



FACING OUR FEARS

31 STORIES FROM M.O.M.

Introduction

Recently, I read something that said, “When Fear comes knocking, let Faith answer the door.” I LOVE that. But it’s not always easy to muster up that mustard seed-sized faith that moves mountains and conquers fears.

We all know that life can be downright scary. Being a mom can be even more scary. And being a mom during these trying times can scare the bejeebers out of you.

The bad news is that, unfortunately, we all deal with fear. The good new is, we don’t have to be defeated by it. God did not give us the spirit of fear. He gave us the spirit of power and of love and of a sound mind.

When we walk by faith we are not crippled by fear.

Through this story-style devotional, we want to welcome you into our own world of fears and fess up on the things that are prone to paralyze us. Those things that have left us knee-knocking, heart-pounding and shaking in our shoes, scared to death.

Each story is laced with grace and sprinkled with God’s overcoming power to triumph over fears that have gripped, and sometimes broken our hearts.

This book is designed for moms and mentors alike. You can walk through it on your own or with a mentor or a mentee.

Let the questions prompt your heart to reflect on your own fears and let the Word of God grip your heart with the truth that through Christ, you are more than a conqueror, sweet mom!



*Fear not, for I am with you;
Be not dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you,
Yes, I will help you,
I will uphold you with My righteous right
hand.’
Isaiah 41:10*

1 ~ On Being a Scared Mom

By: Genny Heikka

“Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?” (Matthew 6:27 NIV)

For the fifth time in an hour, I leaned over my newborn daughter’s bassinet and checked to make sure she was okay. I was a brand new mom and I’d read my share of parenting books and safety warnings. The chapter in one of the books I’d read about SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome) stuck in my mind. Fears of my daughter getting tangled in her blanket filled my head.

Many times I stood by her bassinet, watching her intently, holding my breath so I could hear hers, waiting for her chest to rise and fall. Only after I was sure she was okay did I lie back down and try to get some sleep.

Those first few nights—months, actually—were like that. When Katie wasn’t waking me up because she was hungry, I was waking myself up to make sure she was okay.

You might’ve guessed I’ve always been a pretty good worrier. And as a new mom, I got even better at it. Because as a parent there are so many things to be fearful about, right? From SIDS to choking to strangers to accidents... I spent many times proving the truth in Matthew 6:27: that worrying takes *away* from life, not adds to it. Many times I’ve worried away my energy, peace, *and* sleep.

Over the years, I’ve gotten better in this area. And I’ve learned that, even though we’d like to control everything and make sure nothing bad ever happens to our kids, the truth is, there is much in this world that is out of our control.

And that’s where the peace comes in - the peace of God’s promises. Because, even though parenting can be hard and the world can be scary, in *His* promises, we can find rest. They are promises that stand up to any type of fear that might creep in...

God has our kids in the palm of his hand:

“See, I have written your name on the palms of my hands.” Isaiah 49:16

His plans for them are good:

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

He doesn’t want us to be fearful moms:

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but a spirit of power and love and discipline.” –2 Timothy 1:7

Knowing that and leaning on these kinds of truths can make all the difference in how we feel, and how we parent.

And even though problems do arise, challenges do come, and storms do blow in the journey of motherhood, God tells us that He will work all things together for good for those who love him.

“And we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love Him and who are called according to His purpose.” Romans 8:28

There really is a peace that only He can give us, moms. All He asks is that we give Him our fears and worries first. Won't you let him lighten your load today?

A Mom's Prayer: Lord, I don't want to be a fearful or worrying mom. Help me remember your promises and put my trust in you. –Amen

*** Is parenting ever scary for you?**

*** How do you handle it when it is scary?**

*** Are you a worry wart? If so, how can 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 and Philippians 4:6-9 help overcome your fears?**



2 ~ Future Hope

By: Tara Dovenbarger

“For I know the plans that I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.” Jeremiah 29:11

Planning. It is one job we all do best. We like to plan our days and our futures to make life go smoothly and predictably. No surprises, please! Most of our plans come and go without a second thought, but what happens when they go awry?

Eight years ago our family felt the Lord leading us to do foster care. Our plan was to foster babies until God’s perfectly chosen child became available for us to adopt. We were very excited!

Finally, after about two years, God delivered a beautiful baby girl with huge brown eyes to our front door. Our plans were going great!

Nonetheless, one trip to the neurologist brought all our preconceived ideas of our future to a screeching halt. Our beautiful baby girl had serious brain damage from the drugs that her birth mom used while pregnant. The doctor informed us that the child we desired to adopt would forever need to live at home and have continual care. We were stunned and scared.

Thankfully, the Lord was not surprised. In Isaiah 14:24 He reminded us, *“Surely, just as I have intended, so it has happened, and just as I planned so it will stand.”* I can rest knowing that His plan has been determined long ago, and all I need to do is follow Him into the unknown future with obedience.

Seven years later, I can say with confidence how thankful I am for God’s plan and for our daughter with beautiful big brown eyes.

I found this poem in *Streams in the Desert* by L. B. Cowman:

*God is in every tomorrow,
Therefore I live for today,
Certain of finding at sunrise,
Guidance and strength for my way;
Power for each moment of weakness,
Hope for each moment of pain,
Comfort for every sorrow,
Sunshine and joy after rain.*

*** How do you handle it when life's little surprises rock the boat of your plans?**

*** Do you ever struggle with the daily surprises and frustrations in your journey as a mom? (ie...piles of laundry, sleepless nights, terrible twos)**

*** When things don't turn out like you had hoped they would, what verses can you cling to that will strengthen your faith and your resolve?**

*** Have you ever faced something that seemed terrible only to find out later that God was working things out for your good?**

"O LORD, You are my God. I will exalt You. For You have worked wonders, plans formed long ago, with perfect faithfulness." Isaiah 25:1

3 - Fear of the Deep End

By: Lynn Mosher

Gasping for air.

Swallowing water with each breath.

Reaching for anything to grab.

Going under for the third time in water depths twice my little height.

Frightened beyond words.

Will anyone notice?

Around the age of eleven, I was with some friends at the pool. In the deep end of the pool, some of the older kids played a game with other kids on their shoulders. I don't remember if they were playing "chicken" or not.

One of the older girls asked if I would get on her shoulders.

"Sure," I said. "Just don't dump me backwards in the deep end."

Into the shallow end we went and up on her shoulders I went. And what does she do? Yup. **She dumps me backwards off her shoulders in the deep end!**

I couldn't swim very well. I could play around in the water if my feet touched the bottom of the pool; **I felt safe there.** I always struggled to swim. I had no body fat to keep me afloat. Too skinny! **My biggest fear? The deep end!**

I almost drowned in the deep end that day. But, suddenly, a hand reached out, grabbed my arm, and pulled me up to an inner tube from a tractor tire that just happened to be in the deep end.

Rescued.

I didn't have a storm around me, though it felt like it, so I understand a little how Peter felt as he stepped out of the boat that day, full of courage, yet, *"when he looked around at the high waves, he was terrified and began to sink. 'Save me, Lord!' he shouted."* (Matthew 14:30 TLB)

Just as the Lord heard Peter and *"immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him,"* (Matthew 14:31 NKJV) and saved him, so He reached out and saved me that day.

The deep end still scares me. My lungs even close up when I see someone struggling underwater on television or in a movie. But the crazy thing? I love the water!

No matter what fears we have, they always have a deep end with a swirling current sucking us down to deeper depths of doubt, unbelief, and worry, as merciless destroyers of faith.

Fear cannot abide in a heart where the Lord dwells, as John, the beloved disciple, tells us, *“Well-formed love banishes fear. Since fear is crippling, a fearful life...is one not yet fully formed in love.”* (1 John 4:18 Msg) The Phillips version says, *“Love contains no fear—indeed fully-developed love expels every particle of fear.”*

When Joshua and Caleb went with the other ten recruits to spy out the land and found giants, the ten boo-hooed in fear while Joshua and Caleb, noted for their courage, said, *“We are well able!”* (Num. 13:30)

Ambrose Redmoon said about fear and courage,
“Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important than fear.”

There will always be another giant of fear waiting to play chicken with you and dump you into the deep end. Will it consume you or will you overcome and conquer it?

Stand fast against your fear, *“For God has not given us a spirit of fearfulness, but one of power, love, and sound judgment.”* (2 Timothy 1:7 HCSB)

Whatever your fear, Jesus is always there to rescue you. If you begin to sink into that fear, He will reach out, grab you with a mighty grip, and will not let go. He is your Life Preserver, just like that inner tube.

*** Have you been thrashing about in the deep end of a swirling fear?**

*** When you feel like you’re going down for the count, what are some things you can do to fight your fears and trust that God will see you through?**

*** Right now, what seems bigger-your fear or your God?**

*** As a mom, you know you would protect your child no matter what. What are some ways you can throw a life preserver of faith and courage to your little ones when they feel like they are sinking in life’s circumstances?**

4 - Trapped by Fear

By: Stephanie Shott

“For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you.” Isaiah 41:13

Cowering behind the thorn bushes, my body trembled uncontrollably. By the grace of God I had escaped the cab of his truck but he wasn't ready to give up. Fear had numbed my battered body and the darkness shielded me from his view, but he seemed set on finishing the job.

Each minute seemed like a lifetime as a million memories raced through my mind. **My baby boy's face was etched on my beating heart and I was desperate to stay alive...for him. He needed me. And I needed him.**

Angry and afraid of getting caught, the would-be rapist finally gave up and drove away.

As I peeked through the brush, I could see the tail lights grow dim in the distance. He was gone.

I wandered my way out of the woods and pounded on the door of the first house I could find. It was about 3:00 a.m. when the police arrived to take me home.

It was over and I was alive.

The whole horrific experience only lasted about five hours but the trauma lasted for more than a year.

I became trapped by fear. Afraid to be in the car with anyone, I avoided going places with other people. When I finally braved a trip across town with a friend, I gripped the door handle ready to jump from the moving car as I pressed my body as close to the door as possible.

Logically, I knew I wasn't in danger with my mom or a lifelong friend at the wheel, but my heart was trapped by fear.

It was more than a year before I could ride with anyone without feeling terrified. But somehow it happened. I could finally take a trip with someone else without feeling like my heart was going to pound out of my chest.

It was like I was a bird that had been set free.

Fear has a way of making us feel trapped even when we aren't. We fear what might be because of what once was.

We all face fears. Look at David's response to his own fear in Psalm 34:4...

*"I sought the Lord, and he answered me;
he delivered me from all my fears." (ESV)*

Today, you may feel trapped by your fear. Perhaps you have allowed your past to haunt your heart. Or maybe you are having a hard time dealing with where you are today. Afraid of getting in the car of God's will and taking the ride of your life.

No matter where you are or what you're going through, I want you to know you don't have to grip the door handle of fear anymore.

Remember, you can't enjoy the ride if you're clutching the door and frantically looking for a way to escape. So, rest in Him and enjoy the view. He's got this thing! And more importantly, He's got you!



*** What is it that makes you feel trapped and how has it prevented you from enjoying the ride God has for you?**

*** Isaiah 41:13 tells us the Lord takes us by our right hand. That means we have to be willing to let go of whatever it is we are holding on to and let Him take hold of our hand. What fear are you holding on to that is preventing Him from taking you by your hand?**

*** What other verses can you cling to when you are feeling afraid? Make a list and begin memorizing them so you can stand your ground when fear wages war with your heart.**

*"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny?
And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.
But even the hairs of your head are all numbered.
Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows."
Matthew 10:29-31*

5 - Fear Not for I AM With You

By: Angela Mackey

"**M**OMMY! M-O-M-M-YYYYYYY," my precious girl hollered from her room.

I ran up the stairs and into her room. "What is wrong, sweet girl?"

"I'm scared," she whimpered.

My mommy-heart squeezed for her. I was afraid of the dark when I was her age. However there is a fine line between her taking advantage of my compassion so she can stay awake longer and true fear.

I look into my girl's eyes. *"What do we say when we are afraid?"*

"Do not fear for I am with you. Do not anxiously look about you for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will..."

I join her recitation. *"help you; surely I will hold you in my righteous right hand."* Isaiah 41:10.'

I nod my head, "Remember we don't have to be afraid because God is always with us."

She nods her head slightly still unsure.

"Do you remember the other verse? Joshua 1:9. *'Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.'* See God is with you. We don't have to be afraid."

My words rattled around in my heart long after I kissed my sweet girl and shut her door. God is always with me. **The Great I AM is with me and so I do not need to fear or tremble. Yet fear comes. It comes when I cannot see my child in a crowd, when change is inevitable, and while I wait for test results.**

Why do I not tell myself the truth when fear comes like I do for my children? Perhaps those verses on fear could help me tell my heart the truth. I do not have to fear. God is with me wherever I go. **His presence changes everything** for He is able and He has great plans for me.

Consider memorizing Isaiah 41:10 and Joshua 1:9. There are about 365 verses that speak to fear, one for each day of the year. So find one and work on memorizing it so you will have truth to counteract your fear.

*Father God help me when I am afraid to remember Your word and know You are with me always. In Jesus' name.
Amen.*

*** When have you encouraged others to trust God yet found yourself feeling afraid?**

*** When does fear come for you?**

*** How does knowing God is with you give you courage to fight your fears?**



6 - Indians, Bears & Strange Noises-Oh My!

By: Jodi Whisenhunt

My family lived in the country when I was little, on a remote mountain in West Virginia. I don't know the acreage—didn't occur to me to care back then—but it was forested enough for my brother to terrify me with tales of ferocious bears and rogue Indians. Yes, Indians. In the 1970s.

Down the hill beyond two vegetable gardens pooled a spring-fed pond. At its far edge loomed the woods. Dark and thick, plush with undergrowth, flickers of dogwood blossoms lit its mysterious depths. **One early spring evening, I noticed some large footprints in the grass leading from the woods up the hill. My brother convinced me an Indian brave was hunting someone to scalp.** My young mind hung on his every word, forgetting Dad had been fishing moments earlier and had just taken his gear up to the shed near the gardens.

My grandparents happened to be visiting at the time. Grandma, who is part Susquehanna Indian, suggested we camp out near the tree line, Grandma and Grandpa in one tent and our family in another. We tossed horseshoes, charred weenies, and lit marshmallows ablaze, then scrambled into sleeping bags that were preheated with foil-wrapped potato briquettes (Mom was innovative).

Some time later, a snort and a growl roused Dad. He waited before alerting us, like Isaiah 13:4a (NIV), *“Listen, a noise on the mountains, like that of a great multitude!”*

“Grunt, huff, grrrr,” it went again, startling us from sleep. **Dad grabbed his pistol and crept through the door flap, anticipating a fierce beast.** He scanned the perimeter, stepped out, and readied his gun. Inching toward the sound...closer...closer...he discovered it was only Grandpa snoring!

Blowing out the breath he'd been holding, Dad laughed and disarmed himself. When he returned, he assured us we were safe from the wild grandpa bear and his slumbering Indian bride.

Sometimes when God speaks to us, we misinterpret His message. Inner angst garbles God's gentle whisper. We hear instead fearsome clamor. Anxiety binds us. We pitch excuses and beg our way out. *God, I can't do that! I'm too shy. I'm just one person. I don't know how. It's too far away. There are bears in the woods! Please ask someone else.*

But when we listen before we open fire with our pleas, we receive guidance and add to our learning. We become wise. Proverbs 4:5 (NIV) implores us to *“Get wisdom, get understanding.”* To do so, we must not fear God’s voice.

My dad had gun in hand before setting foot into the danger zone. Likewise, we must arm ourselves with God’s truth and prepare to meet whatever awaits us on His path. *“Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes”* (Ephesians 6:11, NIV).

We must open our hearts to receive His instruction. We must pray for discernment, act on God’s commands, and yes, allow His will to be done. He may require us to surrender our cozy shelters, but with Christ on our side, we can stand against any ferocious creature or barbaric savage (or snoring grandpa and snoozing grandma) with complete confidence.

*** *Have you ever feared something that turned out to be ridiculously funny?***

*** *Have you ever felt like God was speaking to you but you misinterpreted the message?***

*** *What does it mean to put on the whole armor of God and how do you put it on?***



7 - My Fears First-Generation to Generation

By: Julie Sanders

They followed me to Asia to serve in mountain villages among tribal people, but now my team of four women and four teenage girls followed me on the dark sidewalks of one of the world's biggest, most perverted cities.

Sweaty, weary, and wandering, I couldn't help but notice how the climate of the night changed as a different crowd seeped onto the streets, passing us in the night.

We knew the Christian guest house was in the vicinity, but how to get there eluded us.

For the past months we had prepared testimonies, messages, songs and skits to convey our theme to tribal people: We can trust in the one true God.

Could I, the leader, take this message of bold confidence from the dirt pathways of tribal villages to the urban asphalt and the next generation?

Hailing a taxi meant splitting our team, facing the language barrier, and hoping for success. **Deep down, my chicken heart wished someone would get the eight of us, including my own daughter, safely inside our city haven.** With each block, my concerns grew.

Though we wrestle against spiritual powers of darkness, evil people make me tremble in the night! My trusting teens looked to me for assurance, but teaching them to face their fears meant I had to face my own.

The next generation needed boldness by example.

My unique team of four mentor pairs included teenage girls under the age of 18; I needed to keep them safe in a city known for sexual trafficking.

My teammates trusted and would follow me. After bringing a message of faith to people long in the darkness of fearing spirits, I found myself longing for stronger faith to fight back my own fears.

To teach our children to face their fears through trusting in God, we have to face our own fears by trusting in Him ... first.

Knowing how our vulnerable hearts quake, God provides a ready cry for mothers. The prayer of the Psalmist serves as a declaration when encountering threats: *“When I am afraid, I will trust in You”* (Psalm 56:3 NKJV). Faster than she pulls out a burp cloth, a mom can apply these nine simple words at a moment’s notice. Her children will hear and learn the confidence of her heart, unshakeable despite intimidation, uncertainty, desperation, or darkness.

A woman who faces her own fears teaches her children to proclaim, *“The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?”* (Psalm 118:6)

God sent two taxi drivers who understood enough to find our guest house at the end of a darkened street, where a gate promised safety and bright lights spoke welcome.

Both generations entered in with the fresh confidence from trusting in the true God, instead of being trapped and trembling by the things and people of this world.



He is worthy to be trusted and to hear mothers say, *“from generation to generation we will recount your praise”* (Psalm 79:13, ESV).

*** What strikes fear into your heart? Strangers? Darkness? Isolation?**

*** What do you communicate to your children about your attitude toward your own fears?**

*** How can you ask God to grow your boldness and that of your children?**

8 - I Will Remember

By: Tara Dovenbarger

*“Be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication with
thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.
And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension,
will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

Philippians 4:6-7 (NKJV)

The memories. They slip silently into my thoughts hardly noticed until my breathing becomes harder and the nausea tightens my throat. I’m scared. Fearful of what may lurk in the unknown future. With these stabbing memories of the past, how can I face my entire unknown tomorrows?

My heart races. I want to run.

I stop. I have to discipline myself to remember. I remember all the ways in which the Lord my God led me in the wilderness to humble me, to test me, to know what was in my heart. I force myself to remember how He allowed suffering to enter my life, but was faithful in feeding me with His daily, sufficient manna. (Deuteronomy 8:2-3).

Do you have moments like these? Days where the painful past rears its ugly head and tries to drag you down into despair? When your “flesh” forgets God’s goodness?

The book of Deuteronomy is wonderful on days like this as it commands us not only to remember our painful past, but we are also to remind ourselves of how God was working, providing and comforting us through it all.

We are to look at our difficult past honestly and press forward into the future with quietness and confidence in our Lord and Savior.

This remembering is the key that opens the door to a God focused future in which our minds are set on Him with joy and thanksgiving.

Along with remembering God's goodness in the past, we are to focus our mind and thoughts on positive things about our future. Philippians 4:8 works as a great filter for our thoughts as we are told to *only* think thoughts that are "true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, of good repute, if there are any excellent, worthy of praise, to dwell only on these things."

As we dwell on these things and practice managing our thoughts, the Bible tells us that, "*the God of peace will be with you.*" (Philippians 4:9, NKJV).

*When all Thy mercies, O my God,
My rising soul surveys,
Transported with the view, I'm lost
In wonder, love, and Praise.
~ JOSEPH ADDISON*

*Dear God, please help me to hold every thought captive
to be obedient to You. Please allow me to remember
Your goodness that you displayed to me during
my darkest times. Amen.*

*** Does past pain cause you to fear the future? If so, how can you overcome it and be a testimony to your children of what it means to trust God even in difficult days?**

*** Is the God of peace your companion?**

*** Where have your thoughts taken you today?**

9 - Fear Not

By: Stephanie Shott

I'm probably one of the biggest sissies on the planet! Yet it seems like God continually takes me on a journey that challenges me to check-mark my way down my "To Conquer" list.

I'm so thankful God loves me so much that He won't leave me where I am - wallowing in my fear - so afraid to fail that I'm not willing to take a risk. That's who I was without Christ - just one big sissy!

But since the day the Lord radically saved this broken girl with a bad past and a bleak future, He has called me to live beyond myself.

At times those uncertain steps in an unfamiliar direction have had me shakin' in my boots, but they always give me an opportunity to see God do in and through me that which I know would be impossible on my own.

I remember when we were on the mission field and we had just been ethered. For those of you who are wondering what in the world I'm talking about, it's when someone slits the screens in the window and sprays ether on you while you're sleeping so they can break in your house without you knowing they are there. Well, until you wake up...*if* you wake up.

It was during that time that the Lord used something really bad to do something really good in our lives. We had been struggling at the fast-paced language school designed to teach college students Spanish in only three months.

Let's just say our 40-something minds could not retain the fire hydrant of information rushing past our brains.

We were afraid to move to the city but afraid to stay in the ether-friendly zone where everyone told us that being ethered was *normal*.

With the best Spanish accent I could muster, I commenced to articulate that it may be *NORMAL* aqui pero no es *NORMAL* en mi mundo. (It may be *normal* here but it is not *normal* in my world).

I had conquered the rural mission field experience but now I had to conquer the city. I didn't really want to go but I wasn't about to stay.

And so we packed our 9 suitcases of belongings and headed to the capital where we would begin the whole transition and learning process again.

It seems like my faith has often been about God leading me to conquer one fear after another. And yet, as I reflect on each journey, it is very clear that He had paved the path and blazed the trail long before I ever took my first step of faith.

Today, God may be calling you to take another step in the grand adventure of serving Him. Like Joshua ([Joshua 3:4](#)), God may choose an uncharted course for you only to demonstrate He has already gone before you.

Each step of faith is an opportunity to see God move. Each step comes with the promise of His presence. We just have to trust Him every step of the way as we hear His sweet voice say, *"Fear not. This is the way, walk in it."*

Isaiah 41:10 says,

***"Fear not, for I am with you;
Be not dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you,
Yes, I will help you,
I will uphold you with My righteous right hand."***

He may call us into the storm, He may call us to step out of the boat, but His call always comes with the promise of His presence and His gentle voice speaking peace to our hearts.

He is greater than our greatest fear and more powerful than our biggest storm. So, step out of your comfort zone, sweet friend - answer His call to the next step and trust Him.

*** Sweet friends, what is God calling you to do that causes you to fear?**

*** How can your courage and faith inspired your children?**

*** Will you follow His lead only when you feel it is safe?**

10 - Stop Seeking Strength

By: Cheri Gregory

I am simultaneously losing my mother to Alzheimer's and launching my soon-to-be 21-year-old daughter into adulthood.

I'm struggling with both.

C.S. Lewis writes, *"No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear."* I so get what he means.

And I'm disappointed in myself for being such a crybaby and scaredy-cat.

You see, I'd hoped that by mid-life, I'd be a shining example of how to handle these necessary losses with the "strength and dignity" of the legendary Proverbs 31 woman.

Most days, though, I'm more like a poster girl for *How Not to* _____ (fill in the blank with "Parent" or "Teach" or "Be a Supportive Helpmeet" or "Be a Good Daughter")

I feel like the weak link at work and at home. I'm disappointed by my own weakness, at a time when so many need me to be strong.

One of my students recently shared his courageous testimony about losing his mother to cancer when he was in elementary school. He stood tall and strong at the podium, voice steady, words powerful, message gripping.

I wept.

In fact, I don't think I've stopped weeping – inwardly, at least – and that was more than a month ago.

Psalm 46:1 (NIV) says, *"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble."*

The order is vital:

First refuge. Then strength. I get it backwards.

In my Type-A frenzy for action, I bargain with God to borrow a bit more strength.
And I miss what I need most.

I miss the Refuge.

I read countless books about parenting young adults and supporting aging parents.

But I miss the Refuge.

I go to women's group and church potluck and staff meeting, seeking friendship and comfort.

And I still miss The Refuge.

The lyrics to Precious Lord—"I am tired, I am weak, and I am worn"—so describe me right about now.

Trying to do the "strength" thing on my own isn't working. The stronger I try to be, the weaker I seem to get.

So today, I'm going to stop trying so incredibly hard to be strong.

*"I will say of the LORD, 'He is my refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust'... He will cover you with his feathers,
and under his wings you will find refuge..."
Psalm 91:2, 4(a) (NIV)*

Today, I'm going to seek Refuge...

which is, paradoxically, the only place to find Strength.

*** Who (if anyone) taught you about grief? How do you handle grief?**

*** What losses have you experienced in the past? What losses are you experiencing right now?**

*** In what ways do you try to "be strong"? What are the consequences to yourself and others when you try to "be strong" in your own strength?**

*** What does it mean to you to "seek Refuge"? What is one thing you could do today to "seek Refuge"?**

11 - Me?

By: Genny Heikka

“Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it.’” Isaiah 30:21 NIV

I sat in church listening to a guest speaker talk about the need in my community for mentors for teen moms.

Instantly, I felt a tug on my heart.

Being a new mom myself (my daughter was just a few months old at the time), I knew how challenging taking care of a baby could be. I tried to imagine what it would be like to be teenager with a newborn.

I couldn't deny the pull I felt to get involved.

But, quickly, doubt and fear set in...

Me? A mentor to teen moms? Who was I to help other moms when I was just learning how to be a mom myself?

I brought the paperwork home and read more about the Mentor Mom program through Youth for Christ.

But I didn't call.

I held off.

I let fear take over and talked myself out of responding to the need that was tugging at me.

Yet as the days passed, that pull on my heart wouldn't go away...

I remember looking at my daughter asleep in her bassinet and marveling at her – her tiny hands, her rosy cheeks, her little feet.

And thinking about the teen moms looking at their babies too.

When my husband was out of town (he had to travel a lot during that time), I sometimes felt alone and exhausted.

And I thought about how alone those teen moms might be feeling too.

It didn't make sense to me—this tug to get involved.

I felt inadequate. The thought of being a mentor scared me.

But I couldn't deny what was happening in my heart.

(Have you ever felt that way?)

Against all logic, and very unsure how it would turn out, I nervously pushed through the fear and doubt and called Mentor Moms. Soon after, I ended up going through their training and getting involved in their mentor program.

Over the next several years, through that program, I had the privilege of coming alongside several teen moms – moms with different stories, different backgrounds, and different challenges. Moms who felt inadequate (like we all do sometimes). Moms who were fearful or unsure how to parent (like we all feel sometimes).

Moms who just needed someone to come alongside them they would know they aren't alone (just like every mom needs).

Looking back, after all these years, I'm so glad I said yes.

Even though fear and doubt held me back at first, I'm glad I didn't let it stop me and keep me from that amazing opportunity.

I didn't have parenting all figured out back then (I still don't), and I didn't have a lot of experience. But I quickly learned that wasn't what it was about.

It was about being there for another mom during a hard time. It was about letting her know she wasn't alone in her frustrations and questions. It was about supporting her as she learned, and it was about helping her understand how much God loves her.

Sometimes, I think we don't get involved in things or open new doors in our lives because we are scared or we doubt our own abilities.

But when we do that, we miss the chance to make a difference.

And when we say yes—even if we aren't sure if we're qualified or how it's all going to turn out—that's when faith comes in.

That's when lives are changed.

And that's when, one by one, the world is changed too.

*** What about you? Do you feel a tug on your heart, but you've been holding back?**

*** Have you ever been afraid to be engaged in a mentor/mentee relationship? If so, what was your biggest fear?**

*** Which of the following is preventing you from moving forward: Inadequacy? Uncertainty about the call? Afraid of the responsibility? The inconvenience?**

*** What biblical truths can give you the faith and resolve to say YES to the seemingly impossible?**



A life-changing Titus 2 relationship is only an open door away.

12 - Throwing Away Fear

By: Angela Mackey

*"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them,
for the LORD your God goes with you;
He will neither leave you nor forsake you." (Deuteronomy 31:6 NIV)*

"**I** don't want to!" I stamped my foot and shook my head. Tears pricked my eyes. "I can't do this. It is too hard," I ranted at God.

It was five days before I was to leave for my first writing conference. I knew God called me to go. I was prepared. I finished a book proposal, an elevator pitch, and an article for critique. Yet there I stood crying out to God that I couldn't do it.

Fear surrounded me. I can't share the story God told me to share. It hurts too much. I'm afraid of how others will respond. What if they say I can't write? What if they say I can write? My mind swirled with opposing thoughts and my heart sunk into my stomach.

This conference was a bad idea. I can't do this. . . Suddenly my brain found logic. It was too late. I had to go. I paid for the conference and plane tickets. I couldn't waste them now. Besides I was going with a friend and I couldn't let her down. My heart felt trapped and fear continued to build. I had to go, meet with editors, and let my work be critiqued.

"OK God, I'll go," I said resigned. "I don't like it, but I'll go." Fear continued to irritate my heart, mind, and stomach. I actually had to get on an acid-reducer for my stomach. Fear was consuming me.

Later I confessed my fears, rebellion, and concerns to some praying friends. One precious friend told me about Hebrews 10:35 (NIV). It says, "*So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.*" While fear reigned my confidence was in myself – a fallible woman in need of a Savior. When I switched my focus to God, who is able, fear was replaced with confidence.

Did fear completely dissipate? No. I had to fight to hold on to my confidence. Yet as I trained my focus on the God who gave words to a stuttering man, I threw away my fear.

Next time you feel fear putting a choke hold on your heart, remember you serve a God *"who is able to do immeasurably more than all you ask or imagine."* (Ephesians 3:20 NIV) Keep your focus not on what you can't do, but on what God can do through you.

Father God help us to remember You are able. Fill us with Your Spirit so we can do mighty things for You. Help us let go of our fear and hold tight to You.

In Jesus' Name, amen.

*** How can your focus help you be courageous when you are feeling afraid?**

*** How can you respond with confidence when your heart is about to pound out of your chest?**

*** What do you feel like God is calling you to today that has your knees knocking? How can you overcome that fear?**



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13 - Losing Alex

By: Heather Rigglesman

As I sat in my sunrise Bible study, surrounded by babies and pregnant bellies, the conversation moved to Hallie's tragic story and blessings of miscarrying two babies, only to be blessed with four more. As she shared her story, something within me recoiled in fear and yet I felt like I needed to hang on to every word she had said, especially about how God had blessed her through her miscarriages.

Later that week, I lay on the exam table, eagerly awaiting to hear my baby's thunderous heartbeat fill the dark little room. ***Sadly, it never came.*** She had died around seven to eight weeks gestation. I couldn't believe God was going to allow me to face my worst fear. The what if's of being pregnant—only to lose your child for reasons we cannot understand or comprehend.

Those next few days were dark as I tried to understand and ask God all the why's. As I recovered all that was lost within me, I sensed that I was at a crossroads. I could face my worst fear and walk with God and let Him heal my heart, or I could hang on so tightly to my dreams of baby number four and lose all that God had done in my life. If I clung too tightly, the pain would turn to bitterness and engulf me.

As hard as it was, I chose to praise God. Tears flooded each day as I turned on the radio and praised God for all that was good in my life. Later when I had to have a D & C, I still praised God. I thanked him for having compassionate doctors, for healing medicine, for mentor moms who had walked in my shoes. I praised him for the healthy food sitting in front of me, and I praised him that my kids were well.

Eventually I was able to praise God for helping me face my worse fear—the loss of a child. I praised him that he was there with me, because you see—God knew before I did that He would need to take Alex home. While we may never understand or comprehend the how's and the why's of life, we can face our worst fears with God and ask, "What?" We can ask what we want us to do and rest in his presence.

Losing a child is never easy, whether you're ten weeks pregnant or your child was stillborn. The pain fades with time as it ebbs and flows with the rush of daily life. The sting of death has faded and I'm forever thankful because my relationship with God is deeper than what it was. And because I know that no matter what life throws at me—God is there. God will be with me to face the darkest of days.

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.” Psalm 23:4 (KJV)

*** Have you ever went through a dark time in your life that caused you to struggle with your faith?**

*** How is it possible to handle such a great loss and still keep the faith?**

*** When you're at a crossroad in your faith, where can you turn to find strength and courage?**



14 - *Afraid of Giving Birth*

By: Stephanie Shott

It looked like it was inevitable. I had to have a c-section. The thought of surgery chilled me to the bone.

Fear devoured my excitement and as we drove away from our home I couldn't help but wonder if I would ever make it back alive.

I kept thinking, *This is ridiculous! Women have babies all the time!*

But I was actually afraid of giving birth.

My heart raced as we stepped into the cold sterile room and while my body was trembling, my heart cried out to a God I didn't even know.

*"I promise if you just get me through this,
I really will give you my life."*

It was one of those silly deals we make with God when we are desperate for Him to do something. But this time I meant it.

Numb from the epidural, I tried to situate myself on the gurney as the nurse wheeled me into the room.

I prayed for protection. And I prayed for peace.

I can't really explain it, but somehow a gentle blanket of peace covered me and I knew everything was going to be okay.

I couldn't believe it. God had answered my prayer!

The fear seemed to flee as peace blanketed my heart and for the first time I knew that this God whom I really didn't know, knew me. And not only did He know me, but He cared enough to calm my trembling heart.

Four months passed and I knew it was time to make good on that promise I made when I was afraid I'd lose my life.

Holding on to my life didn't make much sense anymore. Especially when I knew the One who could take my life from me had so sweetly chosen to cover me with His peace instead.

It was time to quit playing games and making excuses. It was time to give my life to the One who had given His life for me.

And so I did.

That was 25 years ago and I can honestly say that nothing has been the same since that crisp October day when God took this girl with a bad past and a bleak future and changed my life.

It was then that I learned when you fear God, you have nothing else to fear.

*“He will cover you with his feathers.
He will shelter you with his wings.
His faithful promises are your armor and protection.”
Psalm 91:4 (NLT)*

Fear is real but it is no match for God. He loves us and He longs to vanquish our fears and blanket us with His peace.

Today, if something has you shaking in your shoes, call on the only One who can bring peace to your fearful heart.

Perhaps you are like I was twenty-five years ago and you don't even know Him. Don't worry. Call out to Him anyway.

He knows you.

- * What were your thoughts about having a baby? Were you afraid?**
- * What do you do when you feel afraid?**
- * Has God ever showed up and replaced your fear with His peace?**

15 - Contagious Fear

By: Stephanie Shott

*This is my command—be strong and courageous!
Do not be afraid or discouraged.
For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.
Joshua 1:9 (NLT)*

I'm not sure when it all began but I am absolutely one of the biggest lightning sissies alive.

Perhaps my fear of lightning forged deep roots forty years ago when I was standing in center field. **Lightning struck so close, I felt a surge of electricity before it ever hit the ground.**

Or maybe it started as I gazed out the window of my childhood home mesmerized by the storm, when without warning, lightning ricocheted from heaven to earth, striking the house across the street, setting it ablaze.

You tend to remember things like that and the fear you feel when they happen often lingers in your heart.

But as a single mom who was desperate to be brave as I raised my sweet little boy, I found myself cowering in the corner with every approaching thunderstorm.

And then I began to notice that...

SO DID HE.

My fear had become his. Not because of what he had experienced but because I was making him afraid of my own fears.

Fear is like that. It's contagious.

But what we do in moderation our children often do in excess. If that's true, then what we fear in moderation has the potential to become our children's biggest fear.

It's important that we conquer our fears or our fears will conquer us...and our children.

My fear of lightning was real and even a bit warranted, but passing that on to my son was like forcing him to accept an unwanted and unrequested invitation.

As a mother, we have the opportunity to instill character and courage in those little hearts that are riveted to the way we handle life - or the way we let life handle us.

Throughout Scripture we are called to ***Fear Not***. It's a call that comes with the promise of God's presence.

Whether lightning is crashing in around me or I'm enjoying the breeze of a cool sunny day, knowing God is with me changes everything.

It is easy to be afraid of almost anything and everything in life. But God is with us and that makes all the difference in the world.

We need to live like we know that, so our children will know it too.

*Do not be afraid of the terrors of the night,
nor the arrow that flies in the day.
Do not dread the disease that stalks in darkness,
nor the disaster that strikes at midday.
Though a thousand fall at your side,
though ten thousand are dying around you,
these evils will not touch you." Psalm 91:5-7 (NLT)*

*** What fears do you face that may be affecting your children?**

*** How can you overcome your fears so your children won't be 'infected' by your fears?**

*** What is it that your children fear that you can help them overcome?**



16 - Out of the Fog

By: Julie Sanders

Alfred Hitchcock would've loved the fog on the morning I was called to substitute teach in fourth grade. Before the bell rang, my seventh grade daughter left to walk across the empty playground and over the pedestrian bridge to her Middle School. Since my classroom opened to the yard, I prayed with my sweet girl, hugged her, and sent her behind the white curtain hanging in the air. Something held my heart and gaze as she disappeared up the shrouded steps. Just three years before, she wrestled with debilitating fear, this young lady who walked away alone. Was I being careless? I whispered another prayer for her and turned to welcome my students.

Long after the fog cleared I checked out at the office, noticing the agitated police officer talking with the principal. Early that morning a student was accosted at the Middle School track. The administrator gathered details of the account; the officer assured her it was a Middle School girl, and action had been taken. I couldn't wait to pick up my daughter.

Heaving her backpack into the front seat, she unloaded her story and her heart. My daughter was the student accosted by the strange man, while I handed out papers from a desk across the street. She had crossed the bridge to walk across the track and parking lot when an overcoat-clad man called out to her from the whiteness. Insisting she look at religious tracts inside his coat, demanding that she talk to him, the man became irate when she shook her head, shouted "No!" and quickened her pace. Just as he shifted into aggression and she prepared to drop her load and run, a voice boomed a command out from the edge of the parking lot.

"Get away from that student! Don't touch her! Don't move!"

My sweet girl ran for the front entrance, collected herself, and made it through the day with Jesus as her comfort and confidence. Administrators and authorities dealt with the trespassing aggressor.

Just as the stranger began to attack, a teacher arrived. No, God *sent* the teacher at just the right moment. Not just any teacher. An “I can handle a food fight or the detention room” kind of teacher. At a divinely appointed time and place, she was sent. She didn’t have the voice of an angel, but the command of a warrior.

Through watery eyes I watched and listened as my strong girl re-enacted the morning’s events in the passenger’s seat. My heart and hands shook with gratitude and worship as I declared, “God was watching over you! HE was there when I was not. HE sees everything. HE will always be with you. HE sent that teacher at just the right time. You are never alone and do not need to fear.”

A mother will not be with her child at every moment. She is not able to keep her loved ones protected from all harm. Such a realization may fill her heart with fear, but even in the fog of our fears, He is there watching over us and our children.

My daughter’s once frail spirit saw that I am not the source of her courage, and she does not need to fear what man can do. Our great Keeper doesn’t even slumber or sleep (Psalm 121:4). Wherever our children go, *“The LORD will keep <their> going out and <their> coming in from this time forth and forevermore”* (Psalm 121:8 ~ ESV ~ emphasis mine).

There is no fog too thick, no bridge too far, and no person too clever to make a mother or her children in fear.

- * What can you do to daily release your children to God’s care?**
- * As your children watch you, do they believe that you trust in God to care for them?**
- * What words can you hide in your heart and in your child’s heart to arm them against fears that may come when they are away from you?**

17 - Afraid I'll Ruin Her

By: Cheri Gregory

How much longer can I wait?

The contractions woke me up at 11:00 PM, but they were few and far between.

Now, they come with increasing strength and speed.

I don't want to wake Annemarie up.

A toddler needs her sleep. A stable routine. This one last time, before her entire world is turned upside down.

How can I do this to her?

I begin to weep, partly from pain, but mostly from the release of the pent-up worry that's hounded me throughout the pregnancy.

We'd planned to space our children five years apart, not less than two. Annemarie was losing three precious years of "only child" status.

Preterm labor had landed me in the hospital ten weeks ago. Annemarie was confused and anxious, despite the loving care she received at Nana and Papa's.

Two weeks prior, the ultrasound technician asked me if I knew the gender of my baby. When I told him, "We're having another girl," he jokingly asked if I'd like him to switch it to a boy." Suddenly, Annemarie was no longer welcoming a baby sister.

And now, I'm about to completely ruin her life.

I don't have what it takes to be a good mother to one child, let alone two. I've made so many mistakes in Annemarie's twenty-one months, a lifetime of counseling can't possibly repair them all. And now, my meager parenting "skills" must be divided between two children.

I sob and pace. Sob and pace. Sob and pace.

6:00 AM. ~

Annemarie emerges from her room. We dash to the hospital, me pounding on my thighs to cope with pain. Daniel drops me off and takes Annemarie to my parents' house.

I walk onto the Labor and Delivery ward, right at shift change, and quietly announce that I am in labor. A disinterested resident checks me and predicts that I will not deliver until that night. Although I am a high risk delivery, my doctor is not called.

8:45 AM. ~

I've been asking to see my doctor for over an hour. The nurse tells me it not necessary.

So I'm going through transition labor alone.

8:55 AM. ~

The attending physician strolls in to check on me. He can't find Jonathon's heartbeat high up on my belly.

“Check further down,” I tell him, “he’s been moving!”

Daniel comes in to find the room crammed with doctors and nurses. There's no time for an epidural or an episiotomy.

9:02 AM. ~

The beautiful sound of my son's piercing cry rises above the din as he's whisked off to the NICU where he spends five days strengthening his lungs.

December 17, 10:00 AM. ~

“Bay-bee nohss!” Annemarie exclaims, pointing to “Baby Don-Don's” nose.

I smile.

“Bay-bee tum!” she points to his thumb.

I laugh.

“Bay-bee tohss!” she points to his toes.

Then she walks across the waiting room, picks up the book she's been “reading,” toddles back, and drops the book on Jonathon's face.

My mother reaches out in protest.

But I understand.

Annemarie has chosen what she loves most in all the world: a book. And without a second thought, she's given it as a gift to the baby brother she's only just met.

For the first time (of what will become thousands of times) the thought occurs to me:

*Maybe instead of ruining her life I'm giving **her** a gift.*

“Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes with the morning.” Psalm 30:5b (NLT)



*** Have you ever been afraid that you were messing up your children?**

*** How can you help siblings to love and encourage each other as they grow up?**

*** In this story, Cheri's daughter gave the best gift she could to her new little brother. What's the best gift you can give your child?**

18 - Letting Go

By: Tara Dovenbarger

It was quiet, too quiet. All the rush of people in and out of the room the days before had come to an end. And the darkness, even the newborn bed that was made specifically to be lit up and warm was completely dark and still. **The only movement now, came from the corner of the hospital labor and delivery room as my husband was waking from his fitful sleep.**

My eyes went back to the unlit lamp over my son's newborn warming bed, as a new rush of pain and despair of what would be happening soon rolled over me. **My beautiful newborn son, Isaac, who I was so proud of, was delivered stillborn just hours before.** This was the day that I would have to let my son go, force myself to walk out of the room, never to be able to hold his tiny 2 pound body or see his beautiful face in this life again.

My husband and I were not surprised or in shock, in fact we had been planning on this day for three months now. The doctors said our son had Trisomy 18; we needed to abort, and go on with life.

We said no, we would let God decide the number of our son's days and carry him safe in my womb as long as we could.

Well, during the long months of waiting, I had lots of questions for the Lord. One of the biggest was, *"Lord, this is my son, my child. You are asking me to let him go. How will I leave the hospital and go home without him? Will you be there to give me strength to walk away? To say goodbye?"*

My Lord had proven Himself to be faithful before, but this time? I desperately wanted to know-would God be there? Would He give me the strength I needed, when I needed it most?

And here I was, waking up to that day.

After the long labor, we savored each minute we had holding him, rocking him, studying everything about him. He was so perfect-lots of black hair, long eyelashes, fuzzy eyebrows, the cutest little lips, fisted hands, even chubby cheeks!

Then it was time. And yes, God was there.

God's mercy and peace flowed through the room as a kind nurse walked in. Before I handed her my precious tiny bundle, she naturally turned around and washed her hands. I handed her my son and she smiled gently down at him. She settled down in the rocking chair and rocked him slowly, and we were able to peacefully walk out of the room.

What a beautiful memory my Savior chose to leave me! My son, who the world saw as having no worth, being sweetly rocked while surrounded by these tender, loving arms!

What a picture of His mercy! I am overwhelmed with God's kindness to me, as well as His love and gentleness displayed towards my son.

My spirit agrees with A. W. Tozer when he writes,

"...how shall we thank You enough for Your mercy which comes down to the lowest part of our need to give us beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and for the spirit of heaviness a garment of praise?"

So after months of waiting, and praying, God did show up in a mighty way. He sweetly displayed His love for me and my child through the gentleness of this stranger.

Isaiah 51:12 (NKJV) say it best,...

"I, even I, am He who comforts you."

*** *Has the Lord ever prepared you for to walk down a painful path in life?***

*** *How can knowing God loves you and is with you through difficult times help you when you are in the trenches of trying times?***

*** *When your heart is hurting, what lessons can you teach your children about God's power, presence and faithfulness?***

19 - All Things New

By: Julie Sanders

I shut my eyes tight to block out words like “*intensive care unit, complications, unexplained, and recovery.*” Maternity units are for words like “happiness, joy, content, and healthy.”

My tears left a blurry memory of the doctor’s face saying, “*Julie this stopped being ideal a long time ago. You just have to go to Plan B and do the best you can.*” Who wants to write that in a baby book?

My heart reflected the bitter cold of the winter sky as I struggled to bond with our baby and heal in every way. Nothing prepared me for the shock and disappointment of a miserable end to a healthy pregnancy. Spring couldn’t come soon enough.

The events of our first child’s birth left pain written on my heart. The remnants were much deeper than I even knew. When a pregnancy test turned pink two years later, my old fear-scar throbbed anew.

The gift of another baby, a different baby, brought so many uncertainties. Still healing, still hurting, I dragged my dread into nine more months of carrying a child. A slave to my anxiety, the joy of a new life eluded me as questions plagued me.

The technician covered my swollen belly with cold gel, rubbing the ultrasound wand firmly over my womb. Holding my breath, I waited to hear the all too taken for granted words, “Everything looks good.” I was so afraid.

“No doubt at all,” she said, “it’s a baby boy.”

As we heard the announcement of our child’s gender, God wanted me to hear more. He wanted me to hear that this was not only a different gender than our precious first born; this was a different pregnancy and a different baby. **This was new.** This child would be born in the spring, just as all creation displayed the miracles of birth and life.

God makes all things new; He does not take us down the same road twice.

Our challenges may be similar and our obstacles familiar, but He makes all things new. As we face any day with dread, His mercies unfold, new with each morning (Lamentations 3:22-23). His mercy exceeds our fear.

Though the anxieties of life may leave pain pressed upon our minds, God wants to strengthen our hearts with the promise of hope to come.

When a woman breaks free from the master of fear to follow Jesus, she becomes new (2 Corinthians 5:17). God invites us to discover His mercy daily in answer to what we dread, and He plans to ultimately overcome all sources of our fear (Revelation 21:4-5).

Knowing this, joy can move in where fear once resided.

Our son was born on a bright spring day, a gentle reminder from our tender Father that He knows our fears and constantly creates new life. With eager, healthy arms, older sister welcomed her little brother. The shadows of cold, ugly, painful days faded into the restoration and warmth of new ones.

Today is not yesterday. Today is new, and God's mercies are new with it. In this newly born day, words like "relief, gratitude, confidence, and peace" sound just right.

*** *Are there events in your past with a fear-hold on your present?***

*** *List words that describe the apprehension old memories stir up, then cross them out and write new words for today.***



20 - The Light at the End of the Tunnel (Pt 1)

By: Jessica Kirkland

“Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 (NKJV)

In 2002, I had everything a girl could dream of: a godly husband, a loving family, great friends, and a strong faith in God. It was an exciting time, and I believed that it would be one of the best years of my life. I had every reason to be filled with joy, but one day something changed inside of me. I felt really...off. I remember the day I sat at a baseball game, and watched everyone around me laugh and enjoy the game. I smiled and pretended that I felt like them, and I successfully “faked” happy for a long seven innings.

I cried all the way home.

In the beginning, I chalked my raw feelings up to strong mood swings that I hoped would dissipate with time. After a few months, it was apparent that the “mood swings” had planned a permanent vacation.

I wasn’t enjoying life, or school, or my husband, and I had no idea why. I tried to think happy thoughts, to snap out of it, and to pray the blues away, but I couldn’t. I was sad all the time, frustrated, and mad at myself because nothing I did changed my circumstances.

Fear and confusion were having a wild party in my brain, and someone needed to turn the music down! I felt like they were bad DJ’s spinning broken records of hatred, self-loathing, and filth into my mind.

While normally I could have dismissed these thoughts easily, I felt powerless, and couldn’t get passed my depressed feelings. My mind had quickly become a breeding ground for fear, worry, and anxiety.

I had been a Christian for 14 years and had never faced a giant like this. I knew what the Bible said about “taking every thought captive unto Christ,” but that command felt impossible. So, I did what I thought any good, God-fearing girl would do; I confessed every sin I had committed from birth to twenty-one, and even some I hadn’t.

When the fog didn't lift, I beat myself up for not being a stronger Christian. I read my Bible 24/7 in search of peace, but chaos was my cup. Nothing bad had happened to me. I hadn't been abused. No one close to me had abandoned me or passed away.

Month after month I would walk through possible scenarios of why my personality had been taken hostage, but I always came up short of an answer. I'd love to say that it was my first run-in with fear, but we actually knew each other quite well.

When a spirit of fear began to rear its' ugly head in me as a child, I didn't understand how to get rid of it. Since I felt I couldn't end it, I learned to manage it.

One very strong fear I had was the fear of losing my mind. This fear hung in the back of my brain like a nicely framed picture. You may be thinking, "That's all you were afraid of?" No, it was simply a predominant fear that stood out above a thousand smaller ones.

I told myself that the fear of going crazy, was a CRAZY thing to be afraid of, but it didn't alleviate my worry. We had a distant family member who was mentally unstable, so that fact seemed to justify my fear. No one ever talked about him and he played no role in my life, but I was afraid of him. "How did he get that way?" I asked my mom when I was fourteen.

She said, "I don't know. Growing up he was as normal as apple pie, and then one day, he snapped." How were you normal one minute and so depraved the next? To me, that simple sentence was all it took to keep my fear intact. When I would tell myself, "God won't let that happen to me." The enemy used my mom's words against me.

"That will be you. One day you will be fine, and the next, you will snap."

The thought was terrifying. I had held the fear at bay for almost a decade, but now I was like a besieged city. When I couldn't answer the "why" concerning how I felt – I surmised that it was finally happening to me. I was going crazy. My mind was a raging battlefield, and I was like a wounded soldier who had crossed enemy lines stripped of weaponry.

*** *Why is it so important to guard your mind?***

*** *Have you ever felt like your mind was a battlefield and that you were losing the war?***

*** *When your mind takes you hostage, it can be frightening. Have you ever felt like that and if so, how did you handle it?***

21 - The Light at the End of the Tunnel (Pt 2)

By: Jessica Kirkland

Six months later, I was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. I had dropped several classes and could barely make it to the two I was registered for. My entire body was reeling from months of stress, and I cried constantly.

Each day was so exhausting that I longed to fall asleep at night and turn off the noise. But, the night brought a different kind of pain. For four months, I had been experiencing dreams from hell. Hollywood had nothing on the horror films that rolled continuously when I slept.

“I think you are suffering from severe depression,” my mom said with concern one night on the phone.

A physical illness, like depression, was never anything I had considered, but I was desperate for answers. I looked up the symptoms on the computer and a large portion of the list applied to me. The proclamation made me feel a little better, but I still didn't know what was causing it.

A few days later, the testimony of a friend came to mind. She had told me how birth control made her so crazy that she asked her husband to drive her to a mental home. Although I doubted that our stories could be the same, I grabbed the packet and read the side effects. I had been mindlessly taking birth control since right before my wedding, exactly a year prior. Sure enough, the warning label read: ***“Can cause severe mental depression.”***

I threw the pills in the trash, and for the first time in a year, peace filled my heart and mind.

The battle was over.

During that dark time, I realized that Satan had been carefully weaving a destructive fortress, or stronghold, of fear in my mind. *Was I suffering from a physical illness? Yes. Did he take advantage of my weakened state?* Absolutely.

I realized that the lies that paralyzed me were merely that...lies.

They were carefully planted seeds of thought that I had passively accepted and tried to control over time. In a season of life when my defenses were physically disarmed, Satan set out to destroy me from the inside out.

Implosion.

He was meticulous and took his time. It was a near-perfect plan of destruction.

In the end, God showed me that His plans for me were good, and He wanted me to hand over every fear that came my way. What I could easily count as the worst year of my life emotionally, was re-framed as a year of profound spiritual growth. I learned to count on God's character.

He had shown me that His hand was not so short that it could not save.

He had been my Friend, Counselor, Savior, Deliverer, and Healer. He broke my bands apart and turned darkness into light before me. And although it took me a year to see the light at the end of the tunnel, God taught me that He wasn't afraid of the dark.

Power Verse:

"No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper..."
Isaiah 54:17 (NKJV)

*** Are you in a dark place in your life right now or have you ever been?**

*** Have you or anyone you know ever suffered from depression?**

* Symptoms of depression can be found at the [Mayo Clinic website](http://www.mayoclinic.org). If you feel like you or someone you know is suffering from depression, I encourage you to seek help from a friend, family member, counselor, pastor, or physician.

Recommended Reading:

Freedom from Fear by Neil T. Anderson & Rich Miller (Harvest House, 1999).

The Power of a Praying Woman by Stormie Omartian (Harvest House, 2002).

The Circle Maker: Praying Circles Around Your Biggest Dreams and Greatest Fears by Mark Batterson (Zondervan, 2011).

22 - Fear of Failure

By: Stephanie Shott

Do you need to see the Lord do something new in your life, your marriage, or your finances? Are you seeking God to open new doors in your ministry, in your career or in your relationships? Perhaps you're desperate for the Lord to do a new thing in your children's lives, in your friend's life or in your community.

Through the years I've made a lot of mistakes. But I've learned there's a special beauty we can only find in the wilderness of our own failures - and the streams in the desert are meant to sustain us **in** our circumstances, not to deliver us **from** them.

There are lessons that can only be learned in *the wait* and in the wilderness and God delights in doing new things when He knows the time is right.

But new can be scary.

You see, we long for the new but are often afraid of what it means.

New means we need to come to grips with the old without being defined by it.

We all want to step into the shoes we were created to walk in. We all want to become who we were created to be. But the fear of failure often stops us dead in our tracks.

New means that we realize that we are flawed people in need of a flawless God. That we understand that we will fail. We will fail. But that failure is never final and so it's nothing that we should fear.

How can we see something new when we fear failure more than we long for success?

When the Lord led me to send my first book proposal to a publisher I couldn't help but be intimidated.

I barely finished high school.

I was one of those girls who was seventeen, pregnant, and headed nowhere fast. But God had a plan for my life that was far beyond my any plan I could come up with for myself.

I was to be a Christian speaker and writer. *Definitely nothing I was qualified for.* But I found that God doesn't limit His call to the qualified. Our value doesn't come from who we are or from what we have done. Our value comes from the One that calls us regardless of how deep a pit He had to pull us out of.

In fact, God delights in using broken vessels.

"Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are." 1 Cor 1:26-28 (NIV)

Check out this list of some fruitful failures found in Scripture:

Abraham ~ He was a cowardly liar (Genesis 12:13-15), before God made him the father of faith (Romans 4:11-13).

*** Do your personal struggles with fear and failure prevent you from having the faith to trust that God wants to use you in spite of yourself?**

Moses ~ He tried to take matters into his own hands by killing an Egyptian soldier (Exodus 2:11-12), yet God used Him to set His people free (Exodus 3:7-12).

*** Do you feel like God won't use you because you sometimes fly off the handle and act irrationally or because you sometimes struggle with PMS meltdown moments?**

David ~ He was a shepherd boy before he became King (1 Samuel 16:8-13); an adulterer and murderer before he reached his full potential (2 Samuel 12:1-8).

*** Have you ever felt like your past prevents you from having a God-defined future? Or maybe your mom didn't leave a good example and you're afraid you'll follow in her footsteps?**

*** Do you ever feel like your position in life makes you inferior and makes you unqualified for God to use you in new ways?**

*** Have you ever felt like you blew it and that God was going to give up on you? Have you ever felt like you blew it as a mom, as a daughter, as a wife, as a friend? Have you ever just given up on yourself?**

Throughout Scripture, God specializes in using messed up people in a big way. Each of them defective, flawed, imperfect - each of them saw God show up and do a new thing in their lives. Each an example to remind us that we are not limited by our own limitations - that God delights in doing exceedingly, abundantly above all we could ask or think!

We can't be so afraid to fail that we never try.

Our greatest fear should not be the fear of failure. Our greatest fear should be that we will succeed at something less than God created us for.

Today, ask the Lord to help you have the faith to believe that He is bigger than your greatest fear and that your failure does not define who you are. God defines who you are.

He loves you with an everlasting love, sweet mom. His plans for you are good. So, stop wrestling with your fear of failure and rest in the beauty and power of His grace and goodness. You are the mom He created for your children. Do it well.



23 - *Afraid of Not Measuring Up*

By: Stephanie Shott

There she was. The perfect mom. She stood across the room with what seemed to be a light beaming down from heaven upon her beautifully flowing hair. She seemed almost angelic.

As she swished across the room every head turned. Her demeanor somehow demanded respect yet she was gentle, gracious, and wise.

I wanted to be like that. The perfect wife. The perfect mom. The perfect Bible teacher.

But I wasn't. I was just a messed up mom trying to figure things out - trying to juggle doctors appointments, carpools, baseball practice, and guitar lessons. I was just happy if I managed to get my laundry done once a week.

I was worried about things like whether my kids needed to play baseball, an instrument or both. I wondered about if I was too lenient or too strict, too scheduled, or not scheduled enough, too fun or too focused... or just too anything or not enough of something else.

So, how could she be so stinkin' perfect? *How could I possibly measure up?!*

But then I got to know her.

She wasn't as stalwart as I had once thought. She was human. Flawed. Her dishes weren't always done. Her house wasn't always clean and she didn't always have dinner on the table by 6.

And then one day I read that God fashioned each of us so uniquely that we weren't meant to measure up to each other. She wasn't perfect, she was just like me...trying to do the best she could too.

Ephesians 2:10 (NLT) tells us, *"For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago."*

And Jeremiah 18:4 (KNJV) says, *"And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make."*

And then it happened. My lightbulb moment...

Oh wow! We weren't meant to measure up to anything but what God created us to be. *We are just marred vessels who were meant to have a relationship with Him and line our lives up with His Word.*

We were meant to be the best wives, moms, friends, daughters, and coworkers we can be.

We each are a Divine design - carefully crafted by the Creator of the universe...on purpose and for a purpose. Intentionally unique.

I was so afraid I that this tomboy-at-heart would have to morph into a domestic diva and the thought of that had my knees knocking and my heart sinking.

God made me to be me. He gave me the husband I have and the children I have because He uniquely suited me for them and them for me.

My goal is to be the best and most godly *me* I can be. To be the best wife I can to my husband. To be the best mom I can be to my children. To be the best daughter I can to my parents. To be the best friend I can to my friends. To be the best coworker I can to those I work with.

I have a long way to go. I have failures and flaws that definitely need to be dealt with.

I've got a whole lot of growing to do.

But I no longer feel the need measure up to someone else's life. I just long to walk in the good works He created me to walk in and be a thankful vessel that honors the Potter who took this marred mess of clay and made me into a vessel He could use.

And the same is true for you, sweet mom! The same is true for you!

*** *Have you ever feared not measuring up to others?***

*** *Have you ever been intimidated by thinking someone else's life was so perfect and yours wasn't?***

*** *How does knowing you are a masterpiece help you?***

24 - The Promise

By: Lori Wildenberg

For Sale signs have littered my community. Under-employment and unemployment, the causes. Many businesses are struggling, not meeting their projected earnings goals. All these things filter down to instability in jobs and in homes. Fear of the “What if...” seems to be contagious. **My husband’s company wasn’t immune. Neither was my husband.**

Tom caught me by surprise one morning. He came home from work at 8:30 a.m. rather than his usual 6:30 p.m. ***“I have some bad news....”*** his voice trailed off. My ears felt like they were muffled. The room spun, I thought he was going to say something had happened to one of our four kids.

Instead he told me about being one of many laid off at his company. The oxygen returned to my body. This wasn’t the worst, bad news. Perspective at the moment was helpful.

My plan for the day was now uncertain. *“Do you want me to stay home with you or go to Bible study and get the women praying?”*

“Go ahead and go. I’ll take Murphy (our rust-colored labradoodle) for a walk. I need to wrap my head around this.”

Tom had worked at the company for thirteen years.

I drove off, still not completely comprehending our new development. Tom took the dog for a long walk. Praying with each step.

A week earlier, he had lost his wedding ring. He was convinced it happened while hiking. He decided to retrace those steps. He was on a mission to find his ring while praying about his lost job.

“Lord, if you could show me where my ring is, I’ll know things will be okay. This is a small thing for You but it would mean so much to me.”

Meanwhile, I was at church hunting for a pen in my Bible book bag. I kept digging deeper, blindly feeling for the familiar object. I felt something but it wasn’t in the shape of a pen. It was round and small. I clutched it in my palm and pulled it out. Tom’s ring!

God answered Tom's prayer in an unexpected way. **It was a little miracle and a great big metaphor.** A ring is a promise. It has been five months and Tom is still aggressively pursuing employment. Whenever we fear creeping in, all we have to do is look at His left hand and remember.

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

- * *Have you ever feared the future because it seemed so uncertain?*
- * *What are some ways you have seen God come through and reaffirm His presence in the midst of a difficult situation?*
- * *What do you need to trust Him with today?*



25 - Protecting Them from Pain

By: Cheri Gregory

My children will never experience the kind of pain and disappointment that I did when I was a child.

No, I didn't actually say this to myself as a young parent.

I didn't even think it.

But my actions and reactions demonstrated my commitment.

When my children were hurt, they knew they could come running to me for comfort. Disney-themed Band-aids. And popsicles.

When disappointment loomed, my children knew they could count on me to drop everything and come to their rescue. To pull it off against all odds. I drove extra trips to pick up forgotten school assignments. Paid overnight shipping for "must have costumes."

When a friend or teacher upset them, my children knew they could count on me to take their side every time. I demonized the offender to soothe my child's hurt feelings: the friend was insensitive, needy, selfish; the teacher was inflexible, demanding, harsh.

I wanted to be a loving mother. But in my zeal to protect my children from the abusive pains and disappointments of my own childhood, I made a huge mistake.

I tried to protect them from *ALL* pain and disappointment.

Blinded by fear, I could not see that some pain and disappointment are beneficial, even necessary. My children needed to learn *how* to effectively deal with pain and disappointment. Without this life skill, they would not mature.

But I was so afraid of their pain, I "had" to make it go away as quickly as possible. I did not know how to simply suffer through with them.

I was so afraid of their disappointment, I "had" to prevent it or fix it ASAP. I could not simply suffer through with them.

My inability to suffer appropriately with my children when they were younger has caused pain and disappointment on a whole new level. When they “launched” into their college years, they were not prepared to cope with the normal pains and disappointments of growing up and leaving home. As my children encountered core class wait-lists, textbook delays, harder-than-expected quizzes, and dormitory drama, they didn't have the tools to survive, let alone thrive.

They were too used to Mom *making everything better and fixing it*. It's taken a couple of hard years, and many tears, for them to adjust.

How much better if we'd suffered through the little things together when they were younger! If I'd taught them wise ways of dealing with pain and bouncing back from disappointment.

Watching my beloved children struggle, on their own now, to overcome the *delayed development* caused by my over-involvement, I better understand why God does not step in to soothe my every pain or cushion the blow of every disappointment.

And I also understand that when I parent from fear, I will make unloving choices, no matter how good my intentions may be.

“There is no room in love for fear. Well-formed love banishes fear. Since fear is crippling, a fearful life—fear of death, fear of judgment [fear of pain, fear of disappointment] —is one not yet fully formed in love.” 1 John 4:18 (The Message)

In order to truly love my children, God's love must have “the run of the house” so that I can model maturity in Him.

“God is love. When we take up permanent residence in a life of love, we live in God and God lives in us. This way, love has the run of the house, becomes at home and mature in us, so that we're free of worry.” 1 John 4:17 (The Message)

*** What are some of the ways you try to protect your children from pain?**

*** When you try to ‘fix it’ for them every time something goes wrong, how can that affect their ability to understand consequences and disappointments as an adult?**

*** How can allowing your children to suffer the consequences of their actions or the experience some of the pain of life's disappointments be good for them?**

26 - Afraid of Rejection

By: Stephanie Shott

In my mind I'm able to leap tall buildings with a single bound; I can run marathons and still do cartwheels and backbends, but in reality I've become quite the wimp. I wasn't always like this.

There was a time when I was known as the neighborhood tomboy. Every afternoon we'd meet in the local field and play softball, football, soccer, dodgeball and kickball. In most sports, I gave those boys a run for their money...but football...now that's another story.

My football skills left little to be desired and everyone knew it. I wasn't any better at soccer, either. **When it was time to pick teams, I was always the last one standing.** It was frustrating and humiliating. It left me broken and feeling "less than." No one wanted me and what was worse is that I wouldn't have chosen me either.

Have you ever felt like the odd girl out...the fifth wheel...the forgotten?

It's a painfully lonely place to be, but priceless lessons lie deep beneath the surface of each rejection. No one wants to be left out, but it's just part of life.

As I read the story of Joseph and Matthias in Acts 1, I was reminded of the many times I felt left out when someone else was chosen instead of me. The Bible says the disciples cast lots to see who the Lord would choose to take Judas' place as one of the twelve. It fulfilled scripture, but when Matthias was chosen, it had to leave Joseph feeling *less than*.

What was it that the Lord saw in him that made him "unworthy"?

Wasn't he good enough? Was there a secret sin? Did pride plague his heart? Was God protecting him from circumstances he wasn't ready for? What would the others think of him? How could he face them knowing the Lord had chosen someone else for the job instead of him?

So many questions, yet we're left with absolutely no answers. We can only assume how he may have felt.

Tradition tells us that Joseph, a/k/a Barsabbas (son of the Sabbath), a/k/a Justus, went on to become Bishop of Eleutheropolis, where he died a martyr. He may have

come in second to Matthias, but he came in ahead of the other 100 or so that were in the room. And if tradition holds true, his rejection was just a bump in the road on his way to faithfully following the Lord and serving the church of Christ in Eleutheropolis.

We all face rejection. We all feel left out at some time or another. But rejection is not failure...it's not the end. **Perhaps the "no" you face today is a necessary step to the bigger "yes" you will hear tomorrow.**

The question is, how can we make the most of those times when we're passed over for someone else?

1. Take an Honest Evaluation of Yourself - Is there an obvious reason you were passed by? Are you qualified? Can you handle the success, the position, the platform? Are there skills you need to hone before you are placed in that coveted position?

2. Analyze Your Motives - Why do you want to be chosen? Are you willing to be humble? To die to self? To put others first? Are you trying to make a name for yourself or trying to make HIS name known?

3. Think of Others - When someone else is chosen instead of you, perhaps it is for their good. Maybe the Lord knows they need a **yes** more than you do. Be happy for them. Support them. Esteem them better than you esteem yourself.

4. Trust God & Rest - God is God, and we are not. He knows all; He sees all. There is nothing that escapes His view, no heart that He does not see, no pain that He is unaware of, no promotion that He does not ordain or allow. So, rest in the His sovereignty and trust that if we will humble ourselves under His mighty had, in due time, He will lift us up. Maybe not where we think, maybe not where we plan...but He will lift us up. He promises. (James 4:10)

5. Keep Going - Don't give up. Although not every door is ours to walk through, we all have been given doors with our name on it. As we seek to know the Lord more, we will come to know His will more.

*** Have you ever felt the sting of rejection and if so, how did you handle it?**

*** How can you respond to rejection that will help you move forward instead of retreating?**

*** What lessons have you learned from rejection in the past that can help you better deal with rejection in the future?**

27 - Feeling All Alone

By: Stephanie Shott

“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up.” Ecclesiastes 4:9-10a (NKJV)

Alone can be such a scary place to be.

Next to the fear of death and public speaking, the fear of being alone is one that tops the list.

When I was a little girl, I hated being alone. Especially in the dark.

When I was a single mom, my heart raced every other weekend when I knew my son would be spending the night with his dad and I would be alone.

When I was first married, I hated when my husband had to go out of town - especially when the boys were both spending the night with friends.

Alone. It's not only scary, it's awkward.

- ☒ Eating alone in a restaurant.
- ☒ Going to a party.
- ☒ Attending a wedding.
- ☒ Going to church.
- ☒ Going on vacation.
- ☒ Visiting friends at the hospital.
- ☒ Taking a trip to the museum or an exhibit.
- ☒ Attending a graduation.
- ☒ Going to the beach.
- ☒ Going to a movie.
- ☒ Going hiking.
- ☒ Going to a theme park.

All very awkward and even sometimes scary. It really can be a fearful thing to be alone.

But there is a big difference between being alone and feeling lonely.

You can be in a room full of people and still *feel* very much alone. You can be hanging out with family and friends and still *feel* very alone.

Even being a mom can make you *feel* like you're all alone. Surrounded by your children yet feeling isolated from so many other things.

Lonely isn't just *being* alone, it's *feeling* alone.

I remember when we were in Costa Rica and we were sitting at a table in a restaurant full of people. We didn't know any of them and I looked at my husband and said, "*I don't think I've ever felt so alone before.*"

Hebrews 13:5 assures us that God will never leave us or forsake us. In Romans 8:35-39 we are given the promise of God's eternal, relentless love.

So, if the Lord will *never* leave us and He promises that absolutely *nothing* can separate us from His love, we have a God-given guarantee that we are *never* alone.

Our feelings may fluctuate. Circumstances and hormones happen...our feelings rise and fall with the winds of change in our lives. But God's constant promise of His presence does not change - neither does His love for us.

Feelings fluctuate. Faith stands strong.

Today, you may *be* alone, but you do not have to *feel* all alone. Today, you may *feel* unloved, but you are not. **Feelings of loneliness happen to us all**, but when we realign our thoughts and choose to think on what is true, good, noble and just (Philippians 4:8), the peace of God will flood our hearts and drown out the lies of loneliness along with those feelings of being unloved.

Ecclesiastes 4:9 tells us that two are better than one. When we know Christ, there are always two present, even when we are completely alone.

*** *Describe the feelings you have had when you've felt all alone?***

*** *What does God's Word say about being alone?***

*** *How does knowing God is with us change everything?***

28 - Afraid I'll Blow It

By: Stephanie Shott

He opened the car door with his head hanging low and his heart on his sleeve. I knew something was wrong.

It was report card day and the news didn't appear to be good.

As he hesitantly handed me his report card it didn't occur to me that it wasn't a good time for me to open it. You see, the pressure from my overactive hormones were already about to boil over and that tidbit of bad news would be the proverbial straw that broke this camel's back.

I glanced down to find a big, fat, red, capital letter **F** next to *History* and that was all I needed to fall apart.

My precious son, who was in desperate need of some words of affirmation, became the victim of my overflowing and out-of-control emotions.

I began to have what I not-so-affectionately call - a meltdown moment.

I was angry at the teacher for never contacting me and letting me know my son was failing her class. I was angry at my son for never telling me he needed help. I was angry at myself for not keeping up with my son's needs.

But my meltdown moment melted his little heart and I totally blew it as a mom.

After a spewing episode of monumental proportions, I was riveted with remorse. How could I have blown it and hurt my son's tender heart like that? Children don't understand PMS and it is certainly not an excuse for going on a rant at my son's expense.

Tears started streaming down my face and apologies began to flowing from my lips like words from a broken fire hydrant. I couldn't believe I lost it like that! I couldn't believe I was so angry over something like that! I couldn't believe I didn't handle that whole situation in a way that honored God and displayed the love and mercy of Jesus!

"I'm SO sorry, son! Momma loves you and you are SO very important to me! I should NEVER have talked to you like that and I definitely didn't honor God by the way I handle that whole thing! Please forgive me! Please forgive me!"

And he did...and we were able to start over and navigate that whole situation by sharing responsibility for the bad grade while considering how we could improve before the next report card came out.

We all blow it. We all lose our cool. We all fail our children.

Failure is part of the human experience. We fail because we are flawed. But confessing our failures and reconstructing a God-honoring response will help our children see that nobody is perfect - that failure is never final - that reconciliation is possible and necessary - that forgiveness is freeing - and that we need to give everyone room to fail and room to grow.

We may blow it with our children...in fact, we *will* blow it with our children...**but justifying our bad behavior or pretending as if meltdown moments are acceptable will never heal our children's hurting hearts** or help them to overcome our callous conduct.

Ephesians 4:29 (NKJV) tells us,

"Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers."

Philippians 2:3 (NKJV) says,

"Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself."

James 5:16a (The Message) tells us,

"Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you can live together whole and healed."

*** Have you ever or are you afraid you will blow it with your children?**

*** How can Ephesians 4:10 help us choose words that speak life instead of words that wound?**

*** How does losing our cool demonstrate selfishness and how can we show we esteem others (especially our children) better than ourselves?**

*** In what ways does confession of our faults and praying for each other cause wholeness and healing to take place?**

29 - *You Exist in My World*

By: Jodi Whisenhunt

My father simply wasn't there when I was growing up. He hid our family in the mountains of West Virginia while he lived and worked three hours away near Washington, D.C. He didn't bother to come home when I was born. He didn't meet me until I was three months old.

My parents eventually divorced. When Mom moved us to Texas, I spent my summers visiting Dad. I enjoyed those trips, but as it turned out, that was the only time I existed in his world. Throughout the year, the only time I heard from him was on my birthday and at Christmas. Over time, even those calls ceased.

I was all grown up with a family of my own in 2002 when I received the call that Dad had passed away. I returned to Virginia for the services only to have confirmed the fact I did not exist in his world. More than 500 people attended visitation at the funeral home. So many they had to shut the doors and send people away. 500 people. Aside from relatives and friends who knew me as a child, no one knew who I was. I was told over and over, "I didn't know he had older children...He never spoke of other kids...Oh! He had another daughter and son?" Out of 500 people, only two said, "Oh, *you're* Jodi! I've heard of you!" Two had heard of me.

I do not like to be alone. I keep very few in my inner circle of trust, and I do not like to be separated from that which I belong. I need reassurance I exist in their worlds or else I feel unstable. **I am tempted to be enveloped by fear, on the verge of panic, and lost in darkness.**

Unless...

Unless I remember that I always exist in God's world—in *my Father's world!* My Creator knew me before he knit me together in my mother's womb (Jeremiah 1:5). He was there from before the start and He has never left my side. He tells me that Himself, "*Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you*" (Hebrews 13:5). I matter to Him—to the only One who should matter—and I am never alone.

After Jesus' resurrection, before He ascended to heaven, he told the disciples He would send them (us) a helper. The Holy Spirit arrived at Pentacost. Today that helper, that counselor, resides in the hearts of believers to not only guide and direct but also to comfort and encourage. In those moments I stand on shaky ground, I "*Do not let [my] heart be troubled*" (John 14:1, NKJV, emphasis mine). Jesus said, through the Holy Spirit, "*Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you*" (John

14:27, NKJV). It's a peace that transcends all understanding, a peace that negates fear, silences panic, and lights my way.

*** *Have you ever felt like you didn't exist in your parent's world or in someone else's world?***

*** *Have you ever felt invisible before?***

*** *What are some ways you can be sure your children don't feel unimportant or invisible?***



30 - Baffled by God

By: [Stephanie Shott](#)

*"God's riches, wisdom, and knowledge are so deep that it is impossible to explain his decisions or to understand his ways. Who knows how the Lord thinks? Who can become his adviser? Who gave the Lord something which the Lord must pay back?"
Romans 11:33-35 (GWT)*

We don't always understand why we go through what we do. God only promises enough light for the next step. That's how we learn to trust Him...that's the essence of our faith. Not in what we can see, but in what we can't see. Trusting that God is who He says He is and He will do what He says He will do.

When I was a single mom, I struggled with the unknown and oftentimes found myself wondering what was going on. Would God show up? Would everything be alright?

- *Would I be able to pay that next bill?*
- *How was I going to find someone I could trust to babysit while I worked?*
- *Where was I going to get the money to pay for daycare when I didn't make enough money to pay bills?*
- *How was I going to teach my son how to become a man?*
- *What was I going to do about my worn out car when it broke down?*

After several years, I discovered that I was trying to figure out everything on my own. I didn't really know God at that time and when I became a Christian, I learned that God's plans for me are good, even when things seem bad.

God's plans for my children are just as good and I can trust Him with my kids as much as I trust Him with my own soul.

Life can be hard and things don't always turn out the way we think they should.

Today, if you're baffled by your circumstances and by what God is doing in your life, I want to encourage you to hold on to your faith in the Living God. *Although His ways are beyond our own comprehension, He does not veil the essence of His*

nature by the mystery of His greatness. He gives us glimpses of His character and calls us to trust what He has revealed to be true about who He is.

He is the Alpha and Omega, the Eternal One, the Almighty God, the One who is touched with the feelings of our infirmities, the One who spoke this world into existence, the One who meets the needs of the sparrow and sees our hurting hearts.

He is our God, our Savior, our Redeemer and our Friend. He is loving, He is kind, He is merciful, He is forgiving, He is long suffering, He is good...He is God! AND WE CAN TRUST HIM!

*** *Are you in a place where you are baffled by God?***

*** *Do you need to see Him work in a particular area of your life or in your children's life?***

*** *Do you struggle with trusting Him?***



31 - When I'm Afraid

By: [Stephanie Shott](#)

*"The name of the LORD is a strong tower;
The righteous run to it and are safe." (Proverbs 18:10 NKJV)*

Life can be scary! And life can be hard!

Even the strongest face knee-knocking, teeth-chattering circumstances in this world gone mad.

Fear can grip our hearts and derail our destinies. It's a powerful emotion. God gives us fear for a purpose, but the enemy often uses it as a weapon and we find ourselves cowering when we should be courageous and crawling when we were created to soar.

Great grace is generated as a result of godly fear, but when the enemy sends fiery darts of fear our way it has the power to reduce our dreams down to pea size passions.

Fear causes us to falter; it saps our strength and lessens our resolve; it hinders our progress and shakes our faith. If the enemy can cause us to fear, he can cause us to doubt...and if he can cause us to doubt, he can render us ineffective - like a soldier on a battlefield who has allowed fear to steal his fight.

But the only thing God tells us to fear is Himself. **Fear God! That's it! And when we fear God we have nothing else to fear.**

The Bible tells us that the name of the Lord is a strong tower where the righteous can run and find safety. **Do you believe that?**

- When your world has been tossed upside down, **do you believe that?**
- When you lose your job and you're afraid you don't know how you're going to pay the bills, **do you believe that?**
- When your child or you is given a life-altering diagnosis or you lose your spouse, **do you believe that?**
- When your friends leave you hanging or betray your trust, **do you believe that?**
- When you're faced with a decision and you're afraid of the outcome, **do you believe that?**

Yes, sweet friend, it is true and you can believe that! The name of the Lord is a strong tower...so run to it and find safety.

As I write this, I'm sharing from my own places of pain and my own weaknesses but, like you, I'm a work in progress.

At times, I may struggle with fear, but I've learned that when I choose to remember I'm a daughter of the King - that changes everything and I have nothing to fear.

I run to Him and find safety and I'm not afraid anymore!

*** *Where do you run when you are afraid?***

*** *Is Jesus your King? If not, what is stopping you from surrendering your heart to Him today?***

*** *How does knowing you are a daughter of the King change the way you deal with fear?***

*** *Why is it that when we fear God we have nothing else to fear?***



Sweet mom, you don't have to be crippled by fear. Don't allow fear to prevent you from becoming the wife, the mother and the woman God has created you to be.

So, trust God. Find a mentor. Or be mentor. But don't be afraid to step into your God-given destiny.

...And The M.O.M. Initiative is here to help.

Oh, and remember...

When you fear God - you have nothing else to fear!



The M.O.M. Initiative

Mothers On a Mission to Mentor Other Mothers

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**To find out more about how you can begin a M.O.M. Mentor Group in your area or to receive our next book visit:**

**[www.themominitiative.com](http://www.themominitiative.com)**

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