an important purpose!

Think about it: What food isn't better for having cooked a long time at a low temp? Whether it's pot roast or vegetable stew, chili or seafood gumbo, slow, low cooking tenderizes tough spots. It kills harmful bacteria and allows a variety of disparate flavors to fuse into a medley of robust, nourishing flavor.

While our gaze is fixed on our kids and our hands are busy holding their hands, God is at work using that time—and those back-burner pots--to prepare His best for us. He may be stirring into our lives new people who will make key career connections for us--when the time is right. He may be straining out unnecessary and unproductive obligations so that we'll be free to enjoy learning that new hobby—when the time is right. Or

perhaps He is maturing our perspective on material matters and siphoning off financial woes so that we'll have the right attitude as well as the right amount of money to buy that new house—when the time is right.

Once in a while, when I'm going about my day-to-day chores of caring for my kids, I get a whiff of the wonderful provisions He's cooking up for me. My mouth is already beginning to water, because I know that a beautiful dish of something delicious will be ready to come off those burners and out of those pots for me to enjoy —when the time is right.

## Road Work

What plans or dreams are simmering on your back burners? Take a break from your parenting chores today to lift the lid off one of those pots and give it a stir. If a trip's on your back burner, go there by way of the Internet to begin making plans. If returning to your career one day to pick up where you left off is something that's simmering, keep tabs on what's moving and shaking by staying in touch with your colleagues in the field. If you'd like to finish your college degree, check into the possibility of signing up for an online course you could take now to put you one step closer to your goal.

## Tag Team, If You Can!

*Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work. Ecclesiastes 4:9*

Most days when our older kids were just babies, 5:30 p.m. would find me perched on the front step, one baby on each knee, singing my own lyrics to the tune of “Are You Sleeping?”

“Where is Daddy?/Where is Daddy?

Where is he?/ Where is he?

He’ll be coming home soon/in his white truck.

Where is he?/Where is he?”

Corny, I know. But McCartney and Lennon couldn’t have written a song more meaningful to me than that silly chorus chanted during those sweet but oh-so-long days of mothering little ones at home.

My mornings started before the sun came up with a pre-dawn feeding of newborn Lindsey, and by the time she fell asleep again, her two-year old brother Nick was up and at ‘em, building sheet forts and ramping Matchbox cars off the arm of the couch. I was tired by 10 a.m., exhausted by noon, and just plain cereal-brained by 5 p.m. All I had left in me was enough energy to look at the clock and say, “It’s almost time for Daddy to be home!” before scooping up the kids and heading outside for our afternoon vigil.

My husband rarely missed a beat as we performed this tag-team dance of young parenthood. He would start waving at us as he pulled into the driveway, and was usually as ready to take the babies from me as I was to hand them over so I could go spend some “me” time. I would soak in the tub, chat on the phone with a friend, or run to the bookstore to get out of the house and browse the shelves.

Our routine has endured through the years. Even as the kids have grown and their need for physical, hands-on care has become less intense, Kurt has continued to realize how important it is for me to get a physical and mental break each day. And if he starts forgetting that fact? You can be sure I'm ready with reminders.

If your husband isn't already taking over with the kids from time to time so you can have much-needed breaks, now's the time to do something about it. Explain that you need some time to call your own in order to have what it takes to give stay-at-home mothering your all. Work out a "tag-team" routine that fits both of your schedules—then start looking forward to the "good return" that results from your parenting partnership.

(And feel free to use the lyrics to our song when you're waiting for your shift to end.)

## Road Work

A mom's exit from the workplace to home affects dads too! Household responsibilities shift, financial burdens increase, schedules are reconfigured (or disappear altogether!) and lifestyles change. Make regular dates to talk about these changes and take turns letting each other know what you need in order to regain your balance.

## Man (and Woman) Overboard!

*And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:19*

I let my rake fall to the ground with a clunk as I realized what Kurt was saying.

“...so go ahead and tell them you’re quitting.”

We had been talking about it and praying about it for weeks. The closer the time had drawn to the day when I was scheduled to return to my job at the newspaper, the stronger we were sensing I shouldn’t go back. We believed I might need to stop writing for the paper and start being a full-time, stay-at-home mom to our one-month-old son, Nick. Now here, while we were cleaning musty pine needles out of the flower beds to get ready for spring, Kurt was changing the question mark to a period.

Hearing the words that redefined my life from that day forward made me want to turn cartwheels like a kid. (I probably would have if I hadn’t still been stitched up from my c-section!) I felt relief and excitement, anticipating the coming days of raising my son on my own terms, in my own time, and on my own turf.

But I knew there had to be a “but” coming and I suspected it would be about money. That, of course, had been the biggest uncertainty in all of our discussions about the prospect of my coming home. Sure enough:

“But it’s going to be hard,” Kurt was continuing. Then he said with resolve, “I feel like we’re doing the right thing, and I know God will take care of us.”

Just in case God needed extra help, I was ready with a plan: “Oh don’t worry, I’ve already thought about that. We’ll clip coupons, give up cable, wait about getting a new car, skip vacations”—I took a great big, mature-sounding breath—“and even save money by using cloth diapers.”

With that grand finale, I picked up the rake and got back to work with renewed vigor. I might as well have been Peter himself preparing to strut across the waves toward Jesus, I felt so focused and faith-driven.

What I didn't know at that time was how much strength the waves of financial stress could gather before slamming into our little boat. Clipping coupons didn't save enough coins to make a dent in the price of paying for the special formula we had to buy for Nick's perpetually upset tummy. Driving around town with a baby on board in a car that has engine trouble is nerve-wracking to say the least and can be dangerous at worst. And although using cloth diapers was good for the environment, the money they saved us didn't offset the cost of the huge amounts of detergent we had to use to keep them clean.

At times it was—and still is, 15 years later--hard to keep our eyes off the swells and on Jesus.

If you're a stay-at-home mom who's gone through similar circumstances, I know it won't surprise you to hear me say that not once has He let us down. Even in the leanest times, when we have been dog-paddling in circles in the surf instead of looking to Him for our provision, He has met all our needs and bestowed many blessings besides. And He has done it with or without our "help."

God states He will provide for us. Period. He doesn't take care of us on the condition that we do our part by clipping a certain quota of coupons or driving a certain type of car. It's a breathtakingly simple, astonishingly unconditional promise: "God will meet all your needs."

## Praying for the Power

Lord, I don't stop often enough to thank you for meeting all my needs. Accept my offering of thanksgiving today for making it possible for us to be a family that doesn't merely survive, but one that thrives because of your loving provision.

## "Male Bashing" is Bad Business

*... you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. 1 Peter 2:15 (English Standard Version)*

Bring up a recent blunder your husband committed and before you know it all the women in the room—including ones you don't even know—are rushing up to share tales of their own guys' ineptness ("I can't trust him to get anything right"); blindness (the tired, "he can't find it even when it's right in front of his nose" story); inconsideration ("he wouldn't know it was our anniversary if I didn't remind him"); or just plain stupidity ("would you believe he...").

Eyes roll. We snicker and nod. The bond of sisterhood is sealed more tightly with each account of "what we have to put up with" from our men.

It's not just a fun pastime, this male bashing. It's a lucrative industry. Turn on any number of prime-time sitcoms and you'll find plenty of bumbling fools for husbands. Browse the t-shirt racks in the junior department and you'll learn that "girls rule" but "boys drool." And start calculating the number of commercials that highlight the blatant inadequacies of men; you will quickly lose count.

In the scramble for one-upmanship in the so-called "war between the sexes," many of us have begun to cheat ourselves out of the blessing that God intended our marriages to be. Sure, there are men who abuse or abandon their wives and men who don't pay child support. They are pathetic and their behavior is no joking matter. But the men we seem to ridicule most often are the husbands we've been married to for 3, 10, 18 and 50 years. The ones who do laundry and change diapers. Those who go to teacher conferences, change tires, get promotions at their jobs, know the names of their daughters' best friends, and tell us we're beautiful even when we have spit-up on our shoulder and finger-paint in our hair.

In a society filled with far too many fatherless homes, we need to be building up, not tearing down, the dads who are staying with, working for, loving and praying with our families. Imagine the lessons we can teach our sons about the responsibility and honor of becoming a husband and a father if we'll simply point out the things their dads are doing right instead of laughing about and broadcasting the things they may be doing wrong.

So let's make a deal. Let's stop opening the door to male bashing by refusing to tell tales on our husbands... unless they're good ones. I'll start. You haven't tasted anything until you've tried my husband's fresh, homemade salsa. And would you believe that to make up for the lack of snow during these Arkansas winters, he sprays our sloped yard with water on the below-freezing nights so our kids can go sledding the next morning? Oh yeah, he works really hard at his job so that I can continue to stay at home with our kids. And did I tell you that he ...

## Road Work

Be a trend-changer! Make it your personal mission to silence the subject the next time you find yourself in a group of women who begin bad mouthing men.

[Note: Adapted from *Designed to Build: A Woman and Her Home* (Texarkana, AR: Bogard Press, 2004) p. 81.]

## Traveling Tip

### 9 Cheap (and Fun!) Dates

**Dinner Date** Feed the kids an early, simple supper, then put something delicious and a little more grown-up in the oven, on the stove or on the grill. After you get the kids bathed and tucked in, set an elegant table, turn on some great music, and enjoy a late dinner by candlelight.

**Pack a Picnic** Take sandwiches to a scenic spot nearby: a bench near the fountain in your city park, under a shade tree on your grandma's farm, or in your own back yard.

**Book Buddies** Visit a big box bookstore, split up to browse the shelves, then meet up at the in-house café for a cup of your favorite treat.

**Catch a Play** Attend a production at a local high school or community theater.

**Do Dessert** Eat at home, then head to your favorite restaurant for a grand finale of a sweet splurge you would never otherwise order.

**Window Shop** Spend a couple hours walking the mall, people watching and window shopping.

**A Swinging Time** Get the kids off to bed, then meet on the porch swing (or the patio chairs, or the living room couch) for late-night snacks and grown-up conversation.

**Double Date** Invite friends over to play cards or games while the kids watch movies or play games in another room.

Bargain Hunters While the kids are still at sleepovers some Saturday morning, get up early to hit the garage sale circuit. Grab donuts and coffee on the way.

## Section 4

### Kids on Board

Take a good look:

at the baby sleeping in the infant seat in the seat behind you;

at the toddler beside you belting out nursery rhymes at the top of his lungs;

at the school girl giggling with her best friend while she waits for you to pull through the pick-up lane; or

at the teen boy shooting hoops in your driveway.

The clichés are true: you'll blink and they'll be grown.

Your monumental mission between now and then?

Make each moment count!

## Dressing Kids for Service, Not for Success

*Be dressed ready for service. Luke 12:35*

Each laundry day, I used to dump the freshly washed and dried clothes onto our bed, fold them, and place them into neat stacks. Then, instead of putting them away, I would leave the pillars of towels, piles of pants and rows of underwear on the bed like trophies for my husband and kids to see. The taller the towers, the prouder I was. How satisfying, knowing not only that I had handled such huge amounts of laundry in a day's time, but also that my efforts were not going unnoticed, thanks to my display. Who wouldn't notice five pairs of panties perched on your pillow when it's time to turn in? "See what I did!" those Downy-smelling piles seem to be triumphantly shouting for me and my oversized ego.

But after I was asked to write an article about raising kids with a heart for service, my spirits--as well as those stacks of laundry--came tumbling down. My reading and meditation about having a spirit of service taught me that in trying to show everyone in my home what a servant I was, in no way whatsoever was I demonstrating a servant's spirit. Furthermore, tooting my own horn was producing a melody that didn't sound very pleasant.

The world shouts "me first!" from the pages of books and magazines, and from the plots of movies and TV shows spewing strategies on how to come out ahead in whatever game it is we or our kids are playing. But God tells us we fare much better when we "dress for service" than when we "dress for success." Even though it clashes with the colors of popular opinion, I learned I need to outfit myself and my children with the attitude that service is sublime, not shameful.

So now whenever I do laundry, I try to get those piles of clean clothes put away ASAP. A "well done, good and faithful servant" from my heavenly Father will sound so much sweeter to my ears than a "look what I did!" sounded to my kids.

## Praying for the Power

Lord, it's hard for me to even chat with a friend in the bleachers without using the words "I" and "me" a dozen times. I know my kids learn by watching me; help me to demonstrate servanthood rather than selfishness, and transform my need for attention and commendation into a single-minded passion to please you.

## Taming Tots, Tweens and Teens

*The rod of correction imparts wisdom, but a child left to himself disgraces his mother.*

*Proverbs 29:15*

As I squeezed through the crush of parents and students in the school supply aisle at Wal-Mart after the first day of school, I saw much more than binders and lunch boxes. I witnessed a dreadful display of an ugly temper.

All of us checkbook-bearing moms were stressed, standing gridlocked in that walkway, packed into the aisle like the crayons in a new 24-count box. Each of us had a list as long as the checkout line of reasons to consider breaking a plastic ruler in two or sinking a fist into a jumbo box of Kleenex.

But the angry words I heard were not belted out of a miserable mom. They came from a grade-school girl who was pushing her way through the crowd just behind her mother. As the child spewed out a stream of shrill complaints and orders, she brought to life the adage, “it’s not what you say, it’s how you say it.” I never knew a person could inject so much malice into the words, “it needs to be a blue folder.”

There was no reproach at all from the older woman, only an uncomfortable silence and a shared, cringing smile between the two of us as I passed by as quickly as I could. I felt as if sarcasm and disrespect were contagious and could infect the girls I had with me. Where’s a can of bad attitude disinfectant when you need it?

The episode brought to mind times when my own kids, when they were toddlers, would start to throw tantrums in public places. It’s a universal dilemma among moms: Do you refrain from disciplining in order to avoid embarrassment and to prevent an even worse scene? Or do you stick to your resolve and give them firm and unyielding correction, regardless of your neighbors, friends and fellow shoppers who might be listening or watching? Too many times we take the first option, allowing badly behaving kids to keep stomping and screaming while we plead with whispered promises to buy candy at the checkout if they’ll just be quiet.

## Praying for the Power

Heavenly Father, in your omniscience you can see down the road to the unfortunate results of parenting too permissively and too passively. Although I'm merely a mortal mom, my Wal-Mart experience gave me a glimpse at the future too. What I saw made me more certain that giving a fussy and demanding tot a sucker just to get her to be quiet doesn't do her any favors. It doesn't do much for the people who will have to live with her, go to school with her...or buy school supplies for her 10 years from now, either. Please give me the discipline to provide discipline so that my children will bring you honor.

## A Mom's Duty on the Home Front

*She watches over the affairs of her household... Proverbs 31:27a*

For about two years, I wrote a column called “Home Front,” titled that way because it called to mind a picture of a battle-weary mom trudging through minefields planted with the often-funny challenges of motherhood. But when I christened the column in the fall of 2001, I had no idea that within weeks, the term “home front” took on a new—and much graver--significance.

The troubles redefining our lives daily after September 11, 2001 reminded us what it meant to be on the real “home front.” They took the language of war out of the history books and into daily conversation. And they thrust moms into the trenches against some of the most difficult challenges we’ve ever faced. What’s more confusing than trying to explain to a seven-year-old why someone would take over an airplane full of innocent people and crash it into a building--on purpose? More sickening than trying to explain a front-page headline like “Suicide Attack in Israel Kills 19” over breakfast before school?

We can’t afford to let the way things are in the world intimidate us into parenting by circumstance rather than by choice. Let’s resolve to view our current world conditions—whatever they may be at the moment-- as a call to arms, an incentive to mother more deliberately, and with more of a dependence on God, than ever before. We have an unprecedented opportunity to put feet on our faith, and to show the generation we’re raising the reason for the hope that’s in us (see 1 Peter 3:15).

While we choose our steps through the obstacles we face, may we draw closer than ever to the Lord, who has a special place in His heart for moms: “He...shall gently lead those that are with young” (Isaiah 40:11b). Could it be that He gives us this special regard because we have the position and the potential like perhaps no other part of His creation to offer our families a reflection—through our hearts and homes--of His peace, which passes all understanding (Philippians 4:7)?

## Road Work

As a mom, you're the gatekeeper of your home. What are you doing to make sure you're fulfilling that role with wisdom?

## Open Arms

*You came near when I called you, and you said, 'Do not fear.' Lamentations 3:57*

Trish and her youngest child, Brennon, ventured through the calf-deep water to the slide in the kiddie pool of the water park. The preschooler climbed the steps and stood at the top, but stopped in his tracks when he couldn't see his mom at the end of the slide.

"Mommy! Mommy! I can't see you!" Brennon began shouting in a panicked voice.

Trish was waiting for him with open arms at the end of the slide, but because of the way the chute curled around, her son's vision of her was obstructed.

"I was calling, 'I'm right here! I'll catch you!' but he wouldn't move," she said. "He wouldn't go down the slide because he couldn't see me."

That mini-drama played out by mother and child at the water park turned out to be more than just another trial in the routine of raising a toddler. It sketched a perfect picture of what it's like to rely on God. How easy it can be to ignore heavenly help because sometimes it just seems so...well, invisible!

Trish shared that as she was standing knee-deep in water, urging her little boy to come on and reassuring him that she was right there waiting for him, she caught a soul-piercing glimpse of what God must go through all the time for us. As we stand on the brink of each new challenge—whether it's taming a toddler or handing over the car keys to a just-turned-16-year-old—we're often afraid to move forward when we can't see those open arms on the other side. Like Brennon, we'd rather stay put and cry out, or turn around altogether and back down the steps to avoid the discomfort of the uncertainty.

What is it we're afraid of? That God might be too busy with other things to be keeping a close watch as we come flying off the end of the slide? Or that His arms might not be big enough and strong enough to hold us and all the baggage we have with us as we come barreling towards Him?

Of course those fears are unfounded! As dependable as a mother—or a father—is, and as strong as a mother's—or a father's—arms are, God is all the more dependable, and His arms are all the stronger.

The sooner we learn that, the sooner we can learn to let go and enjoy the ride!

## Praying for the Power

Lord, continue to reassure me of your presence even—especially--when I can't see you.

## Wet Towels

*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1*

My 7-year-old daughter huddled under a hot pink beach towel crying and crying and crying. These were the indignant tears of a child whose defiant words, reckless antics and uncooperative attitude had finally sentenced her to a time out from the swimming pool.

At first, “it’s not fair,” was the refrain she hiccupped angrily between snubs and sniffs. I didn’t go to her even though it was tough to watch her missing out on the sliding and splashing in the pool. Five minutes passed, then ten minutes. The tear streams slowed to heavy drips, the sobs muffled, and the words changed. “I didn’t mean to.” Close, but not quite. I waited until...

... “I’m sorry.” A fresh flood of tears, this time representing the remorse felt by a girl who finally understood that she had hurt feelings, jeopardized safety, and--worst of all--defied her mom. I went to her, ready to accept the apology and let her jump back in, anxious to hear her laughter wash away the tears and swirl into that of the others on this blue-sky day.

But not yet. The tears didn’t slow, even when I said she could get up. ‘What’s wrong?’ I asked.

“It’s just that I’ve gotten in trouble so much today and I wish I could just start fresh.” She shivered, small and soggy under weight of the wet towel.

Oh, baby, I thought, isn’t that the cry of all of our hearts--whether we’re seven or seventy, whether we’re children or parents? Many days, we get ourselves into so much trouble—whether it’s with our mouths, our hands, or our hearts--that the punishments seem surely to be piling up so high that there couldn’t possibly be anything we could do to redeem ourselves. And the fact is, we can’t.

But God can. And He did! "... through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:1).

How many times do we casually shrug off God's promises by clinging to the hopelessness of our "human-ness"? Let's throw off those wet towels of guilt and shame to luxuriate in the limitless liberty of His overwhelming grace!

## Road Work

Sometimes the word “mother” seems synonymous with the word “guilt.” When things go wrong in our children’s lives or when our kids do things they shouldn’t, we often tend to assume the brunt of blame. Many times we aren’t at fault. But other times, we are; after all, we’re only human. Thankfully, God doesn’t mean for us to stay wrapped up in the paralyzing, joy-stealing weight of the guilt of our mothering mistakes. What “wet towels” can you cast from your shoulders right now by claiming the promise of today’s verse?

## Section 5

### Backseat Chatter

The kingdom of heaven is of such as these...

Oh, the divine lessons our little ones (and not-so-little ones) can teach!

## Time for Everything

*There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven. Ecclesiastes 3:1*

The week before her first day of kindergarten, Erin took an unusual interest in a fist-sized ceramic bell my mother had set out during our recent garage sale. Of course, my mother gladly let her have it. Later that day, Erin explained why she had wanted the trinket so badly: “If I wear shorts with pockets big enough, I can put this bell in my pocket and take it to school.”

“Why would you want to do that?” I asked.

“So whenever I ring the bell it will be time to go home.”

Great young minds apparently think alike. Erin’s friend Betsy, also 5, made a name for herself during her first week of school when she sounded the fire alarm, prompting all the students and teachers in her school to exit the building.

Asked why she had done such a thing, she explained she had thought the alarm was the school bell. She wanted to ring it because she was ready to go home.

I love the idea that these little girls felt they could have some control over their time. As adults, we seem to lose our grip on the sense of being able to have a say-so in how we spend the minutes, hours and days God has given us. Stay-at-home moms, sometimes afraid to appear not to be accomplishing enough, tend to fall prey to this kind of thinking. As a result, we often become eager to sign up for an ever-growing list of responsibilities.

The fact is, one of the freedoms we enjoy as mothers at home is the fact that we do have control over the clock and the calendar. Of course we must follow schedules at school, church, and other places, but we have the

liberty to fill most of our time as we see fit. With that freedom comes responsibility however; it's important that we schedule time in a way that allows us to accomplish the goals we've set in raising our kids. After all, if we don't, no one will!

## Road Work

If you're feeling like you're always at the mercy of someone else's timetable, remember—the bell's in your pocket! The question to consider now is: How are you going to use it to make sure you make time for what's really important?

## How Does God Tell You?

*I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go... Psalm 32:8*

Three-year-old Kari tended to be a little windy from time to time. One day, standing in the middle of a glitter-strewn floor, she explained the mess by telling her mom that a squirrel had climbed into her window during naptime to make Valentines for his friends. Her mom gave the child—who was sparkling from top to toe—every chance she could to confess to making the mess.

“You know, God knows when you’re telling the truth and when you’re not,” her mom said.

Kari, weighing her options, asked, “But then how does He tell you, Mommy?”

As stay-at-home moms, we stockpile an arsenal of information that helps us conquer our days of raising kids. We may know, for example, how to get a toddler to eat her carrots, or how to lull a colicky newborn to sleep. But at the heart of the matter of mothering are situations that require far more than “just the facts.”

Some call it intuition; others call it being “street smart.” Whatever we call it, that supernatural sense of what’s what tells us when “I have a bubbly tummy” should send us to the medicine cabinet and when it translates to “there’s a test today and I haven’t studied.” It guides us in judging whether to veto another extracurricular activity for a seventh-grader who’s struggling with science and self-image. It tells us when to raise our limbo bar of expectations when we see our kids having to bend dangerously far backward to succeed. And, yes, it lets us know whether to chalk up tall tales to the product of a preschooler’s storybook-fueled imagination or to drag out the time-out chair to discipline a little one for deliberate dishonesty.

Obviously, the calls we make on issues like these have far more impact on our kids' lives than getting the vegetables into their tummies. That's why it's important to keep our spiritual ears open to God day and night. He'll make sure we hear everything He wants to tell us.

Then we can lovingly grab the chin of those little storytellers and ask, "Do you think the squirrel would like for us to clean up the mess he made while he delivers those Valentines?"

## Praying for the Power

Lord, so many of the decisions I make about the kids you have given me charge over 24 hours a day, seven days a week, make a real and lasting difference in their lives. Keep me tuned into your voice so I will act according to your wisdom in “training them up in the way they should go.”

## Where Does the Bible Say “Do Not Hit?”

*For the Lord will be your confidence... Proverbs 3:26a*

If we moms sometimes have trouble remembering the stuff in the Bible is real, and applies to everyday situations, our kids’ faith in the Word tends to scribble it into living color.

When my two oldest kids, Nick and Lindsey, were preschoolers, they were squabbling about who would sit where in the van as we headed out the door for church one Sunday morning. The argument escalated and finally, in an unbelievably uncharacteristic move for my peacekeeping, rule-following son, he decided he had taken enough bossing from his baby sister. He let loose and popped her on the shoulder.

The assault didn’t rattle Little Miss Ruffled Britches. She simply stopped in the doorway of the van and flipped open the miniature pink New Testament she carried to Sunday school each week. Rifling through the pages with her chubby fingers, she asked in an indignant, I-know-almost-everything voice—even though she couldn’t yet read a word: “Mommy, where does it say in here, ‘Do not hit?’”

Apparently she decided to throw the Book at her brother instead of returning the punch.

It’s easy to let incidents like that make me confident--much too confident--about the job I’m doing as a mom. “Look at that!” I think to myself when the kids demonstrate a “biblically correct” response to a situation they’re in. “Surely I must be doing something right!” I glance around the room, certain that my kids are surely in the “top 10” among their peers. And I deserve at least some of the credit for that...don’t I?

Yet the moment I start swaggering up to a group of other moms, my pride in my parenting abilities fairly dripping from my lips as we compare notes and trade kid stories, something inevitably happens to correct my “I” trouble. My five-year-old utters an unmentionable word in grandma’s living room with a crowd of relatives

within earshot. (“We really don’t say words like that at home” I stammer to shocked aunts looking up from their coffee and cobbler to hear my feeble explanation. “I can’t imagine where she heard that!”) Or my 13-year-old, about whom I’ve declared “never would even want to wear something like that” ... wears “something like that.”

My smug smile vanishes as I once again am reminded that I’m human, oh so human, and I’ve produced kids of like kind. When they --unwittingly or not—put my faults and theirs on public display it’s impossible to maintain much parenting pride or cool confidence...unless I remember my confidence should be coming from God, not myself.

Pride and parenting will never be a great combination, but prayer and parenting are always a perfect blend. I’m pretty sure that’s in this little pink New Testament somewhere...

## Road Work

How can you shift the spotlight of credit for some of your parenting successes off of your face and onto God's?

## The Note

*Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion... 1 Peter 5:8*

“I wonder what this says,” said the 12-year-old who is one of our carpool kids. He slipped into the seat beside me after school and fingered the legal-sized envelope with his parents’ names handwritten across the front.

“I’d really like to open it, but that’d be wrong, wouldn’t it?” I know his mom well, and knew fully well that her son already knew the answer to that question. But I could hear the worry in his voice. Had this been on an episode of “The Wonder Years,” this type of commentary might have been dubbed over the scene: “I knew it couldn’t be good news or they wouldn’t have sealed the envelope... What if I flunked that math test? ... Maybe I have to go to detention hall tomorrow for forgetting that library book. If I just knew what was in here I could form a plan of action.”

I hated to launch into the role of morality police. A lecture on “of course it would be wrong to look at someone else’s mail” just didn’t seem the best thing to do at the moment. He was already having a tough enough time. So I tried to lighten the mood, then change the subject. “I’m sure it’s nothing. Hey, what’d ya have for lunch today?”

But he wasn’t that easily distracted. “Here comes Nick. Hey, did you get one of these?” (“Wonder Years” commentary: “Maybe all the students got one. We can’t all be in trouble, can we?”)

“What is that?” Nick answered as he climbed in the back, adding, “Oh, Michael got a letter like that too.”

“Oh no. Michael’s always in trouble.” I knew what Chris was thinking and that he REALLY was worried now. He was silent about half the way home. “Boy, the devil sure is trying to make me look at this letter,” he finally said.

“I know,” I said, proud that even at 12 he had the discernment to realize the true source of the conflict. “But you sure are doing the right thing by waiting to give it to your parents.”

## Praying for the Power

Father, even at age 12 and within the safety zone of this mom-chauffeured carpool, this child is fighting the kind of spiritual war that's no less intense than the battles we grown-ups fight every day. Whether it's the temptation to take a peek at a note, to exclude a not-so-cool kid from the conversation, or to glance at someone else's answers during a test, please keep growing my kids stronger in you every day. Help them to know that the closer they draw to you, the further from evil they'll be.

## She Must Be Tired

*Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. Colossians 3:2*

“She’s in a wheelchair now; she must be tired,” Lindsey said as she bounced into the back seat the first day of fourth grade. She was talking about a little girl in another grade who had been walking with the help of crutches the year before. Now the girl was being wheeled through the door by a student helper.

My heart sank. How many times I had watched that child the previous year. As I would whip into the drop-off lane, her mom would ease into the parking lot. As my kids would hop out of the van at the curb and disappear through the doors, her mom would be helping her out of the car and snapping the metal crutches onto her forearms. As I would pull around the U-shaped drive to turn onto the road heading home, the little girl and her mom were usually just then negotiating the step up onto the curb in front of the school.

When I had seen them, I would breathe a quick prayer. With painful honesty, I must admit my prayers had mainly been ones of relief--really, relief that my own kids were healthy. I had not prayed as often as I should for her health, which had obviously declined during the intervening months.

I’m ashamed to say that mothering often keeps my eyes so focused on my own kids that—when I look up from what I’m doing with my own crew to see what’s going on in the rest of the world --I begin to see the what’s out there only according to how it relates to me and mine. What a tragedy! In calling me to mother at home, God didn’t excuse me from serving in opportunities that arise beyond my front yard. That must be why He urges me to keep my focus on things above; otherwise, I will remain ignorant of how He might want me to serve Him in my neighborhood, my community, and my world.

## Praying for the Power

Lord, I come to you in all humility asking that you replace my narrow vision with eyes that are always opened to discover new ways to serve you. Replace my tendency to serve only myself and my own family with a generosity of spirit and with willing hands. Correct my vision so that I may see--as my daughter does, and as You did while you walked on this earth—the hearts of people, rather than merely their circumstances. And if that little girl is tired, Lord, please give her some rest.

## Traveling Tip

### 3 Ways to Plan Your Days

Give your day to God: “Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed” (Proverbs 16:3). Handing the day to God helps you to remember whose day each day really is. That practice puts a wide-angled perspective on how you spend your time.

Repeat and vary: “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven” (Ecclesiastes 3:1). Establishing familiar routines--brushing teeth, riding bikes on the driveway, picking up toys, waiting on the front step for Daddy to come home, prayers at meals and bedtime—weaves a pattern of security and confidence in the hearts of our kids. Colorful interruptions of those routines—rowdy pillow fights, impromptu trips to the dairy bar for ice cream—interject highlights that will spark bright some of their brightest memories.

Customize: Not a morning person? Don’t plan a paper mache’ project, or homeschool lessons, or a play date until the afternoon. Arrange a work schedule that best fits your lifestyle and personality, as well as of your kids, and don’t be afraid to stick to it.

\*Adapted from material in *Celebrate Home: Encouragement and Tips for Stay-at-Home Parents* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2005) p. 109-111.

## Section 6

### That Diva in the Driver's Seat

Chauffeur, chef, coach; nurse, social director, storyteller.

Financial whiz, clipper of coupons and trimmer of nails. Counselor, custodian, confidante. Teacher. Playmate, prayer warrior, personal shopper. Time manager, hairstylist, fashion consultant. Play-dough maker, doll dresser, horse trotter. Appointment setter, referee. Event planner, entertainer, comforter...

All these, and more...

that's YOU!

## A Crisis of Critical Proportions

*Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.” Proverbs 12:18*

“The color of that outfit will make me look like a banana popsicle.”

“Do I really want to go the prison matron look in front of a group of Southern ladies sipping sweet tea?”

Just a couple of the milder barbs my inner self threw at my outer self as I was desperately searching for a new outfit to wear to speak at a women’s luncheon. The more clothes I tried on, the more clothes that sharp-tongued fashion police patrolling around in my head made me toss into the “no” pile.

Now, I don’t have a history of having a particularly low self image, but I can’t remember my style conscience ever being so strict. Why, then, the sudden transformation into my own worst critic?

I may have a hunch. Last fall when I was down with pneumonia, I got hooked on the style channel because, well, I just like to see people go from being quite ordinary to quite beautiful right before my eyes. In the grand scheme of television viewing, these programs seem harmless enough. After all, drugs, sex, violence or profanity usually don’t surface in shows that teach you how to dress to look like you’re 10 pounds lighter.

While the content of these shows is nontoxic, it can have harmful side effects. As the hosts transform dull dressers into fashion divas they also showcase relentlessly critical attitudes. Apparently if the writers of these scripts followed our house rule, “If you can’t say anything nice, don’t say anything at all,” they would be forced to turn in blank scripts.

I guess it’s time to turn off the TV and learn how to “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5).

And just so the fashion critics in my head and on the screen will know, here's what Christ himself has to say about my wardrobe: "Consider how the lilies grow...not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field ... how much more will he clothe you?" (Luke 12:27-29).

## Road Work

TV offers lots of good information many of us stay-at-home moms need, from tips on home décor and clutter management to advice on child rearing and coaching on cooking techniques. Watching TV is also a great way to pass the time when we're folding clothes, nursing a baby, or pacing the living room with a colicky newborn in the wee hours of the morning. It's important, though, to turn off of shows that promote and glamorize fault-finding and insults. A critical nature—made evident by critical words--is a contagious disease and our kids are at the highest risk for catching it!

## I Am Nice and Cool

*[God] crowns you with love and compassion, [and] satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagles. Psalm 103:4*

“You are nice and cool.” Not the language typically found in the Holy Scriptures, but these words—written in pencil in chunky kid print on a torn piece of paper—stay sandwiched between two sheer leaves of my Bible.

I remember clearly the specific circumstances that earned me the prized declaration on a long-ago Wednesday night. I had been feeling especially uncool after the drudgery of diapers, discipline, and driving kids all over town, every day, all week, had begun to wear on me. I was overdue for a haircut and tired of wearing the same old clothes all the time. Feeling generally undervalued and unnoticed, the epizoodies (what our family calls being down in the dumps) had crept up and taken over. I went to church that evening feeling I didn’t have much to give.

A teen girl, whose demeanor made me suspect she was feeling much the same as I was that night, slipped into the pew beside me. Just as our speaker began to talk, she distractedly turned over her notebook and began to doodle. Although I tried to “do the right thing” and keep my eyes on the podium, I couldn’t resist whispering a compliment on her sketch. At that, she brightened up and doodled some more--and before I knew it, I had started doodling too. Then she whispered to me that she like the way I drew. Within moments, we were waging a friendly drawing duel right there on the fifth pew from the front.

I deftly turned the word “boy” into a picture of a boy! She dexterously drew Donald Duck! I carefully traced out the profile of a little house with an “x” in it—without ever lifting up my pencil! And then she casually wrote the word “cool,” embellishing it with sunglasses just as I described above.

Next thing I knew, the speaker was offering a closing prayer and our doodlefest came to an end. But before she filed into the aisle to leave with the rest of the students, the now-grinning girl beside me scribbled the words “you are nice and” in front of the word “cool” and tossed me the sheet of paper. My spirits lifted immediately as I tucked the souvenir proving my “coolness” in my Bible.

Are mothers sensible? Most of the time. Polite and practical? We try to be. Germ conscious? Always. We also try to be self-controlled, cautious and considerate. And (with the exception of my behavior in church that one night) we always behave in church. But are we cool? We definitely have our moments!

## Road Work

Sometimes God can use a fresh face or a break from the routine to rev our engines when we're bogged down by the monotony of mothering. Be on the lookout for an opportunity to meet a new friend or a chance to color outside the lines of your day-to-day duties.

## Who's Watching Me?

*Direct my footsteps according to your word. Psalm 119:133*

The short report in the papers stated the following: “Police track prints; catch office burglars.” A pair of boys had snagged about \$3,000 worth of computers and equipment from city offices and the footprints they left led police directly to them.

“Footprints left by the burglars came from shoes popular with skateboarders,” the article stated. “Officers discovered that only one store in the area sold the shoes, and the shoe with the unique tread was sold to only a handful of customers.”

Police were able to narrow that list of unique skateboard shoe wearers to two young men, whom they arrested in a restaurant at the local mall.

The incident made a verse of a preschool song pop into my mind: “Be careful little feet, where you walk.”

As an organizationally challenged mom who is living in what could conservatively be called the schizophrenic years of parenting (raising two teens and a grade schooler), my not-so-little feet have numerous opportunities to walk into situations that could get me into big trouble. Oh, I may not rob an office like those skateboarding criminals did, but I can sure steal the spotlight when it's supposed to be shining heavenward. I may not destroy someone's property, but I can easily demolish someone's reputation by joining in a session of gossip. I might not harm someone with a gun or a knife, but I can easily choose to use words that can be just as dangerous. Yes, I am in a position to commit some heavy-duty crimes indeed.

## Praying for the Power

Lord, may I never forget that, like the treads on the thieves' shoes identified the boys as skateboarders, the shoes I wear sport unique treads that tell the world I'm your child. I pray you will direct my footsteps according to your word.

## "She Looks Wonderful To Me"

*...a true friend sticks by you like family Proverbs 18:24 (The Message)*

I lumbered into the restaurant beside my husband and behind my third-trimester belly the month before my youngest child was born. Swollen feet, indigestion, and aching fatigue—intensified after having sat on the bleachers through four ball games that afternoon--had made it difficult for me to get going that evening.

My best friend, Tonya, and her husband, Troy, were in town for a few days and I was happy to see them seated at the table as we walked through the door. But before I could waddle—er, walk--over to them, another friend in our group greeted me.

“Oooh, you look like you don’t feel good,” she said with all the sympathy a 110-pound woman with no children can muster for an expectant mother of two with a tummy circumference the size of a wading pool.

I knew this acquaintance meant well and was speaking out of genuine concern. But my emotional fortitude was as fragile as my physical stamina. Tears began to swell up from a spot somewhere north of where a little elbow was lodged against my ribcage.

In making myself up I had tried really hard not to look as bad as I felt, yet those words made me feel that I looked even worse than I had feared.

As I began to realize my worn-out-looking self was about to look even worse once the tears surfaced to paint white streaks down my cheeks, Tonya stood from her chair and stepped beside me. I can’t remember what she was wearing that night, but I’m certain it resembled a shiny white robe and a halo.

“Really? I was just thinking how wonderful she looks to me!!” she blurted.

Like a cup of cool water drenching my boiling emotions, her words stilled my tears and soothed my insecurities. Our server came in and we got busy studying our menus as I breathed a quiet prayer of thanks for a friend who saw the condition of my feelings rather than the condition of my frame.

## Road Work

Stay-at-home motherhood can be quite an isolating experience even though it's one of the phases of our lives when we most need the encouragement and support of friends. Do you have a friend who knows and loves you like a sister? If not, make it a matter of priority to pray for—and pursue—a nourishing friendship in your life.

## A Mighty Mission

*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men. Colossians 3:23*

Climbing into our van after church Sunday morning, I am content. We do serve an awesome God, I think, as I breathe the icy December air, pull my door shut and begin peeling off my gloves so I can warm my bare fingers in front of the heat vent while the rest of my family finishes piling in.

Refrains from the choir music circle through my mind and my heart continues to feel still, yet riotously thankful, as I think back over the words our pastor handed out today like gifts from the pulpit. Surely this must be the peace that surpasses understanding. The realization touches off a wave of warmth through my spirit that is as tangible the toasty air thawing my fingers.

I make big plans to hang onto this peace, this holy hush in my heart, this renewed focus on God, at least for the rest of the day. When I get home, I will sip a steamy cup of hot chocolate while I listen to some good music and consider what mighty mission He might have in store for me. Certainly He has been preparing me to do great things for Him and today I intend to figure out what they are.

But my family has other plans:

“Mama! I’m bleeding! I need a Band-Aid!”

“Can we go to Wal-Mart? I need some poster board for a project at school tomorrow.”

“When we get home can you help me type my paper for English?”

The demands shatter the silence and jar my tranquility. I want to grab each one, put it in the glove compartment in front of me and keep it locked up until I'm good and ready to handle it. Because right now I want to nurture my own soul, not bandage up a paper cut. I want to linger in the presence of the Almighty, not rush into the press of the crowds at the Super Center. I want to bury my nose in my Bible, not proofread a 9th-grade report on Dickens.

How can I contemplate my mighty mission while taking care of such mundane chores? God, don't you want me to focus on heavenly matters instead of on these earthly errands?

Even as I whisper that prayer, I realize it's off track. Of course God wants me to focus on heavenly matters, but not to the neglect of my earthly errands. If He didn't, well, He wouldn't have planted me on this plot of turf begin with.

God hasn't called me simply to bask in His glory while I wait for Him to "promote" me to service more godly and more glorious. He has given me a far greater assignment. My challenge is to carry around with me all week the peace, joy and thankfulness that flood into my heart during worship service on Sundays and find a way to infuse those blessings into each aspect of my everyday life--even when I'm answering demands I would prefer to lock away.

Can I share joy while administering first aid to a kindergartner with a nearly nonexistent boo-boo for the fifth time in one day? Can I demonstrate thankfulness when I'm shuttling kids around town? Can I spread peace when I'm standing shoulder-to-shoulder with other shoppers in the quick-check lane?

It doesn't take an afternoon on the couch to figure out that these challenges, mundane though they may seem, comprise a mighty mission indeed!

## Road Work

God wouldn't give us a mighty mission without fully equipping us to carry it out. Deuteronomy 6:5-9 presents one specific suggestion for parents. He says we should impress His truth upon our children's hearts by sharing His word at home, when we're on the go, at bedtime and in the morning. He so urgently wants us to do this that He even suggests that we leave ourselves notes and reminders! Take a few minutes to consider some practical steps you can take to follow through on this charge.

## Traveling Tip

### 7 Resources Every Stay-at-Home Mom Needs

An active and growing relationship with the members of your local church family.

An opportunity to meet and make friends with other stay-at-home moms. Visit [MOPS.org](http://MOPS.org) to find out where a Mothers of Preschoolers group meets near you.

A copy of *Celebrate Home: Encouragement & Tips for Stay-at-Home Parents* by Angie Peters, a handbook about negotiating the ins and outs, ups and downs of stay-at-home motherhood (visit [CPH.org](http://CPH.org) or your local bookstore to order).

[CelebrateMoms.org](http://CelebrateMoms.org): website – a free, interactive web conference/tour you can “attend” when you need some time to “refresh.” It is designed by a dedicated team of authors, ministry leaders and moms to bring the conference experience right to your own home.

Homebased Mom Audiozine – For those who are truly on the go, this audiozine gives you a convenient and practical way to hear inspiring articles and down-to-earth interviews—all designed specifically for mothers who have chosen to stay at home. Visit [homebasedmom.org](http://homebasedmom.org) or call 1-866-324-2893 ext. 8117.

Your local library. Browse the shelves while your little ones enjoy story time or other children’s events, pick up some classic kids’ movies, and stock up on a fresh supply of books.

A good babysitter. Whether it’s Grandma or the teenager next door, you shouldn’t stay home without one!