

# Overwhelmed Moms' Devotions to Go

**Finding  
Peace In  
the Chaos of  
Daily Life**



**Paula Wallace**

**Moms' Devotions to Go Series**

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**Paula Wallace**

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## Dedication

This labor of love is dedicated to my husband, Mike, for his love, encouragement and awesome friendship;

To my children, Jonathan and Leah, for being an enormous blessing in my life;

To the staff and families at Judah Christian School for their love and support in raising our family;

To friends, family and colleagues too numerous to mention who encourage me;

To my faithful prayer partners ;

To Rachael Brown for her editing expertise and inspiration;

To my mom, Beverly Brown, for her unending prayers and love;

To all the overwhelmed moms who read this book;

To God for a gazillion reasons.

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## Introduction

As time began racing toward my 40th birthday, I was keenly aware that I had no intention of living out my days on earth without having children. After twenty years of a childless marriage, my husband and I finally determined that we would embark on the challenging journey of adoption. We completed a 3-inch stack of paperwork, gave up every possible piece of personal information to immigration services, offered earnest if not demanding prayers, handed over a significant sum from our life's savings, provided three sets of fingerprints to international authorities, all of which resulted in a life changing drive to the airport to pick up our firstborn child. We were handed the most beautiful baby boy I had ever seen. He stared at us in silence for the next eight hours as we drove him to his new home.

Jonathan stayed up all night, experienced night terrors when he did sleep, and he was our son. Our precious, adorable, long-awaited boy was home. The only thing left to do was to bring a sister home for Jonathan, a daughter who would also change our lives forever. Two years later, another 3-inch stack of paperwork later, more prayers, nearly finishing off our financial savings, and taking our bodies past the brink of exhaustion, an awesome child of God, our daughter, Leah, arrived. She was the most beautiful baby girl I had ever seen and she was ours. We soon found ourselves living in a "new normal" of life on a constant journey of growth and change. We learned new heights of what it means to be flexible.

No one could have prepared me for the gamut of feelings motherhood brought to my life, but two words do well to summarize the experience: overwhelming and joy. Sometimes I'm just overwhelmed. Sometimes I'm full of joy. Sometimes I'm even overwhelmed with joy.

I continue to be surprised and nurtured by the way our children have increased our relationship with God. Prayer has always been the foundation of my life, but my prayer life and my love for God continues to increase more deeply as I live out my life with children in my home who are my daughter and my son.

Without my children, there would never have been a reason for this book. I am grateful to them for their willingness to allow me to share our family stories with the hope that the lessons we have learned in life will provide some spiritual insight and growth for those who read them.

May God's blessings and grace sincerely meet your every need,

**Paula**



## Follow the Leader

*In that day the wolf and the lamb will live together; the leopard and the goat will be at peace. Calves and yearlings will be safe among lions, and a little child will lead them all.*

*Isaiah 11:6 (NLT)*

It was the first warm day of spring—that magical day in the Midwest United States when it's warm enough to step outside without a coat—and it felt so good. We were organizing the garage for a spring sale. My five-year-old daughter brought her CD player to the garage while I got out the mini trampoline to use while taking a break from our work. We were soon dancing and singing to our favorite children's contemporary Christian songs.

I circled the trampoline as a part of my dancing and soon noticed how easily my daughter started copying what I was doing. We were engaged in a good old fashioned game of "Follow the Leader" which naturally emerged without a word ever being spoken. A haunting thought soon flashed through my mind: Does she copy other things I do so easily? Like the time I was angry for being interrupted? Like the time I chose words that I later regretted? Like the time I allowed stress to choose my attitude toward her instead of my love for her...and oh, how I experienced a jolt of reality. Of course she copies those things as well.

Then she zoomed around me so she could be the leader. I quickly recognized the difference between her leading moves which she made up and the ones she copied from me. Most of her moves as the leader were the ones she had copied from me.

Now I realized that the bar was raised on my responsibility as a mother. I became acutely aware that she would be raising my grandchildren some day. She might become a teacher, a professor, a doctor, a counselor, and would I want her leadership skills to be based on the things she copies from me? It was a humbling moment to

allow my daughter to lead me in the game and to learn that I could do a better job of leading and training her for life.

*Prayer: Oh Lord, thank You for making me aware of how responsible I need to be with my actions, words and behaviors every day. Thank You for children who mimic what I do so that I can grow more mature. Help all moms to be great leaders and role models for our children. Amen.*

### Something to Enjoy

Turn on some music and play “Follow the Leader” with your child today. Be sure everyone in the game has a turn to be the leader.

## Dirty Laundry

*God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble.*

*Psalm 46:1 (NLT)*

When our second child arrived, we lived in a state of chaos for several months. With two children in diapers and two working parents, we were just happy if the diapers were changed on time and everyone had food and sleep when they needed it. Our mantra of daily needs became: “clean diapers, food, sleep; clean diapers, food, sleep.” If those three things were happening at the appropriate times for every member of the family, we claimed the day successful.

During this time, our laundry routine was way off balance. One day I had sorted the laundry but never got around to washing it, so I put the dirty laundry into baskets to get it picked up off of the floor. This was something I had never done before. There was an unspoken rule at our house that if clothes were in a laundry basket, they were clean. A couple of days later, my husband and I engaged in an uncharacteristic, full-blown argument about the laundry in the baskets and whether or not it was clean or dirty.

I had never known my husband to be as animated as he was on that particular morning. He jumped up and down and would have risked his life to convince me that the white load in the basket was clean. I had never seen him push a point so fervently before. He was more than determined in his effort to convince me that the white load was clean. I began wondering if he had done the white load without me knowing it. I was so distracted by his behavior that it didn't occur to me to ask him.

He finally was so desperate that he decided to conduct an experiment. He went to the white basket, found a pair of his own underwear, held them against his nose and sucked in a big, deep breath. What happened next is still impossible to describe. I thought a demon had been turned loose inside my husband's skin. After a moment of

total hysteria which cannot be detailed without sacrificing his human dignity, my husband confessed that he had been using out of that basket for two days, thinking he was putting on clean underwear every day.

We were in big trouble. It became evident that the chaos was winning the battle at our house. It was time to realign our lives with the presence of God and receive God's help as the refuge and strength of our souls. The experience with the laundry allowed us to recognize that our tired souls were somewhere in the bottom of the dirty laundry basket and we needed God's strength to become a refuge for our souls in a weary time.

*Prayer: Lord, sometimes I get into trouble and desperately need Your help. Give me wisdom and strength to endure the difficult times in life. Thank You for hearing my prayer. Amen.*

### Something to Nurture

Read Psalm 46 out loud to yourself. Sit in a comfortable position and sit in silence for five minutes with your eyes closed and do absolutely nothing for five minutes. During this time, take in deep breaths and release them slowly. Continue breathing deeply and slowly. At the end of five minutes, read Psalm 46 out loud again.

## The First Day of First Grade

*For I am about to do a brand new thing. See, I have already begun! Do you not see it? I will make a pathway through the wilderness for my people to come home. I will create rivers for them in the desert!*

*Isaiah 43:19 (NLT)*

My children and I were having a wonderful lunch together. Laughing. Chatting. Sharing toddler-level stories—when suddenly my eyes unexpectedly filled up and spilled over. This intrusion into my fun was surprising. During his Kindergarten experience, my son had only been gone to school in the morning, but tomorrow he would be going to first grade and staying at school all day.

My daughter and I would be lost without him. He was her best friend. They played together endlessly. She wasn't ever interested in playing with anyone else. And me? I would miss him deeply. So we talked about our feelings together, soon realizing that all three of us had been thinking about him starting school for several days. We were all concerned about how the change in our daily routines would feel.

We took him to school the next day and it wasn't long before we headed to the mall to distract us from the sadness we felt. She and I had been inside J.C. Penney at least 15 seconds when I was aware that we were surrounded by an enormous amount of female underwear on display. The colors were so loud I could almost hear the undergarments calling out to us: "Look at me! Look at me! No, over here....look at me!" There were some interesting things made of strings, slick faux animal skins, hot pinks, neons and every abstract design imaginable.

I was grateful for the distraction on the first day of first grade, but as I found myself gawking at piles and piles of complicated underwear with my mouth wide open, the thought startled me: When did life get so complicated? When did the importance of life get reduced to billions of underwear choices? Haven't we carried the choice thing just a bit too far?

The answer is probably, “yes,” we have carried the choice thing a bit too far. However, being lost in a forest of multicolored, versatile underwear helped me to understand that I have choices. I could choose to be sad about missing our boy on the first day of first grade, or I could choose to be thankful that he is a healthy, growing, capable boy who is where he is supposed to be. We survived his first day of first grade and surely I’ll have to survive a day like this all over again next year when my daughter goes to her first day of first grade.

Then they’ll drive, then they’ll graduate and then.....well, choosing to let go is a good thing, because God will likely be “doing a brand new thing” in my life through every season of our children’s lives. AND God will make a way for us through the challenges of letting go.

*Prayer: Lord, thank You ever so much for healthy, happy children. Thank You for their ability to adjust to transitions and changes. Help me to make changes as easily as they do and to support them in their need to grow through the seasons of their lives. Amen.*

### Something to Change

Try something with your children today that neither you nor your kids have ever done before, such as tasting a new food, going skating, playing a new game, or inviting a new friend to come play. After you try something new, then take a moment to talk to your kids about their experience. Find out what they liked and what they didn’t like. Tell them what made you feel uncomfortable or good. Use the experience as a way to encourage them to try new things and embrace healthy change.

## Overwhelmed

*Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.*

*Matthew 7:7-8 (NRSV)*

Overwhelmed? OVERWHELMED?? You wanna see overwhelmed? Just take a long, hard look at me—I'm the master of being overwhelmed. I'm supposed to be writing a book of devotions to help moms who feel overwhelmed, but instead of helping someone else, I'm the one who's overwhelmed!

Not long ago I found myself in a dumbfounded stupor. I stood still in the middle of my bedroom, looking at nothing, as I listened to the angry child on the other side of the wall. I had tried being nice. I had tried talking to him. I had tried listening to him. Some promises and threats were tossed around in my brain. My husband and I had shared a couple of dumb ideas and it seemed that nothing was going to work.

So I turned to the only thing I knew how to do: NOTHING! I decided—on purpose—in the middle of major overwhelmed feelings—to do absolutely nothing. I had a raging child on my hands and not one idea in my creative head brought a solution. How could I be so inept? How could someone call me a mother? How could someone so capable in life be reduced to standing by and doing absolutely nothing while the child railed? Why couldn't the child respond to the variety of things I had tried?

Why not? It seems that it hadn't yet occurred to me that I needed help to deal with the situation. I still stood frozen as I thought through the possibilities and resources I had at my disposal, but my favorite one that came to mind after choosing to do nothing was God. I could pray for the child. And so I did. And within moments, the sounds on the other side of the wall subsided. Hmm. In Matthew 7, Jesus tells us to ask, search and knock and

we will be given what we need. God truly gave me what I needed, what the child needed and reminded me to ask sooner next time.

*Prayer: Thank You, God, for answering my prayers when I am so overwhelmed. Thank You for helping me and for helping my children. Amen.*

### Something to Create

Design a sign. Make it attractive. Use acid free paper, stickers, glitter, fancy scissors, computer letters, alphabet stickers—whatever crafts you enjoy using. Frame it. Place it in a prominent place. Here are some suggestions to choose from depending on which speaks to you most, or create your own words with the same message:

When I Don't Know What To Do, I can PRAY

Remember to Pray

Pray First Panic Last

PRAY

Use the sign to recreate a new response to intense situations as well as creating greater peace in all situations.



## Holy Ground

*"...Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."*

*Exodus 3:5b (NRSV)*

It was the seven days before Easter, I was a full time pastor and in a fragile moment when I wasn't thinking clearly, I had signed up to help at preschool one morning that week. When I arrived in the classroom, the project for the day was explained: Remove the children's shoes, paint their feet, press the squirmy painted feet on the material in the right place, print their name below their footprints, wash the paint off and return the shoes and socks to their feet. It was a daunting assignment.

I had shown up stressed out and tired that morning. I must have looked like I was being asked to do something impossible as the teacher explained what I needed to do. I looked at the clock and there wasn't much time. Not only did the job seem overwhelming, but now I was going to have to hurry.

Shoes were flying, colors were being chosen and paintbrushes were being pushed into action. As I dried the first child's feet, I wondered how we were ever going to finish on time. As I dried my second subject's feet, it occurred to me I was going to be on the floor the whole time. I wondered if my legs would work when I tried to stand up.

As I washed the feet of the third child, it occurred to me that in the middle of this rushed frustration, I was on my knees, at the feet of a child, washing precious feet. What at first seemed overwhelming soon felt like a privilege. I was only aware of one other person in history who had washed more than ten pairs of feet the week before Easter. Only Jesus knew what that felt like.

Now I really wanted to savor the moment, but they were 4-year-olds; I had to keep moving. And then as I washed the feet of my son, it occurred to me that I had never knelt and washed only his feet. It was holy

ground. It was the deep stuff of life. I was a servant of the Lord as I cared for my child and it was the first time I had ever considered my work as a mother to be of service to God.

I had been overwhelmed with what the teacher explained I needed to do. Why DID the oldest parent in the class get THIS job? Probably because I was the parent who most needed to be slowed down the week before Easter and taught about the deeper meaning of being a mom. I was doing very important things as a pastor that week, but the most significant thing I did all week was to wash the feet of children, my child, on my knees, humbled by God.

*Prayer: Lord, thank You for feet. Thank You for preschoolers. Thank You for slowing me down when I need it most. Help me to serve my family and meet their daily needs for nurture and love. Amen.*

### Something to Bond

Wash the feet of everyone in your home and allow them to wash your feet. You can choose to do it as a serious activity and read the story of Jesus washing the disciple's feet, or it could be a silly, laughing time after painting footprints on an art project, or it could be done in the back yard. Be sure to have someone wash your feet as well. As feet are being washed, you may choose to talk about how God made each person's feet different and remember to talk about the details: the nails, the toes, are they crooked or straight? Enjoy the feet of your family today!

## Smart Mommies

*Children are a gift from the Lord; they are a reward from him.*

*Psalm 127:3 (NLT)*

It was a morning when a child needed to sleep, yet she had to get up to go to school. She was struggling to wake up, so I stood at the sink brushing my preschooler's teeth for her, when a specific sensation went up my back. "I think there's an airplane rolling up my back."

"How did you know it was an airplane, Mommy?" my son curiously asked.

"Because I knew you had an airplane in your hand the last time I saw you," I calmly responded in the midst of hurry.

"I think Mommies are the smartest people in the whole wide world," he proclaimed as he skipped away.

He got me. The tension of the morning was now broken. I took the time to laugh right out loud. I thanked him.

I thank God for children who bring deep, personal joy to my life every day. They are a blessing in the deepest sense of what it means to be blessed.

He's right. When it comes to their children, mommies are the smartest people in the whole wide world. We know our children intuitively, instinctively, fully to the core and when we use this knowledge for good, we will be a blessing to them and they to us.

*Prayer: Dear God, thank You so much for precious children who bring joy and love to my life. Help me to always treasure them with my actions, words and thoughts. Help me to use my intuition and instinct in ways that will always be a blessing to them. May they always be a blessing to me. Amen.*

## Something to Bless

Write down a list of blessings in your life which you have because of your children. Do not stop writing until you have at least 25 blessings and keep on writing if you can. Take a moment to thank God for the many ways your children are a blessing to you. Now share at least three of these blessings with your children and thank your child or your children for being a blessing to you.

## I Don't Want to Go to School!

*...clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.*

*Colossians 3:12b (NLT)*

“My stomach hurts.” Silence. A moment later: “I don’t feel well.”

“But you were perfectly fine five minutes ago.” My mind was racing. “You need to get your socks and shoes on.” What happened in two seconds that dramatically changed his disposition?

“But I don’t feel good.”

“What do you mean you don’t feel good? You were fine a few seconds ago. You’ve been fine all morning.” The panic was welling up inside of me.

“I don’t want to go to school.” There. He said it. It was out. The truth is always helpful so we parents know exactly what we’re dealing with.

“I don’t want to go to school.” A little more force in his voice. It sounded meaner.

A little louder: “I don’t WANT to go to school!” Now all of the bells, whistles, sirens and alarms were going off inside my body. How could a well-adjusted, capable, straight A, thrilled-to-go-to-school-everyday kind of student be saying this?

And then the rest of the truth came out: “I just don’t feel like I saw you enough this weekend.” Oh. My mind says to itself: “We were home together all weekend.”

Then reality took charge of my thoughts. Sure we were home together all weekend, while I fixed meals, cleaned up the kitchen, completed 8 loads of laundry, put it all away (that's a bonus!), called my mom, rushed off to church together and facilitated play dates. It was Monday morning and there hadn't been any quality in the time we had spent together over the weekend....only quantity. He was right. And good for him to know and name what was bothering him.

So we took his sister to school and continued my necessary routine for the morning; however, I included him in everything I did as we chatted together. Within an hour he was cautiously ready to start his day at school. It was difficult to spend this first hour of Monday morning this way, but ever so important to listen to this precious child and his particular needs.

It requires God-given patience to give our children what they need 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, especially when it is rather inconvenient on Monday morning. It requires God-given wisdom to know when to go with tough love and get to school on time and to know when to lighten up with patience and time so the rest of the day is successful.

Tenderhearted mercy—kindness—humility—gentleness—patience. All necessary for those days when a child surprises us with interruptions and eruptions when we least expect it.

*Prayer: Lord, help me to be compassionate, kind, humble and patient in everything I do with my children every day. Thank You for the challenges they provide which allow me to grow in my faith and spiritual maturity.*

*Amen.*

### Something to Discuss

Make a list of these words in large letters on a piece of newsprint or oversized paper: tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Allow your children to draw or doodle over the words on a piece of

newsprint or large piece of paper as you talk with them about what each word means and how to live their lives with mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Maybe the words could be created on a piece of paper with stencils or make your own “bubble” letters for children to color inside each letter. Enjoy a creative moment and enjoy your conversation.

## Catastrophe Queen

*Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life.*

*Philippians 4:6-7 (The Message)*

Wet hair. Clean jammies. Fresh smells. Quiet evening. It was a treasured moment, because she was letting me paint her toenails. Usually she wants to do it herself but this time I was offered the privilege of handling each precious toe, guiding the brush over each nail and leaving the pink polish in place.

We were chatting about nothing when thoughts came to my mind like an evil intruder into this sacred space. What will happen if the biopsy results are positive? What will our family do? How will we cope? This isn't fair to my children. Like a semi speeding downhill and out of control at 198 mph, my imagination ran wild with the idea that losing their mother would be overwhelmingly devastating. My special talent is a knack for imagining catastrophe and right there, in that special moment with my daughter, I allowed myself to participate in the imagined disaster willingly, all the while never missing a stroke of the brush on her toes.

My children had already been separated from their biological mothers, then their foster mothers. How unfair could the results be from this biopsy? I was overwhelmed with how much they depended on me to care for

their physical, emotional and spiritual needs every day. After all they had been through, it was my job to take care of myself so they could have an emotionally healthy life. And now this biopsy.

Finally the catastrophe police sent a squad car with sirens blaring and lights flashing into my brain, pulled the semi to the side of catastrophe lane and stopped it dead still. The officer said, "Why don't you just depend on God as much as your children depend on you? Then you won't have to worry about the biopsy."

*Prayer: Dear Lord, forgive me for worrying instead of trusting You. Help me to turn to You instead of my own catastrophic ideas. Thank You, Amen.*

### Something to Pray

Write down on a piece of paper a list of things that you worry about. After the list is complete, sit with the list and intentionally pray for each item, giving the concern to God and letting God have control of your worry and fear.



## The Yorkshire Terrier

*...do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.*

*Nehemiah 8:10c (NRSV)*

The Yorkie pup had to be watched every second in order to keep her teeth away from the things we didn't want chewed into little bitty pieces. As I sat at the computer on that Saturday morning, my husband called across the house to me, "Paula, I need your help." There was an uneasy intensity in his voice. It moved me quickly to where he was.

He was angry. A child had been sent on a mission to acquire the masking tape for a bedroom project and the Yorkshire terrier returned with the roll of tape around her neck. It was amazing that the tape slipped so easily over her head, but refused to slide back over the strong ear cartilage the same way it went on.

My brief examination revealed to us that her ears wouldn't allow the tape to pass over her head in the reverse direction at all. How could it have gone over her head so easily, yet not be able to come off the same way it went on? The roll was too thick to cut with scissors; it was too dangerous to use a knife that close to a busy puppy terrier's head. So I started unrolling the tape. We ended up with a giant size ball (actually a fun size if you had a sense of humor). Finally the safety scissors could work their way through the thick board at the end of the roll and she was free from her masking tape collar.

The next day it occurred to me as we were riding in the car together that the whole thing was really rather funny. Just thinking about it brought an unexpected giggle to the surface. Laughing over the matter certainly had not occurred to Daddy yet. When I carefully mentioned it to him, he finally caved in to the laughter. When we look for joy in the circumstances of life which are overwhelming, the situation soon becomes more tolerable and we have strength to endure. Allowing anger or frustration to come from our heart can encourage negative

feelings. However; looking for joy will give us joy for the journey of life. Finding joy renews our energy and strength.

*Prayer: Dear Lord, Thank You for puppies and masking tape. Thank You for children and daddies and mommies. Thank You for a sense of humor and laughter. Give me the ability to lighten my burdens by my willingness to laugh at my circumstances. Help me to remember to not take the little things too seriously in life.*

*Amen.*

## Something to Laugh

Play a tickling game with your family today. One of my favorites is to sit close with a child and just barely touch a place on his or her body. While briefly touching, I ask the child: “are you ticklish here?” Keep moving to different places with a light touch and asking: “are you ticklish here?” You are sure to end up with some great giggles and laughter.

## And God Was There

*“And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

*Matthew 28:20b (NRSV)*

Six months of begging, pleading and asking for ballet lessons brought us to the studio that fall afternoon. Adorned in her pink leotard and tights, my 4-year-old daughter was more than ready to get started...until we got there. A sudden attack of “shy-itis” struck this normally capable child and she was glued to my side.

My first attempt to get her on the floor with all of the other ballerinas launched me into a grand inquisition: “How could we be so excited for so long, only to cave in to the curse of feeling shy?” I leaped into action with ridiculous threats of withholding the future purchase of ballet shoes and no more lessons after today. Failure ensued. I suggested that she could at least start following the teacher’s moves while stuck to my leg. She reluctantly tried, but it was no good.

Suddenly it hit me, quick and fierce, without warning. I knew what I had to do. It was the kind of knowing that can only grow from the wisdom of a mother’s instinct and there was no turning back until the deed was done. As the thought was clarifying itself inside my mind, my psyche was adjusting to a wave of “oh, no—surely not!” I grabbed my lip with my teeth and as slowly as possible, I grudgingly peeled the sandals from my feet and joined the budding ballerinas on the floor—in front of the mirror. Thus, I began my ballet career at the ripe old age of 47.

Still in my lawn mowing wardrobe, I was on display for all of the 20 and 30-something parents, cultured people of poise and grace. I had the fortune of first hopping like a bunny in a circle around the room, then galloping skips and a lap of marching. I nearly collapsed prostrate on the floor to thank God when I was able to fade into the wall of parents and leave my dancer on the floor, comfortable with her brand new friends.

Soon it occurred to me that I have a parent who does the very same thing for me. Every time I am afraid and uncertain with life's struggles, God comes along beside me to skip, gallop, march and dance with me through the challenges, just as I was able to skip, gallop, dance and march alongside my daughter to help her on her way.

God is always with us and it is a good thing. I was able to return to ballet class for the rest of the season with my head held high and I soon forgot what had taken place on that first day of ballet lessons. Hopefully, the other parents did too.

*Prayer: Dear God, thank You for pink ballerinas. Thank You for providing wisdom to me when I need Your help. Remind me to depend on You in every circumstance because I can. Thank You for always being right beside me, leading me every step of the way through life. Amen.*

### Something to Stretch

Think of an area in life that your child is struggling with right now. Is it making new friends? Is it doing his homework? Is it taking her bath? Picking up toys? Whatever your child is struggling with in life right now, take the time to complete the activity with her from beginning to end, right by her side. If you see progress, feel free to do it every day for a week and watch for great success!

## Thank God for Winter Coats

*“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.”*

*Isaiah 43:2-3 (NRSV)*

His anger was fierce. It wasn't a new thing, but it came at an unexpected time on this particular morning. In spite of the fact that I had attended every field trip and parental opportunity for the year, he was demanding my presence at the classroom Christmas party.

His protest involved a refusal to dress, rejecting the need to wear a coat and resisting the need to get into the car to go to school. It soon occurred to me he was holding the entire family hostage, so I used the last resort—the thing I most despise to do—I promised to spank him if he didn't cooperate. The threat motivated him to successfully pull himself together and we arrived at school 10 minutes late.

Upon our arrival, we were soon reminded that the entire school--preschool through 12th grade—was just assembling in the gym for an all-school Christmas program. I carefully pointed out to him that now I had to walk in front of the entire student body to find his class and I hadn't even combed my hair yet—to which he responded: “how embarrassing!”

In the car on the way home, it occurred to me that I not only hadn't combed my hair, but I hadn't even dressed yet. In all the chaos of the morning, I had only slipped on pants and pulled my coat over my pajamas! Thank God for winter coats!

*Prayer: Thank You, God, for winter coats! Thank You for the many times You have taken care of me in the trenches of life. Thank You, God, for the many times You will continue to do so. Thank You for helping me so that I won't be overwhelmed too much and so that I can survive the daily challenges of being a mom. Amen.*

### Something to Remind

Think about a time when you had to deal with a specific struggle with a child. Think about the events that took place and how solutions came about. Consider the possibility that God was taking care of you through the difficult moments and think about how maybe God was active in helping you. Then take a moment to thank God and to ask for God's help in the future.

## Blew It

*Forgive, and you will be forgiven.*

*Luke 6:37c (NRSV)*

I blew it today. Totally. Unbelievably a disaster. I just lost it and totally blew it. After pulling the car to the side of the road and letting my voice pierce the hearts of my children, I glanced in the rearview mirror as I pulled back onto the road. The hurt in my son's teary eyes tugged at my heart.

For 10 miles of interstate, I analyzed the whole experience. What went wrong? It wasn't the words that hurt. Or was it? I had chosen them carefully so as not to attack. But did I? Soon I came to understand that the tone and inflection of my voice had really gone wrong. As I continued at 70 mph, wiping tears from my own face, I began praying for wisdom and forgiveness.

Stopping at the next exit, I gathered my children in my arms and told them how sorry I was that I had spoken to them so harshly. Then they heard me say that I was disappointed in myself. Soon the offending child reluctantly mumbled "sorry" and suggested that disappointment described his feelings for his behavior as well. We hugged one another and fastened ourselves back into our seatbelts.

It was a rough few minutes one morning. However, God came through for me and quickly answered my prayer for wisdom and forgiveness. There is no better source of wisdom, forgiveness and encouragement than pouring out our hearts to God and asking for wisdom, forgiveness and insight.

*Prayer: Dear Lord, thank You for forgiving me when I really blow it. Help me to be more patient and kind with my children every hour of every day. Help me to recognize the need to apologize and give me courage to do it.*

*Forgive me, Amen.*

## Something to Heal

Sometimes even mommies make mistakes. But how do you react when you do? Take some time to reflect on your day and see if there's anything that you need to ask forgiveness for in regards to your relationship with your children. Apologize to your children if necessary and ask for their forgiveness. Use your mistakes to model repentance and humility.

After an apology, stand in front of the mirror and look at yourself for a moment. Then say these phrases out loud while looking at yourself. "I am a unique child of God." "I am lovable and capable." "Sometimes I will make mistakes." "God forgives me and I forgive myself." "I do not have to carry my guilt forever." "I am forgiven." "I am a good mom." "Thank You, God, for making me."



## Reality Check

*As Jesus and the disciples continued on their way to Jerusalem, they came to a village where a woman named Martha welcomed them into her home. Her sister, Mary, sat at the Lord's feet, listening to what he taught. But Martha was worrying over the big dinner she was preparing. She came to Jesus and said, "Lord, doesn't it seem unfair to you that my sister just sits here while I do all the work? Tell her to come and help me." But the Lord said to her, "My dear Martha, you are so upset over all these details! There is really only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it—and I won't take it away from her."*

*Luke 10:38-41 (NLT)*

How can there be so much busyness in the morning? It was another morning which consisted of everyone buzzing around doing what was important to them. My husband and I were doing the usual push with our words to motivate our children to eat, dress and brush their teeth in a timely way before school. My son quickly lost his focus on what needed to be accomplished and he picked up his daddy's stethoscope off of the kitchen counter. He quickly put the ear pieces in place, grabbed his sister and positioned the round silver disk on her 3-year-old chest.

There was a precious split second of silence as we went about our business and then he broke the silence with his exuberant voice: "Mommy! I hear Jesus in there!" The sparkle in his 5-year-old eyes was too much for me. The stress of our morning routine was snapped into pieces as we consumed this precious moment.

I wondered if our children were "hearing" Jesus in our hearts as we raced around nagging them of a morning. I wondered if other people were able to "hear" Jesus in our activities as we moved through our day. I wonder.

Jesus was quick to point out to Martha that she was so caught up in busyness and details that she missed the point of life. My husband and I have made great strides in letting some details go and focusing on our children when they need us most. I hope we will always hear Jesus in her heart!

*Prayer: Thank You, Jesus, for being in my heart. Help me to always hear You in my children's hearts. Help my children to always hear the love of Jesus in my heart. Amen.*

### Something to Treasure

Draw a big heart on a piece of paper. Place crayons in the middle of it and invite your children to color the heart with you. Allow scribbling, writing, drawing, or anything that comes to mind for them to do in the space of the heart and cover the entire area inside the heart with crayon. While sharing this time together, talk with your children about what it means to “hear” Jesus in their hearts and how to live with the love of Jesus in their hearts.

## Face to Face

*Jacob named the place Peniel—"face of God"—for he said, "I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved."*

*Genesis 32:30 (NRSV)*

My husband was out of town when the phone call came that my dad had died. It didn't take me long to pack the things my children and I would need and drive an hour and a half to my mother-in-law's to drop off the kids.

My son and daughter were soon shuffled from relative to relative as my husband and I walked through the journey of funeral planning and began to grieve. It brought consolation to know our family would be on vacation the following week and that our kids would have our undivided attention.

On vacation, our undivided attention soon equaled following our children all over the amusement park doing whatever they wanted to do. They managed their best behavior the entire time and even exhibited model behavior in the car for the five hours it took to travel home.

The first night we were home from vacation, our oldest child erupted like a volcano. It seemed his behavior came with no warning signs. I followed him into his room where he buried his face on the bed with no intention of talking to me. Fortunately, a serendipitous moment emerged from a worn out "blankie," allowing us to play and eventually talk for awhile.

He just needed some individual, one-on-one, face-to-face contact with his mother. Within minutes he was back to his recognizable self. I couldn't help but wonder: If I had ignored my personal relationship with a beautiful child during high volume stress, perhaps I, too, was in need of some individual, one-on-one, face-to-face contact with my heavenly Father. After multiple trips to my parents' home during my father's illness, it was time for me to sit with God for awhile and experience God face to face.

*Prayer: Almighty God, I praise You for Your patience with me. Help me to stay close to You, even in times of great distress. Amen.*

## Something to Reconnect

Play the eyeball contact game. Sit face to face with your child and stare into one another's eyes. The first one to blink loses the game. Another version is to see how high you can count while looking into one another's eyes before one of you looks away.

## On My Own

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.*

*Proverbs 3:5-6 (NRSV)*

From a distance, there didn't appear to be anything in her mouth. She kept chewing up and down, chomping, chomping and chomping. I moved closer and finally honed in on the nearly-impossible-to-see sewing thread stringing from the sewing machine to the Yorkshire terrier's mouth. She worked hard as I stood waiting and hoping for her to let me rush in and rescue her from the mess she was in.

However, in a few short minutes, she had worked herself free. She always wants to do it by herself. She doesn't want any help and my children aren't much different. They love to plunge ahead, attacking problems on their own, aggressively seeking their own solutions. Sometimes, they get things worked out and sometimes they have to have my help.

Some of my personality traits are similar to the Yorkie's and my children's. Sometimes I just want to work it out by myself, solve the problem on my own, without any help. Just as I stood and waited for the dog to need my help with the sewing machine thread, God is simply waiting patiently for me to need Him. It really makes me wonder why most of us are slow to ask for God's help for our daily needs.

*Prayer: Lord, I am really sorry for the number of times I have tried to do things on my own instead of depending on You for help. Give me the courage to trust You with everything in my life. Amen.*

## Something to Trust

Enjoy a trust walk with your children. Blindfold one at a time and walk them around the house or go outside for a walk. Take time to talk about what it means for them to trust you as you walk them around. Then talk about how that is similar to trusting God to lead our lives. Now let them blindfold you and walk you around the house! Take time to share your feelings about the experience with your kids. Walking one child at a time probably works best. A variation would be to have children walk one another around while you supervise them.

## Time Out

*And after he [Jesus] had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray.*

*Matthew 14:23a (NRSV)*

Being Mommy for a 2 and 4-year-old can be a pretty demanding time in life. There's the infamous "terrible twos" to manage and there's the 4-year-old tantrums still hanging overhead.

The best management skill in our household during this time was the all-important Time Out Chair. When used with consistency, it really does work most of the time. It gives children the chance to cool off, to settle down and to get their behavior under control. However, there are those occasional times when even the Time Out Chair doesn't seem to do the job.

I distinctly remember one of those times. It seemed as though my children hadn't listened to a thing I had said all day. I was using everything in my parental toolbox I could think of that would bring order to our lives that day. It seemed as though I couldn't come up with anything to get their rambunctious attention under control. Clearly I was in a total state of feeling overwhelmed when I marched to my room and shut the door for a Time Out.

Little feet scurried down the hall to race after me, but when the door shut, it was more than they could stand. "What are you doin' Mommy? Mommy, tum out! Tum out! Mommy, let us in! Mommy! Mommy! Mommeeeee!"

When they became quiet enough for Mommy to speak, they heard her say: "Mommy needs a time out. You sit down and wait for me and you will be fine." Silence. Oh. Finally, I had their attention AND had taken care of myself so I could be a better Mommy.

Sometimes God wants us to take a time out from the business of the day. Jesus took a time out from the crowds to pray and sometimes Mommy needs a time out from the “crowds” to be alone and regain her energy.

*Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for a time out for me. Help me to catch my breath and gain new energy when I need it most. Thank You for helping me, Amen.*

### Something to Relax

Find someone to be responsible for your kids for two hours. It might mean hiring a babysitter or scheduling Daddy or a grandparent in order to give yourself a two hour break. Take a nice long bubble bath and enjoy a time of just sitting and soaking in the warm water. Do not take any of the two hours for any tasks or errands. Just soak and enjoy relaxing.



## Lost

*For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.*

*Luke 19:10 (NRSV)*

It was time to pick up my son and his friend from a birthday party in a nearby small town. The birthday boy had moved since we were at his house last, so we had to write down directions and follow them carefully.

We had circled the town twice when I realized I was lost and couldn't find Koki's house. I was mumbling street names, going over the directions carefully and thinking about what to do next. I spoke up rather loud in frustration and said: "we're lost."

I had forgotten that my attentive four-year-old daughter was in the backseat observing the entire situation. As she started to speak, I looked into the rearview mirror and saw her pink coat, her pink pointed glasses with the faux diamonds in the corners and her interesting expression: "Do you know where you are Mommy?"

"Yes, I do, Leah."

"Do you know how to get out?" she inquired.

"Yes, I do."

"Then we're not lost Mommy. Lost means you don't know where you are and you don't know how to get out," she explained. How do four year olds do that?

"You're right then. We're not lost. We just don't know what we need to do to find Koki's house," I replied.

We eventually dug out the cell phone, found the phone number and called for better directions. It seems there's a tricky part in the directions we were given about what to do when the road came to a fork.

Jesus claimed in Luke 19:10 that he came to the world in order to save the lost. I think it's possible that many of us are not lost. Most of us know who Jesus is, most of us know that following Jesus could be a good thing for our lives, but we are simply driving around in circles without seriously trying to find Him. My daughter's analysis of this experience helped me to realize that we need to be careful when we come to a fork in the road. Perhaps we're not as lost as it seems, but rather we need to be more specific about where our lives are going so we can choose the best direction when we come to a fork in the road.

*Prayer: Lord, I thank You for little girls who pay attention to details. Thank You for reminding me to be specific and intentional in my relationship with You. Help me to take the fork in the road that keeps me close to You every time. Amen.*

### Something to Consider

Take time to say this prayer and say it again several times if it is helpful to you in your journey with the Lord:

Heavenly Father, thank You for making me. I am sorry I haven't been as close to You as I could. I am sorry for the mistakes I have made in my life. Help me to follow You and love You forever. Help me to stay close to You. Forgive me and help me to never feel lost again. I pray You will help me to fall in love with You more every day. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## Midnight on the Front Porch

*For I can do everything with the help of Christ who gives me the strength I need.*

*Philippians 4:13 (NLT)*

How could he be doing it again? I thought I would lose my mind. Night terrors. How could I cope? Night terrors would start with him thrashing and bumping the wall and then become full blown as he cried and screamed while kicking and thrashing. We did everything we could to comfort him and wake him up. We tried to hold him, but couldn't. We tried putting water on his face, but it didn't work. We tried talking, yelling, singing, playing music, but nothing helped. So I stood on the front porch in the freezing cold, thinking the cold night air would wake my thrashing two-year-old son. Not!

When all of our own efforts failed, we contacted every specialist we could think of—the family doctor, the pediatrician, the child psychologist, the mental health facility—and they all told us the same thing: “We don't know very much about night terrors, but don't try to wake him up. Just be sure he's safe.” No kidding! There was no way to wake him up in the middle of a night terror. The experience usually lasted a minimum of twenty minutes and it happened at least once a week.

He was two years old when our daughter arrived and he thoroughly enjoyed everything about her during the day, but at night? Forty-five nights in a row of night terrors. We left him upstairs to sleep on a comfortable pad on the floor, with the rest of us sleeping downstairs. Putting some space between our sleeping patterns and his startling sounds in the middle of the night cushioned the health of our nervous systems. I would wake up to the thrashing and screaming overhead, reassured that he was safe and I just laid in bed and prayed for him. I've discovered that night terrors can be overwhelming. Talking to God during the night terrors helped me to cope with them and eventually the terrors came less and less often.

There were times I felt like I was barely hanging onto what little sanity I had left because of the sleepless nights and night terrors. However, God was faithful once again as I talked to Him during the night terrors. Talking to God gave me peace and helped me to have strength in order to cope. Talking to God helped me to realize that I had done the best I could do with the circumstances and it was time to find some peace about it. It also helped me to understand that I really can “do everything with the help of Christ who gives me the strength I need.”

*Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for the challenges of life. Help us to rely on You in the difficult times and to find peace when there are no obvious solutions. Amen.*

### Something Else to Pray

My mother once told me that she had prayed for me every day of my life. I have been the recipient of a mother's prayers and they are tremendously powerful. It is indeed the most important and powerful thing we can do for our children. Spend fifteen minutes today praying for each of your children and make it a habit to pray for your children and their specific needs every day.

## Public Broadcasting System

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.*

*Psalm 19:14 (NRSV)*

My husband and I had been married for 21 years when our first child finally arrived. We were set in our ways. Private conversations were always kept private, quiet evenings were always quiet and everything was put away in its place at the end of each day.

A year after our son arrived and began making strides with his language skills, I remember with clarity the moment at which it occurred to me we would soon have a public broadcasting system stationed in our home.

The more developed his language skills became, the more he would be able to repeat anything and everything he wanted to, whenever, wherever, or however he chose. While this might not be troubling to everyone, it made my entire body tremble. I shuttered to think that every single word uttered in the privacy of our home could be available to the public without us even knowing it. Or worse yet, something could be repeated at church or told out of context that could be totally misunderstood. We didn't have anything to hide, but it would definitely change our "permission to speak freely" and solve problems out loud with one another.

When he started preschool, our preschool teacher told us, "I won't believe half of what he tells us about you if you promise to only believe half of what he tells you about us." It was a deal.

Installing an immature public broadcasting system was a great wake up call for me. After all, God hears everything we say any way and wouldn't we want to live in such a way that what we always say is pleasing to God, even if we are in the privacy of our own home?

*Prayer: Dear God, please keep Your hand over my mouth today and help me to say things that are pleasing to You. Amen.*

### Something to Learn

Play a listening game with your family. Sit around the dinner table and have an adult start the game by whispering to the person on his or her left. The adult should whisper something about an event that took place during the day at work, school, home, etc. The person who listened to the information then whispers it to the next person, continuing around the table until the last person hears the story. Have the last person repeat it out loud. Talk about what was correctly passed along and what was incorrect. During the time that the information is being whispered, no one can ask questions and no one can repeat what was said.

## More Love

*As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you.*

*Isaiah 66:13a (NRSV)*

The tears finally came. I made it through the initial scream at one o'clock, the longest ride ever to the hospital, the endless mind-numbing questions from the emergency room receptionist and I even survived the restraints used so the injured eye could be examined.

My daughter had been innocently crawling around under a new table we had just purchased and brought home. She came out from under the table screaming wildly that her eye hurt. She was so hysterical that we weren't able to know what really happened. Apparently something fell from the underneath side of the table and went into her eye, but the offending object was never recovered.

At bedtime seven hours later, she was still suffering with serious pain and for a brief moment, I dared to let the tears come forward. Guarded tears. Cautious tears. Not knowing when her scream would bring my nerve endings to full attention again and jolt me back to coping.

The intermittent naps and screams made for a long night, but I held her close and never left her side. I didn't know it was possible to love my daughter more, but I loved her even more in those four long days when she never opened either eye to protect herself from the pain. It was hard to understand how I could love her more than I already did, but the experience produced the feeling of loving her more than I ever had.

My daughter's eye took much longer to heal than the doctors expected, but it healed with no permanent damage. And our love for one another grew even deeper through the experience.

God does the same for us. When we are suffering the most, when we are living our deepest pain, God loves us even more. God stays beside us and comforts us with an even deeper love when we most need it and God will never leave our side.

*Prayer: Dear God, help me to know that You love me when life is good and when life is going rough. Help me to trust Your love for me. Thank You for Your loving comfort. Amen.*

### Something to Appreciate

Write a simple prayer thanking God for loving you more every day.



## If I Were An Octopus

*Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*

*1 Peter 5:7 (NIV)*

I was working full time when my children were 3 and 5 years old. A colleague and I had been playing phone tag for a couple of days. There were six slices of ham in one skillet, three pieces of French toast in another, syrup in the microwave and I poured the drinks while flipping the French toast. As I turned them a second time, the doorbell and the telephone both rang at the same time. The caller I.D. indicated it was the colleague I needed to speak with, so I chose the phone over the door, but my son didn't. I glanced up from the stove with the phone in my ear to see a 6-year-old boy wearing only a t-shirt running out of the bathroom and toward the front door. Whoever was at the door definitely knew we were home and I had to answer it.

Not only did I have to answer the door, but I had to get the half-naked boy back in the bathroom to finish his task, keep lunch from burning and be polite to the man on the other end of the telephone while answering the door! It came to mind that this much multi-tasking could even challenge an octopus.

This busy life was really getting to me, so a year later I stopped working and became a full time, stay-at-home mom. Life was definitely better, but it didn't take long to understand that whether I worked outside the home or not, a mother is required to have the capabilities of an octopus at least 37 times a day. Sometimes the multi-tasking gets so out of control I start multi-tasking the list of multi-tasking in my brain. And it overwhelms me.

My mother was with my children one afternoon while I was gone and the children were getting ready to go outside with their grandma. Grandma was helping one child get ready to go outside while the other child was demanding that Grandma tie her shoe. Grandma told her she would just have to wait a minute because she couldn't do everything at once. With her three-year-old charm, the child reached for the microphone on her cash register toy, leaned into it and said loudly: "we need a few more Grandmas over here!"

One of two things: either moms need the arm capacity of an octopus or we need a few more grandmas! Perhaps both.

*Prayer: Thank You, God, for the busy times which keep life engaging and interesting. Help me to manage my time and abilities so that life doesn't become a blur of being overwhelmed. Amen.*

### Something to Breathe

Enjoy today without any multi-tasking. Do one thing at a time. You won't get nearly as much done today, but when you talk to your child, stop what you are doing and look at her. When you zip up his coat, leave the phone on the table. While you are driving, leave your coffee cup alone and keep your phone in your purse. Do one thing at a time today, all day. Yes, you will have to give yourself permission to let some things go that you would normally get done, but indulge yourself to do one thing at a time so you can enjoy some peace of mind. At the end of the day, think about how God blessed you today through the experience of no multi-tasking.

## A Time to Laugh

*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh;....*

*Ecclesiastes 3:1-4 (NRSV)*

Our church staff was lingering around the table after a staff meeting and I was chatting with the pastor. My three-year-old daughter had been playing quietly on the floor next to me during the entire meeting, but she started to get restless while we all chatted afterwards. However, the conversation was important, so I handed my purse to her. Quite delighted with the freedom to explore the contents of my purse, she became very quiet again and enjoyed another 15 minutes to herself. I was standing up to leave when she pulled something out of my purse and waved it in the air. The room stood still to hear her say, “Mommy, what’s this?” I was horrified! It was the most personal of personal things a little girl could ever pull out of her mommy’s purse. It was intended for once a month emergencies—not for scrutinizing after a church staff meeting.

If my face could have been any redder, blood would’ve had to start oozing through the pores of my cheeks. I was nearly gasping to breathe as I quizzed her about how she got the zipper part open and found that particular item. It was then the pastor said to me, “aren’t you glad it was just me?”

No! I was NOT glad it was him. I was mortified! So I said, “not really. Why would you say that?”

“Well, since I live with my wife and two teenage daughters, it’s no big deal,” he said.

“Well,” I replied, “it’s a huge, great big deal to me. I would’ve rather it hadn’t happened at all”—tried breathing some more and composing myself—then it came.

Uncontrollable, nervous, laughter. Boy, it sure was funny once I got to the funny side of it. We have to choose to laugh at ourselves or we will suffocate in our struggle to be prim, proper and perfect. It seemed like the only choice if I wanted to keep any of my dignity in tact at all.

There is a picture of Jesus hanging in my hallway at home that was given to me by the Korean Church. It is a black line drawing of Jesus laughing with his mouth open. Sometimes as moms we take ourselves far too seriously. Seeing the picture of Jesus laughing out loud reminds me daily that perhaps God would simply have us laugh and move on. There really is “a time to laugh” when we feel overwhelmed.

*Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for helping me to survive horribly embarrassing moments that happen with my children. Thank You for the gift of laughter. Help me to know that laughter is Your healing balm for distress and to use it appropriately. Amen.*

### Something to Lighten Up

Think about a time when you have taken yourself too seriously. Give some thought as to how uptight you felt and how ridiculous the circumstances were. Give yourself permission to laugh and enjoy the lighter side of life. If you are finding it difficult to laugh, then find a book at the library or bookstore written by Barbara Johnson. Her work will lighten your load with laughter.

## "You're a Good Mom"

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.*

*II Corinthians 1:3-4 (NIV)*

There it was again. Those magic words that give renewed purpose, those magic words that fuel energy, those magic words that inspire us and make our heart soar: "You're a good mom!" Wow! Did I ever need to hear it right then.

My kindergartner was in the restroom dressing at school. When I went to her bedroom this morning to ask her to put her coat on, she hadn't even begun to dress. She and I were very clear about what was expected and what she needed to do, but unbeknownst to me, ten minutes had passed and she hadn't even started to take off her pajamas.

As words were collecting themselves in my mind and about to spill from my mouth, I was suddenly aware of what she was doing. She was writing in her little diary book: "I love Mommy and I love Daddy." Yikes! What to do now with this disobedient child who would rather write of her love for Mommy and Daddy than do what Mommy had asked her to do?

It wouldn't be fair to her brother to be late for school. It didn't make sense for me to come to the rescue and quickly dress her. So I quickly bagged up her clothes while she put on her coat and shoes. Both children arrived on time and I left her dressing in the restroom at school.

As I apologized to her teacher for the inconvenience, I heard those magic words: “You’re a good mom.” And then her teacher told me how glad she was that I hadn’t bailed my daughter out of the mess, even though it would’ve been much easier to do than to bag up her clothes.

p.s. My daughter never showed any distress at having to dress at school, but five months later when we had a similar morning, I quietly asked if she would just like to dress at school instead of hurry and she replied with a bold “no” and dressed herself in record time.

*Prayer: Dear God, I am so grateful when my children do what I ask them to do. Thank You for giving me wisdom when they don't. I appreciate being reminded that I can do good work for my children, even when it might feel otherwise. Amen.*

### Something to Share

Tell another person today “You’re a good mom.” Strike up a conversation about another mom’s children and gently, naturally insert the words “You’re a good mom.” Even the most confident of mothers need to hear it.

## Reaching Out

*I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. As you make your requests, please pray for God's mercy upon them, and give thanks.*

*1 Timothy 2:1 (NLT)*

"I'm not bringing you out with me again. You'll have to stay at home." Harshly spoken. The woman's words had sting. "Stop it! Stop doing that!" She commanded.

I should've minded my own business. I shouldn't have even looked, but the familiar feelings her words conjured up inside of me compelled me to look, because the experience reminded me what it's like when a child is embarrassing, frustrating and exhausting. I was starting down the bread aisle any way, and that's where they were.

It was easy to assume that the words had been said to a fussy toddler by a tired and frustrated mom. But when I took the risk of being nosy, I soon learned the loud wails were coming from a boy who was at least 10 and possibly as old as 13. It was apparent that he had some developmental challenges and when he called her "mom," I was increasingly aware that this had to be a mom who was overwhelmed. When I first saw them, for some reason I had assumed she was a caregiver or a life skills teacher, but instead she was his mom. I imagined she had experienced many struggles in their life together. She continued commanding him sternly to "stop!" as they headed toward the frozen foods. "Stop it! Stop! Stop it now!"

My heart ached. It reminded me of all those times when my children had embarrassed me in the grocery store. All over again I was experiencing the desperation and disappointment, the anger and frustration. My thoughts trailed off to wondering what I could possibly do to help her without being offensive. The least offensive thing I could think of was to pray. I began praying for her and her son as I continued pushing the grocery cart through the store. Praying God would give her some newfound wisdom. Praying for patience. Praying God

would rescue them both from their exhausted frustration. A few minutes later, I watched them quietly and calmly leave the store together.

I'll never know for sure if my prayer had anything to do with their calm demeanor as they left the store, but I am certain it didn't hurt anything. It was much better than being nosy.

*Prayer: Thank You, God, for turning my nosiness into something good. Thank You for helping me to be useful to another mom with prayer. Amen.*

### Something Else to Pray

Think about another mom who may need your prayers today. Is it someone at work, someone you pass by at school, a neighbor, or even someone you don't know in the grocery store? Stop what you are doing several times today and pray for her. Pray for her to have strength and wisdom. Ask God to guide her thoughts and to give her hope.



## The Car

*God wants us to grow up, to know the whole truth and tell it in love—like Christ in everything.*

*Ephesians 4:15 (The Message)*

The door slammed, and I was aware of feet stampeding toward me from the garage: “It’s too small!” Tears dropped to the floor and she cried out again: “It’s too small!” I couldn’t imagine the source of her complaint. As I cradled the sobbing girl in my arms, she offered a little more: “my car’s too small.”

Uh-oh. When she had asked us to retrieve her beloved car from winter storage, I shuttered at the thought that she might not fit in it another year. More than likely you’ve seen the precious car—at day care centers, garage sales, sitting on a sidewalk, inside the backyard chain link fences—it’s the one with the yellow roof, the orangish-red bottom, fueled by the child’s moving legs.

Trying to help her through her moment of distress, I carefully asked: “Can you fit into the seat?” She managed between sobs: “I can get in, but I can’t move my legs.” Then deep sobbing.

Growing pains are, well, painful. The car had been her constant companion for five summers. It was time to give it up. Say goodbye. Move on.

Moving on can be difficult. Adult growing pains in life can be equally difficult. When we try to grow without God, we can really get stuck, just like a little girl getting stuck in her car. When we choose to grow with God, we can move on to a “bigger car” and a more fulfilling, satisfying life.

*Prayer: Lord, I confess that sometimes it just seems easier to stay “stuck” in life. Sometimes I don’t want to grow and change. Give me courage to grow my heart bigger for you and to do healthy things through the growing pains of life. Amen.*

## Something to Grow

Give some thought to an area of life where you need to grow some more. Do you need help in letting go of something and moving on? Do you need to grow in your understanding of how to help a child with a bad habit? Do you need to grow in your spiritual life with God? Do you need to grow in your ability to have a healthier marriage? Do you need to grow in your ability to be attentive to your children? Think specifically about an area of life where you could improve your quality of life by growing. Go to the library or the bookstore and find some resources to help you start growing.

## Every Mom Needs a Soft Place to Fall...and I Prefer My Bed

*“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”*

*Matthew 11:28 (NRSV)*

Three months after our first child arrived, my husband and I literally fell onto the bed one night. We were lying flat on our backs, staring into the white ceiling, while reflecting on the first three months of parenthood—the airplane landing at the airport, the escort carrying our baby through the doors, reaching for our 19 pound, 9 month-old son and holding him ever so tightly as we welcomed him into our family.

Then there were the sleepless nights with a child who had been living on a time zone 12 hours ahead of ours, a railing child who was grieving the loss of his first caregiver, a child who still had symptoms of colic at 9 months and then the night terrors.

As we fell flat on our backs on the bed that night and dared to share deep thoughts, I said to my husband, “Do you think we’ll ever feel normal again?”

Silence.

I asked again: “Honey, do you ever think we’ll feel normal again?”

No answer. He was sound asleep.

It didn’t take long to understand that we were living in a new normal. Our lives would never be the same again and it was time to accept the blessing of the new normal we were living.

*Prayer: Lord, sometimes I want things to change, like having a baby, yet stay the same, like getting plenty of sleep. Help me to accept the challenges that change brings to my life and to learn to live in the new "normal" of life. Amen.*

## Something to Rest

Go outside, lie flat on your back and feast your eyes on the sky. If it's cold outside, spend at least 5 minutes; if it's warm, spend at least 15 minutes. Soak up the pleasure of resting in the presence of God by doing absolutely nothing and enjoying the vast expanse of the sky.

## Share the Burden

*So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.*

*1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NLT)*

It was a particularly fussy morning and then in the car on the way to school, the truth was blurted out from my daughter in the backseat: “Mommy, I don’t want to go to school today. I just want to stay home with you.” I don’t know if it was motherly gut instinct or just plain old common sense, but suddenly I was aware that the next ten minutes wouldn’t be very pleasant.

We walked into the school together to avoid a scene in the drop off line. As we approached my daughter’s classroom, I looked up and saw my friend down the hall with a child who resembled Velcro attached to her leg. I left my daughter crying in the arms of her teacher that morning. I prayed for her all the way home and I prayed for my own nagging guilt for leaving her like that with her teacher. What if she really needed me for some reason today? What if I hadn’t gotten to the bottom of what was really bothering her? Had her mom completely failed her today?

When I picked my daughter up from school, her day had actually gone quite well (much better than mine, which was loaded with guilt). My friend I had seen in the hallway that morning called later the same evening to set up play dates and I seized the moment: “Looked like you were having something similar to what I was experiencing with a child this morning.” Wow! We talked for 30 minutes, decided our children would just need to do that sometimes and that yes, we are capable, intelligent, loving mothers!

It was a wonderful gift to share the burden, unload the guilt and encourage one another. God expects us to share our burdens with each other in order to find relief and healing. Moms deeply need each other and we deeply need God.

*Prayer: Thank You, God, for friends. Help me to share my burdens and to listen to the burdens of others. Help us to pray for one another. Amen.*

### Something to Encourage

Be intentional about sharing a burden you are carrying with someone today. Listen to her feedback and thank her for listening. If you aren't experiencing anything particularly distressing today, then seize the opportunity to reach out to someone else and ask how she is doing. Take time to love another mom with your listening.

## Sense of Entitlement

*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.*

*Ephesians 2:8 (NRSV)*

It seems that everyone is always handing something to my children. The grocery store offers them a sucker at the checkout. The library gives them stickers and bookmarks. The bank has suckers. At the Post Office, it's a coloring book. At the mall, it's a free piece of chicken on a toothpick. The Department store? A balloon. Then there's the snacks and treats at church, the "rewards" at school, the doctor's office (probably legitimate after a shot), the dentist's treasure box (possibly legitimate), Daddy's office—and don't forget Grandma and Grandpa's house (occasionally legitimate)! The one that finally put me over the edge with feeling overwhelmed was the day the employee monitoring the self-check lanes at Wal-Mart gave my daughter a headband with bunny rabbit ears.

This is not good. My children have learned some unhealthy expectations. It's important that they don't expect someone to give them something, and it's equally important that they appreciate a gift when it is given to them. It seems I'm the "bad guy" because I always say "no" to them, but someone needs to say "no" once in awhile.

What I'm concerned about is called a "Sense of Entitlement." And it overwhelms me to know how to teach my children what is good for them without being offensive to the people handing them things. We're thrilled to have used clothing handed to us. We appreciate one or two gifts at Christmas and birthdays, but the abundance of "stuff" has confused and overloaded our children, which ultimately overwhelms me.

I was really stumped the day my son came home from a birthday party with a more expensive party favor than the wrapped gift he had taken to the birthday boy. Eeks! Eegads!

Love doesn't equal stuff. Love equals time and conversation and good times together. God loves us and is freely giving us all something everyday and we need to readily accept His gift of life and salvation as easily as we allow our children to accept gifts from other people.

*Prayer: Lord, thank You for the good intentions of people who want to be generous with my children. Help me to find balance in the giving of "stuff," and help me to have the wisdom and courage to say "no thank You" when necessary. Bless my children to receive Your free gift of grace and live their lives according to Your purpose. Amen.*

### Something to Teach

Go to the toy chest with your child or children today and clean it out. Go through everything and make decisions together about what could be given away to someone who doesn't have very many toys. After some decisions have been made, go together to drop them off at the Goodwill, the Salvation Army, or a charity which can put them to good use. Use the time to talk about what it means to have too many things and what it means to be content with less. Talk to your child or children about how it felt to give some things to someone who doesn't have very much.



## The Swing

*...those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed.*

*Proverbs 11:25b (NLT)*

Today was just one of “those” days.

“Daddy’s being mean! I’m gonna run away. Nothing is going well today!”

Dramatic sobs. Doors slamming. At one point, neither Daddy nor I knew what to do to help her. So we did what any mature adult couple could do. We stood up together, looked one another in the eye, walked to the patio, sat down in the swing and stared at the lake.

“Isn’t this beautiful?” he said.

“Feels like a taste of heaven,” I answered.

The sacred moment of quiet lasted for at least 45 seconds before the frustrated child stood at the screen door behind us in her nightgown and announced, “I can’t hear what you’re saying.”

He was first. I joined him instantly. We looked at each other like two kids in a church pew who aren’t supposed to laugh and we erupted. Deep, crack-me-up-till-I-can’t-breathe laughter. Fortunately, she had walked away as quickly as she had appeared so we weren’t in danger of hurting her sensitive feelings.

We got up from the swing, healed and ready to go attack the challenge of bedtime at the end of a very, very, very long afternoon. When we walked away without a clue about how to help her with her bad choices and terrible frustrations, I couldn’t help but wonder if God has moments when he just sits on the swing and looks at

the lake while I stomp around and get my frustration cleared out. I am always glad to come to my senses with Him and settle down.

*Prayer: Lord, I'm so glad I don't have to always have the answers to my children's problems. Thank You for helping me to know when to do something and when not to do something to help them. Help me to know when to take a break and refresh myself. Amen.*

### Something to Indulge

Take time to do something for YOU today. It doesn't have to take very long. Sit down and read, chat with a friend, give yourself a facial treatment, buy expensive hand cream. Find something that would briefly nurture you so you can be refreshed in your work as a mom.

## Sacrifice: Surrendering Self

*He [Jesus] called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."*

*Mark 8:34 (NRSV)*

Looking at the list of MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers) meetings for the month made my eyes freeze on one line: April Meeting, Paula Wallace speaking on sacrificial love. I waited for such a long time to have children, that I hadn't considered the possibility that being a mom was a sacrifice. So I asked myself: what have I sacrificed as a mom?

The list of answers was overwhelming: sleep, good nutrition, white sweaters, white blouses, white pants, money, doing my job as well as I used to, my friends, my time, nurture for my own soul, travel opportunities, hot food, long conversations, peace and relaxation, time with my husband, my sanity, my expectations, my nerves, shopping trips, my privacy, my freedom to come and go as I pleased and a clean house. Whew! The stakes were high. No wonder I felt tired and lacked energy.

A couple of years later, my friend told me at the kitchen table one day that being a mom was the most difficult job she has ever had in her life. I ventured a guess that it was the enormous responsibility that comes with being a parent or maybe it was because she had twins. She surprised me by saying it was neither of those things. She went on to explain that it was the ultimate sacrifice it requires. It didn't matter if she was doing something important like bathing, sleeping, etc., when a child called and she was needed, she had to drop what she was doing and take care of the child. She went on to explain the enormous sacrifice required to be a mom... a good mom. It is indeed a difficult job description that requires significant sacrifice every day.

Jesus said to the crowds, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." This particular line from the Bible could just as easily say, "If any want to become a parent, let

them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” Parenting requires sacrificing many things, but when we dare to align ourselves with God in the enormous responsibility of parenting, the sacrifices we make become a growing edge instead of a burden. We soon learn the importance of taking care of ourselves in order to be able to make the necessary sacrifices required as we care for our children.

*Prayer: Almighty God, I confess that sometimes I forget to put my children first and I do other things that could be done at another time. Help me to keep my priorities aligned with Your purpose for my life as a mom. Amen.*

### Something to Refuel

Write down everything you have sacrificed in order to be a good mom. Say a prayer of thanks to God that you are able to make sacrifices for your children. After doing so, take the time to plan a date with your husband or a friend. Arrange the necessary details today so you have the peace of mind that a special time for you, personally, will be within the next two weeks.

## The Goal

*But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

*II Peter 3:18a (NRSV)*

We were shivering inside our winter coats as we watched and cheered from the sidelines. It was colder than cold. Clad in only his team shirt, soccer shorts and shin guards, my son was playing with energy and joy we had never before witnessed in his soccer game.

Only six months before, he often stood still on the field in the middle of a game and watched the ball fly past him like a bored spectator. But the spring season was different. Hungry for a goal, ignited by a passion to win, our first grader was now fully engaged in the game.

My husband and I reminisced about the progress our son had made. It was incredibly satisfying to watch him grow in so many ways. Not only had he grown taller, but he had also grown in maturity, his ability to play soccer and in his knowledge of the Lord.

The best game of his early soccer career left me wondering: He had grown so much in his life; had I grown as much over the past six months in my relationship with God? Why not?

*Prayer: Lord, I realize that sometimes I become so busy with my busyness that I forget to thank You for my life and all that You have given to me. Thank You for the privilege of knowing You and help me to learn more about*

*You every day. Amen.*

## Something to Relate

Go to the local library or bookstore and spend some time reading a book written by Max Lucado called *When God Whispers Your Name*. Make some time to read as much as you possibly can and nurture your understanding of God and your relationship with God.