

Getting it...

Together

31 Days to a
**MORE TOGETHER
YOU**



THE **MOM**
INITIATIVE

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Getting It Together Writers

Introduction page

Have you ever felt like the mom you wanted to be was very different than the mom you had become? *I have.*

I was the mom who would never count to three, never yell at her kids, who would always have her house clean, and who baked her own bread. But somehow the mom I longed to be was a much more *together* mom than the mom I had become.

But giving up wasn't an option. Little eyes were watching me and I realized that wedged somewhere between the pink line on the pregnancy stick and the day I would send them off to college were only 18 summers, a lot of chaos, and the only chance I would get to make the most of the beautiful, crazy, messy, sacred calling of motherhood.

Maybe like me, you feel altogether not-so-together. You don't have to feel that way anymore.

Tucked in the pages of this book are words of wisdom from moms who share from their own lives the messy truth about getting it together - 31 days of grace echoed from the hearts of moms who understand that in our attempts to be *more together* moms that perfection is not the goal. The goal is really just a more together mom who embraces the truth that life is too short to just hope things go well.

These are the days for grace. Grace for you and grace for your family. Grace mixed with a tad of discipline, a lot of patience, and the peace of knowing that the perfect Parent has promised to partner with you in your journey.

Motherhood. It's a 24/7 gig that none of us have down pat. Maybe some are a bit *more together* than others, but there's not a mom on this planet who has it all together. Just millions of moms like you and me who are trying to figure it out and who understand that a *more together* mom makes for *more together* kids.

*A woman's embrace of the sacred
calling to motherhood is the Divine
plan bequeathed to those He
entrusts with the mission to mold
the heart of the next generation
and leave a legacy of faith.*

The Hand That Rocks the Cradle

BLESSINGS on the hand of women!
Angels guard its strength and grace.
In the palace, cottage, hovel,
Oh, no matter where the place;
Would that never storms assailed it,
Rainbows ever gently curled,
For the hand that rocks the cradle
Is the hand that rules the world.

Infancy's the tender fountain,
Power may with beauty flow,
Mothers first to guide the streamlets,
From them souls unresting grow—
Grow on for the good or evil,
Sunshine streamed or evil hurled,
For the hand that rocks the cradle
Is the hand that rules the world.

Woman, how divine your mission,
Here upon our natal sod;
Keep—oh, keep the young heart open
Always to the breath of God!
All true trophies of the ages
Are from mother-love impearled,
For the hand that rocks the cradle
Is the hand that rules the world.

Blessings on the hand of women!
Fathers, sons, and daughters cry,
And the sacred song is mingled
With the worship in the sky—
Mingles where no tempest darkens,
Rainbows evermore are hurled;
For the hand that rocks the cradle
Is the hand that rules the world.

by William Ross Wallace

1 - One Thing Your Kids Really Need to Know Before They Go Back to School

By [Lindsey Bell](#)

"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." Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)

Whether they are homeschooled, in public, private or virtual school, there are many things we want our kids to know before they go back to school.

When my oldest first started kindergarten, I made sure he was as prepared as possible. I wanted him to know his alphabet, his numbers, his shapes, his colors, and how to write his name. I also wanted him to know how to behave properly in a school setting: how to stand in line and wait his turn, how to sit quietly (or at least somewhat quietly) for a limited amount of time, and how to play with others, etc.

I spent so much time focusing on these things that I neglected to focus on the ONE THING that was even more important than these.

That one thing he needed to know more than anything else? **That he, as well as every other student in his class, was wonderfully created by God.**

Knowing the alphabet is important, but it's not as important as knowing how to treat people. Because the truth is, there will be times when my son will face a choice.

- Will he watch another child be picked on and insulted (or worse, do it himself), or will he stand up for the student everyone else refuses to help?
- Will he ignore the new kid at his school, or will he befriend him instead?
- Will he join the crowd and make fun of a child who is different? Or will he stand up for what's right?

When our kids are faced with choices like these, being the best reader in their class isn't going to help them decide what to do. What is going to help them is the knowledge that EVERY student in their school is wonderfully created by God. There's no place for bullying or name-calling with this mindset. There's also no place for standing by and watching someone else do it either.

By instilling in our kids the knowledge that they—and their peers—are special, we help our kids stop bullies in their tracks. We also help them build up and encourage every single person they come into contact with.

What about that child in foster care who feels like he's not enough? Your child can encourage him. And what about that boy who just moved to town and thinks he'll never fit in? Your child can make a difference. And what about that girl who has a rough home life and longs for someone to notice her? Your child can help her realize that *someone* already has.


THAT is something to be proud of.

If you and I measure our kids by how well they do in school—their grades, their participation in extracurricular activities, or their popularity—we're missing out on something that's even more important.

We might be tempted to think success is found in straight A's and positive teacher feedback (and yes, grades are important!), but true success isn't measured by report cards and parent-teacher conferences.

Success for our kids isn't found on a report card. It's found in the smile from another child who found a friend in ours.

- *What are some ways you can teach your children that they are special to God and that everyone else is too?*
- *What do you focus on teaching your children in preparation for school?*
- *Do you struggle with measuring your children's success with what kind of grades they make?*



True success for our kids
isn't measured by report
cards or parent-teacher
conferences

*It's found in the smile
of another child who
found a friend in ours*

~ Lindsey Bell

2 – Praying Them Back to School

by Holly Smith

“Because we know that this extraordinary day is just ahead, we pray for you all the time—pray that our God will make you fit for what He’s called you to be, pray that He’ll fill your good ideas and acts of faith with His own energy so that it all amounts to something. If your life honors the name of Jesus, He will honor you. Grace is behind and through all of this, our God giving Himself freely, the Master, Jesus Christ, giving Himself freely.”
2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 (MSG)

With anticipation and trepidation, we look to the beginning of school as a challenge for our children.

As with most challenges, we must prepare—school supplies, clothing, curriculum (if homeschooling), schedules and even looking to all the extra-curricular activities in which they will take part.

It all seems daunting.

We are both thankful for a routine after a rather non-routine summer, and we are resentful of the way the schedules will seemingly drive our daily lives. Next thing we know, it will be Thanksgiving! With schedules like that, time does indeed fly.

In the midst of all the preparations, I believe we leave aside the ONE THING needed for it all.

We forget to purposefully pray over each detail, each child. It is the LIFE-SOURCE, and we neglect it. If only we grasped hold of the power of praying for our children and our homes, we might find that margin is regained and added perspective is given.

Where do we begin and how do we place prayer at the top of our to-do list?

For me, it begins in the summer. As I walk through each child’s room, I pray over them. I pray for their friendships and their teachers. I ask God to allow only the helpful yet hard things happen to them, so that they will learn the lessons in season—lessons that God filtered through His loving hands for them. I pray for their successes, that they will rightly give Him glory for them.

I ask the Lord to give them hearts that long for Him and His Word. I pray my children will ache until they seek Him (I pray the same for myself and for my husband).

I pray as we are shopping for school supplies, that each tool in their hand will be purposed for learning and growth—that God will blow His fresh breath over each child and fan into flame the gifts He has placed in each of them.

I pray that God will “set them up for success” in their calling. It’s the kind of success that can only be defined by God alone—success in His eyes, not the worldly success of fame and fortune.

I pray as we go to meet the teachers (in our case, since our kids are in public school) and over their classrooms. I pray for God to bless the teachers with insight for their task and the ability to be focused and do their jobs well. I pray for them to guide and lead our children in His ways.

I also pray protection over the classroom and over false teachings that may be spoken from classmates, teachers or administration. I pray our children will begin to glean truth and know what to believe and trust.

Finally, I make prayer a daily practice. Before I even step from my bed, I pray over the day. I ask God to give me a song in my heart that morning, as I often set the tone (good or bad) for the day. I pray for the Lord to send special blessings for each child and to hone them in, however He sees fit. Sometimes that prayer means some hardship for our children.

But, I do pray for them to have purposed hardship, as training for their futures, equipping them in every way.

When it comes to prayer, I think we often set it aside as a time, like time we spend in the Word every day or time to prepare for meals. But prayer is not bound by time. Prayer is, in fact, timeless...unbound.

The prayers we pray at any moment also continue way beyond the day. They are powerful in that way.

So, pray all the time for your family.

Give God your trust as you pray some powerful prayers over each life you touch. Pray aloud! Pray to yourself. Position yourself prostrate...and let the Holy Spirit intercede.

The great and wonderful thing about prayer is that it does affect much...it is the daily power we have as believers for our families. It is also a practice. So begin...and continue. **Watch for the answers that God brings, notice them and give thanks!**

There's so much in this world over which we have absolutely no control, but God gives us the tool of prayer. He fills and overflows in our lives because of it. My prayer for each of you, who read

this is that God will be magnified over each family...that He will have His way and win in us.

- *Is back-to-school tough for you and your family?*
- *How does knowing that there are some things you can't control make you feel when it comes to parenting?*
- *What are some areas you can pray for your children as they get ready to go back to school?*



I pray my
child will
ache
until they
seek Him

~ Holly Smith

3 - Ten Ways to Ease Your Child's Back-to-School Nerves

by Allison Dillaberry

"Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:6-7 (NLT)

We have all experienced the first day anxiety of something... **You know that YUCKY feeling you get on the first day back to school when your stomach is turned upside down doing somersaults like it's in the Olympics.** As a former school teacher, I have seen that agonizing look of fear on so many faces on the first day of school.

Believe it or not, most teachers go to great extremes to help ease their students' hearts and minds on the first day. But no matter what parents and teachers do, that first day can be a rough one.

Even if your children are homeschooled, they often become part of a co-op and feel some of the same fears all kids do when it's time to go back-to-school.

So what can moms do to help ease the anxiety of their sweet babes?

- 1. Talk about what your child can expect on his first day.** Most teachers play getting-to-know you games and set basic rules for their classes. The most important part to focus on is getting-to-know your teacher and his or her rules and procedures.
- 2. Help your kids understand that everyone is in the same boat.** Help them to realize that the kid sitting next to them in first period is having the same thought, "don't call on me" running through their head like a freight train.
- 3. Go over bus routes, walk-home routes and even take a tour of the school if necessary.** Try to walk class schedules before the first day, so your kids know the best time to take bathroom and locker breaks.
- 4. Try to meet their teachers in advance, so they can begin getting-to-know you and your child.** And yes, go to orientation—believe it or not, you and your kids might learn something you didn't know before.

5. **Pack a lunch. Sometimes, cafeterias and food stores have glitches in the first week.** They can avoid waiting in long lines or eliminate anxiety about getting their lunch if you simply pack them a lunch.
6. **Pray with your kiddos about the upcoming day. Pray at bedtime the night before and the morning of the first day.** It's amazing what peace God can bring through simple prayer. And try to make this prayer time together a habit for the rest of the school year.
7. **Make sure any summer reading is already finished.** You don't want your child sleepy-eyed on the first day because they stayed up late to finish summer reading or any other work due.
8. **And yes, start the school sleep routine at least a few days to a week in advance,** so your child will already be accustomed to going to bed and getting up at the same time each day.
9. **Be considerate of your child's worries and fears.** Listen to them and show empathy toward them.
10. **Help them be excited about learning.** Create a special place at home for them to study and do homework. Whether it be a small desk, favorite chair or bean bag, make an inviting place that is private and all their own to study in solitude.

Happy first day!

- *What are some things that make you or your children anxious about going back to school?*
- *Which of the 10 ideas above might help you best?*
- *Be honest. Who's more stressed out about back-to-school, you or your children?*

*Be considerate of your child's
worries and fears.*

Allison Dillaberry

4 - Be a Discriminating Volunteer

by Lori Wildenberg

"A sweet friendship refreshes the soul." Proverbs 27:9 (The Message)

Moms...we are the Masters of the Family Calendar. As fall approaches we get the kids' schedules and supplies all organized. We fill out countless forms for school and extracurricular activities. Then comes the ever-present volunteer sign-up sheet. We feel compelled to jot down our John Hancock on every upcoming event.

STOP!

Even though our kids are back in school and our day is definitely different **we don't HAVE to do everything!** Just as you do for your children, **be discriminating in what you choose to spend your time doing.**

Before your schedule gets too full with "I can do that", let me toss out a few ideas for consideration. Ask yourself these questions:

1. Do I like working directly with the kids?
2. Do I prefer to support the school in a more clerical manner?
3. Do I like committee work or would I enjoy running a committee?
4. Is supervising or planning a field trip more up my alley?
5. Do I enjoy planning and running the classroom parties?
6. Would I rather make or purchase party treats or favors?
7. What type of volunteering fits into my daily life?

For moms of the younger kids...here is a recommendation. Don't do everything. Pick and choose. There are many opportunities at the elementary level to get involved. (Seasoned moms know this!) Then all moms...listen up!

Set aside time for your own personal development. Join an exercise class, a bible study, or book club. Maybe even do a new activity with a friend.

Begin nurturing those neglected female friendships. These endeavors are not selfish. They are actually good for a woman's mental and emotional well-being.

Men typically appreciate it when their wives discuss things at length with girlfriends and then later receive the cliff notes. Women tend to explore the details surrounding things but men...not so much.

I recall one time I was relaying a story to my husband, I stopped to take a breath-and he thought I was done. (I was just getting warmed up!) My girlfriends will participate in the dissection of an event. My husband doesn't appreciate that form of communication. He prefers to move into problem-solving mode immediately. **I am a better wife when I have friends.**

Female friendships among women are good for the soul and the marriage. **Be deliberate and not over-zealous in your volunteering at school.** Make some intentional choices to care for yourself and your marriage.

- *Have you been in the position of over-extending yourself?*
- *How did you learn to say no?*
- *What is that last thing you volunteered for? Did you pray about it fi*

I'm a **better wife**
when I have
friends

Lori Wildenberg



5 - How To Support (and Sabotage) Student Success

Part 1

by Cheri Gergory

"And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." Colossians 3:17 NKJV

As parents, we want to help our children succeed in school.

In my twenty-three years as a classroom teacher (twenty-two as a parent), I've seen parent strategies that pay big dividends.

I've also seen well-intentioned efforts that actually cost the kids.

Today, let's explore one support strategy and one form of sabotage.

Support 1: Help your child learn their multiplication tables.

Through the 20s. As soon as possible.

I'm not suggesting "super baby" tactics. But do take advantage of edutainment software programs that will drill your child over and over again. Make your mantra, "We're gonna keep on trying 'til we get 'em all right!"

A parent once accused me of giving "way too much" math homework: it was unreasonable for me to expect her 7th grader to spend 2 hours a night on math! I agreed and asked if we could go through a few math problems together with the student.

As we walked through the problems together on the white board, the mother was dismayed to hear her daughter struggling with basic multiplication facts: "4×6...21? 27? 22?"

She soon realized that I wasn't giving 2 hours of homework each night. The real problem was her daughter's lack of basic math skills, which caused 20 minutes worth of homework to stretch on forever.

Once this student's multiplication skills were up to speed, her homework time decreased, while her confidence—and enjoyment of math—rose.

Sabotage 1: Talk negatively about the teacher to your child.

The mother in the example above had been blaming me to her daughter for several months before she talked directly to me. This gave her daughter license to get mouthy with me in class, “forget” her homework, and “lose” her notes.

After we met, the mother started telling her daughter that I was a caring capable teacher. She instructed her to sit in the front row, listen, and take notes. She called and e-mailed me often to make sure her daughter was turning in homework and paying attention in class.

At first, the student resented me for bringing her mother “over to the dark side.” But as her math grades improved, she soon considered me a “favorite” teacher not because of anything I was doing differently but because of the changes in her mother's—and her own—attitude toward me.

I've always remembered, and tried to emulate, one parent who spoke with utmost respect about all teachers while within her child's hearing. When she needed to express a concern or disagreement during a parent-teacher conference, she excused her child, “talked turkey” with the teacher, and then moved back into your-teacher-and-I-are-in-this-together mode when the child returned.

- *How do you talk about your children's teacher in front of them?*
- *How do you support your child's school success?*
- *How might you be engaging in well-intentioned sabotage?*

***As parents, we want our children
to succeed in school***



6 - How To Support (and Sabotage) Student Success

Part 2

by Cheri Gregory

"The wise woman builds her house, but the foolish pulls it down with her hands."

Proverbs 14:1 NKJV

Whether you homeschool or your children are in public school, private school or virtual school, a parent can either support or sabotage their children's success as a student without even realizing they are doing either.

Today, let's explore another support strategy and another form of sabotage.

Support 2: Expand your child's listening vocabulary.

A child who starts school with an enriched listening vocabulary has a huge advantage over a child who does not. Sure, when they're both learning basic decoding skills, they can sound out "r-a-t" and "c-a-t" with equal ease.

But when they switch from "learning to read" to "reading to learn," the child who has thousands upon thousands of words stored in her listening vocabulary is likely to have an "ah-HA!" experience.

I can well remember the day I first encountered the word "facetious" in print. I had never spoken the word aloud, so I tried to attack it with the basic rules of phonics.

"FACE-tie-owss."

Nope.

"FAK-a-tyus."

Nope.

Suddenly, I recalled my father saying (as he so often did), "I'm just being fuh-SEE-shus!"

And I thought, “That is how you spell fah-SEE-shus?”

I was fortunate. I had the correct pronunciation of *facetious* word tucked away in my listening vocabulary. When the time came, I had that memory available for access.

So I had a fabulous “ah-HA!” experience. I felt positively brilliant. So all of a sudden I *loved* reading!

Too many students have the opposite experience when they start “reading to learn.”

They encounter word after word with which they have no prior experience. Their decoding skills fail them.

Their experience is one of “Agh...” which they verbalize as “I hate reading.”

Which is often cover for the disheartening belief: “I can’t read. I must be stupid.”

Intelligence isn’t the issue; the number of words stored in their listening vocabulary is. So read aloud as much as you can, even after you child has learned to read! Read a wide variety of genres, especially poetry, which is so rich with wonderful words.

Talk about interesting words throughout the day: on billboards, at the grocery store, in the preacher’s sermon, on the radio, in song lyrics, in the magazine you’re reading. Model your own enjoyment of “delicious words” as well as your own strategies for collecting, understanding, and incorporating new words into your conversations.

Sabotage 2: Create anxiety over test scores, scholarships, and college entrance.

When I was in elementary school and even high school, I knew nothing about the ACT or SAT. When I was a senior, I showed up, did my best, and forgot about it.

Now, kids take “test prep” classes while still in junior high. Attend ACT “boot camp” instead of summer camp. Apologize for not taking AP English Literature and Composition from me because they can’t afford the time to “just read books”; they need to cram for the SAT instead.

Yes, I understand that tests have their place. I understand that ACT and SAT scores can have a very real impact on our kids’ futures.

But when kids are cramming “test prep” into their heads instead of reading full works of great literature, something is very wrong. **The system is broken, and parents can refuse to sacrifice their child’s love of learning on the altar of test scores.**

My son scored a perfect 800 on the Reading Comprehension section of the SAT, having never set foot in a “test prep” class. In fact, he never even opened the SAT prep software I bought for him.

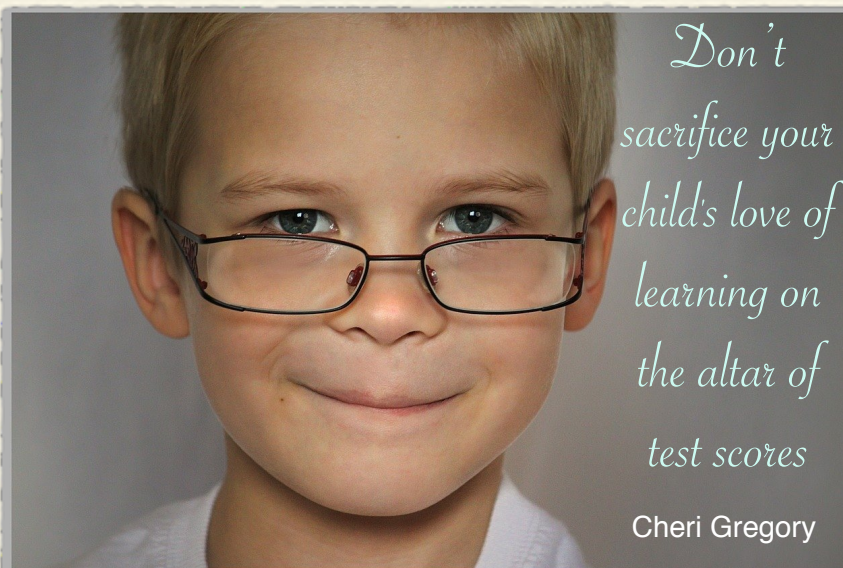
No, that score came from 18 years of “test prep” known as Family Reading Time each and every night, often for an hour or more.

That score came listening to dozens of wonderful audiobooks, many of them over and over again.

That score represents not just a one-time achievement on a test but a life-long deep adoration of reading and books and stories.

When learning is pursued, “numbers” follow.

- *How do you support your child’s school success?*
- *What do your children struggle with most in school? How can you help them succeed through it?*
- *How might you be engaging in well-intentioned sabotage?*



7 - How To Support (and Sabotage) Student Success

Part 3

by Cheri Gregory

"Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing."

1 Thessalonians 5:11 NKJV

Parenting your children through school is an important part of your mom journey that can leave your children with a lifetime of skills that can help them be men and women who can step fully into their own God-given identities and reach this work for Christ.

So, today, as we explore one more support strategy and one more form of sabotage, I hope you'll embrace this opportunity to pour into your children's lives and not think of it as just helping them with their school work.

Support #3: Help Your Child Develop Organizational and Planning Systems

One day, I came home from 4th grade in tears. I'd been assigned a "research report" on the Yokut Indians, and I had no clue how to do it.

My mother used this report as an opportunity to teach me some much-needed organizational and planning skills. Here's what she did:

1. She made sure I understood the assignment by having me explain it to her. I pulled out the assignment handout and read it aloud to her. She then read the handout aloud to me and had me hand-write a checklist based on the information.
2. As we talked, we realized that we both had questions not answered by the handout. I wrote them down on a separate piece of paper, leaving room for the answers. The next day, I set an appointment with the teacher and, when the time came, asked her my questions, writing down her answers in the space I'd left.
3. She bought me a large wipe-off calendar and colored wipe-off pens. Using the checklist, I set "due dates" for each step of the project. Since I'd need to do my research in the library (the Internet hadn't yet been invented!), we scheduled several days when she would drop me off for an hour at a time.

4. My mother gave me a small plastic storage tote in which I stored everything related to the research project: the original handout, my list of questions (with answers), xerox copies of important materials I'd read at the library, 3×5 cards, etc.. She also gave me a stack of large envelopes in which to store my note cards. She encouraged me to divide my cards into categories as I did my reading and note-taking; I then labeled each envelope with the category name.

5. She suggested that I finish my research project a week before it was due so that I could ask the teacher to look it over and let me know anything that needed to be changed. I'll never forget the look of amazement on my teacher's face when I handed her my binder, telling her it was still a first draft. Now, of course, I recognize her joy at being able to give me input while I could use it (rather than a poor grade when it was too late to make changes!)

Each of these steps has become a life skill for which I am grateful.

As an adult, I know how to clarify an assignment immediately and ask questions before starting; how to break a large project down into "baby steps", create a checklist, and use a calendar to track my progress; how to develop a quick organizational system for keeping the components of a project together; how to finish early enough to seek input and give added polish.

Sabotage #3: Rescue Your Child from Hard Work

Did you notice what my mother did *not* do?

She did *not* call the teacher to ask the questions herself.

She did *not* write the checklist for me.

She did *not* create the calendar or fill in the due dates for me.

She did *not* do my research for me—she actually introduced me to the reference librarian and left me to do the work on my own!

She did *not* label my envelopes for me or even tell me what categories to put on them.

And she certainly did *not* write any portion of my report for me.

In other words, my mother did *not* do for me what I could do for myself.

Which means that she did not rob me of the sense of satisfaction I felt when I received a well-earned A on my research project.

She did not teach me to try to get out of hard work by whining, begging, crying, procrastinating, feigning ignorance, faking illness, or any of the other strategies I've seen students use – often “successfully”, I'm sad to say – to get their parents to “rescue” them.

“Rescue” from what?

From what was once considered a character-builder, but now seems to be considered a fate worse than death: sustained hard work.

Encourage. Support. But don't rescue your kids from meaningful hard work.

(Note: I'm not talking about waste-of-time worksheets...that's a whole 'nother topic! I'm talking about well-crafted, worth-while project-based learning on a topic for which the student has a passion.)

- *How have you helped your child develop organizational and planning systems that work for him/her?*
- *How have you avoided rescuing your child from “hard work”?*
- *Do you struggle with making things easy for your children?*

**Encourage.
Support. But don't
rescue your kids
from meaningful
hard work.**

Cheri Gregory

8 - Planning Family Fun During the School Year

by Laura Polk

"And also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor - it is the gift of God" Ecclesiastes 3:13 NKJV

The beginning of a new school year always scares me.

I like summer. I enjoy the relaxed atmosphere, the lack of homework, and my children sleeping in. As summer draws to an end, the panic begins to rise. I dread the schedules, the rules, the expectations that come with a new school year. Not because they don't all lead to good habits and things in my children's future, but because it seems to steal all of the family fun away in the process.

Once the school year gets moving, life careens out of control it seems. Everything from homework, to after-school activities, and earlier bed times can begin to steal the summer joy we've enjoyed while also making things feel over structured, and overwhelmed.

Last year, I decided to tackle this issue by instilling (and guarding) a Family Fun Night at our house. By the end of the school year everyone in our home looked forward to it, loved participating, and held me to the promise that we would do it consistently.

I wanted our family night to accomplish three things:

- Teach my children the life skills of socializing and hospitality
- Give us an opportunity to talk—really talk—at least once a week about our lives and how God was moving in them
- Have a fun activity scheduled together each week

Are you worried about the school year and losing the closeness with your kids due to the madness of scheduling obligations? Start your own Family Fun Night with these four easy steps:

Step 1: Schedule it!

"Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12 NIV). In the day-to-day life of a family, we need to schedule in togetherness time as much as any other task.

Find a day of the week that is open on everyone's schedule. Once that day is determined, declare it your Family Fun Night and protect it with everything you have!

Don't allow yourself, or any other family member to schedule things on that day. Decide ahead of time that it is a time to be not only protected, but cherished.

Step 2: Make a Plan

"Commit your actions to the Lord, and your plans will succeed" (Proverbs 16:3 NLT).

What do you want to accomplish on your family night? Do you want your children to learn a skill along the way like cooking or hospitality? Do you want faith to be a focus, teach them how to pray in a group, or open the discussion to how God is working in their lives? Do you want to keep it at home or be a night out each week? Maybe you'd like to combine a few ideas and change it up each week. A word of caution here: whatever you decide, come up with a plan, and then put it on the calendar. If you don't have a plan in place, your family night will slowly fade as other time-stealers take over. Commit now, so you'll reap the benefits later.

Step 3: Get Talking

"Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it" (Proverbs 22:6 NLT).

In the beginning, conversation may feel awkward if you are not use to sitting down at a family meal regularly with the goal of simply talking and having fun. But, it's also a crucial time to bring up things you need to discuss with your children.

So, keep some conversation starters in mind, and address each family member with at least one question that is individual to them. It's easy to bring up questions about faith or to pray over something that one family member is struggling with when once you have this regular weekly communication in place.

Before long, your Family Fun Nights will be so full of great talks; you won't be able to pull them away from the table!

Step 4: Keep it Playful

"Praise him with the tambourine and dancing; praise him with strings and flutes!" (Psalm 150:4 NLT).

When life gets over-scheduled during the school year, some planned playtime with the family provides a much needed respite for everyone. Whether you play your favorite board game, go out for a night of bowling, or simply watch a DVD together, keep the atmosphere playful and light so that everyone has a good time.

One of my tricks on nights we choose to go out for dinner is to play a game while we are waiting on our food: we choose a category (like animals) and then go around the table in alphabetical order saying the first thing that comes to mind (Alligator, Baboon, Cougar, etc.). Just remember: it doesn't have to be complicated to be fun!

Starting your Family Fun Night is a great way to ensure that you and your family remain close, have an opportunity to expand your faith together, and keep fun a priority in your life during the busy school year.

Get a plan in place, respect the time you set aside, and you'll soon discover it's the night you look forward to most each week.

- *How could your family benefit from a weekly Family Fun Night during the school year?*
- *What are three things that you would like to accomplish during your Family Fun Night?*
- *How can you make faith a regular part of your Family Fun Night each week?*

FOUR EASY STEPS TO FORM A FAMILY FUN NIGHT:

Step 1: Schedule it!

- *(Free Downloadable)*

Step 2: Make a Plan

Step 3: Get Talking

- *(21 Conversation Starters Free Downloadable)*
- *(40 Conversation Starters Free Downloadable)*

Step 4: Keep it Playful

9 – Stop Crazy Parenting

by Lori Wildenberg

"Fathers, don't exasperate your children by coming down hard on them. Take them by the hand and lead them in the way of the Master." Ephesians 6:4 MSG

Have you heard this definition? "Crazy is doing the same thing over and over expecting different results."

Yet we often go crazy because we are in a discipline rut.

So let's STOP crazy parenting and get creative!

S: Super hard to enforce. If the punishment doled out is harder on mom and dad or specifically difficult to enforce this will be an ineffective mode of discipline. Make your discipline doable and enforceable.

T: Training is absent. Discipline means to train. Train your child for the behavior and the character qualities you want rather than focusing on what you don't want.

O: Over the top consequences. "You are grounded for life" type of idea. If you have delivered a consequence that is too big, it will be ineffective. This happens when we feel as if life (our child) is out of control, and we are emotionally charged. Back up and switch it up.

P: Penalty doesn't match the crime. For instance: taking away the cell phone when the child is late. Instead have the child owe you time (maybe paid back in chores) or make his curfew earlier.

STOP crazy parenting and get creative. Seek to train your child for the character traits you want to develop. Don't only focus on bad behavior.

- *Have you been parenting like a crazy mom lately?*
- *S.T.O.P. - Which is going to be the hardest to implement?*
- *How does focusing on their hearts and their character differ from focusing on their poor behavior?*

STOP crazy parenting and get creative!

Lori Wildenberg

10 – Why We Didn't Quit Ballet

by Becky Kopitzke

"...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus," Philippians 1:6 (NIV)

PARENTING

She twirled. She leapt. She skipped across that stage with red hair piled high in a dainty bun, her silver white tutu glimmering like the starry sky. My beautiful girl—my ballerina.

This was our daughter's first dance recital, the finale to six months of lessons and rehearsals and crazy costume fittings. My husband and I sat among a crowd of fellow parents, all of us applauding so hard and grinning so wide, our hands and cheeks ached long after the curtain fell.

Sure, it wasn't the Koch Theater, but it might as well have been. These were *our* kids, *our* superstars. Everything—from memorizing the routines, to facing an audience, to navigating backstage without Mom—was an accomplishment. We were giddy, proud of our daughter.

And we might have missed the whole thing, if it had been up to her. Because she hated her dance class.

Oh, she loved dance. Just not this particular class. The previous spring, she fell head over slippers for beginner ballet at the YMCA. So for the school year, frugal mom here enrolled in the community Park and Rec dance program, which was half the cost of the YMCA. Hey, dance is dance, right?

Nope. Not according to the ballerina.

"Can I please stay home?" She begged one Thursday evening near the start of the dance season. Her body went limp, and she resisted my tug to get her leotard over her hips.

"Why? I thought you love ballet."

"I liked the YMCA. I want to go back there."

"Well, sweetheart, we're trying this new class now. Give it a chance. You might learn to like it."

But she didn't. There were too many kids, she said. Eighteen little girls running around the dance floor, paying no heed to the teacher. Her class at the Y had only four students. It was quieter. She'd rather play at home with her sister, her dolls, and her coloring books. She'd rather help me clean the bathroom.

"Really?" My eyebrows shot up. "Scrubbing toilets beats dance class?"

"Yes." She frowned. "I don't want to go."

Week after week, we drove to class anyway. She tolerated it well enough, but she never exhibited the same enthusiasm she once had for pirouettes and pliés. So I wondered—should I force her to go?

"Yes." My husband stood at the kitchen stove, browning meat for the tacos we planned to eat after dance class. I jiggled car keys in my hand, wishing I could hang them up and help chop lettuce instead.

"But she's not enjoying it," I reasoned. "She's only five-years-old. What's the point in making her continue an activity she doesn't love, when there's so little time outside of school to just be a kid?"

"I understand that. I do," my husband sympathized. **"But where do we draw the line? She can't back out of an activity every time she's dissatisfied. We have a chance here to teach her an important life lesson. In our family, we keep our commitments."**

Commitments.

Does anybody really honor a commitment anymore? In our modern, fast-paced age, deals are easily broken. People change jobs, change majors, upgrade their homes, their cell phones, their wives. So, what if we already paid the forty dollar costume fee. My baby wants out of dance class and darn-it-all, I want her to be happy! Commitment, *coshmmmitment*. Loyalty is outdated!

But thankfully, our God is timeless.

"...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus," (Philippians 1:6, emphasis mine).

Why do we honor our commitments? Because God honors His to us. He does not give up on us when we're no longer fun and interesting. He sees us through to completion. I am so grateful for that. Aren't you?

So, we stuck out the full season of dance class. We weren't legalistic about it. On occasion, I'd let our daughter stay home if she had a headache or a cold. But, her dad and I made it clear that skipping was not to become a habit, and if she missed dance this week then she *would* go next week unless she happened to be bleeding or feverish.

It wasn't always easy, but it was worthwhile.

"Sweetheart, you were stunning." I beamed at my daughter as we drove away from the recital hall. She held a flower bouquet in her lap, a reward from her dad. "Did you have fun?"

"Yes." She flashed a shy smile.

"You know dance class is done now. The recital was the end for this year."

"I know."

"Are you happy about that?"

She rolled her eyes and grinned. "Oh, yeah! Can we go back to the YMCA now?"

"Yes, love." I laughed. "You've earned it."

My child may never become a professional dancer, just as yours probably won't make a career out of soccer or swimming or science club. **But they can be well trained for a lifetime of loyalty and integrity. It starts with making smart choices about where we invest their time, then teaching our kids to follow through.**

Until the day of Christ Jesus—and a silver tutu curtain call.

- *Are commitments hard for you to keep?*
- *What commitments have you made for yourself or have you and your children made that you struggled with keeping?*
- *Are there ever any commitments that you should break and why?*

LOYALTY AND INTEGRITY

Characters we long to instill in our kids.
And it starts with making smart choices
about where we invest their time, then
teaching our kids to follow through.

Becky Kopitzke

11 - Four Parenting Myths Busted

by Lori Wildenberg

"Teach me Your way, O Lord; I will walk in Your truth" Psalm 86:11 NKJV

Moms, have you ever heard parenting tips touted as the fix-all to your parenting problems, and you wondered how it could be that easy? Parenting is very individual and there are no cookie cutter solutions that will work with every family. If you hear something that sounds too good and too simple to be true, it probably is.

Here are a four myths we are tempted to believe ... and the truth that busts them:

1. Correction Crushes a Child's Spirit.

TRUTH: No. Correction is training. Kids need training. Criticism is the thing that crushes a child's spirit. Correction motives and encourages a child to do something better. It is training.

Criticism sounds like: Your room is always a mess. You are so disorganized. How can you find anything? (negative, personal attack, shaming)

Correction sounds like: *Your room needs some TLC. I will show you how you can organize it. I will help you if you like.* (state problem, train, offer assistance- same team approach)

2. A Big Voice Means Business.

TRUTH: No. A big voice means the parent is out of control and the child has control of the parent's emotions.

A quiet voice sounds like (not a whispered threatening voice, a pleasant one): in close proximity, using eye contact, and gentle touch increases the importance of the message and is more likely to gain the child's cooperation.

3. My Kids Need to Work It Out Alone.

TRUTH: No. Most kids don't have conflict resolution skills. If they are not assisted, jungle rules prevail. The biggest, toughest kid gets his way.

Instead give your children skills to deal with conflict. Teach them how to respectfully state a concern without attacking the person. Speak stating with *I* rather than *you*.

What dealing with conflict well sounds like: "I feel frustrated when you use my stuff without asking." Next person, "I'm sorry I took your shirt without your permission. Will you forgive me?" "Yes" Final line, "I will ask next time."

Train your kids in how to handle interpersonal issues respectfully. They need your help to do this. Be sure to be the coach rather than the referee.

4. Consistency is a MUST.

TRUTH: No. Consistency is critical in moral, safety, and legal messages. How the issues are dealt with depends on the situation and the child. Discipline doesn't *always* have to be the same. Where you stand on important issues does.

- *What myths do you believe?*
- *Which one of the four mentioned have been something you've struggled with?*
- *How can you begin to change your old patterns of parenting?*

Four myths moms are tempted to believe...



1. Correction crushes a child's spirit
2. A big voice means business
3. Kids need to work it out alone
4. Consistency is a must

Lori Wildenberg

12 – Just Love Them

by Genny Heikka

*"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God."
Ephesians 2:8 ESV*

PARENTING

A few weeks ago, after I spoke to a group of moms, one of the women in the audience came up to me and shared some of the challenges she'd been going through with her twelve-year-old. Fighting tears, she told me she wasn't sure how to handle his behavior.

I could tell she wanted to parent her son in the best way possible. **But I could also tell she was questioning herself and doubting how she'd been handling things.** (What mom hasn't been there at one point or another?)

She talked, I listened, we hugged, and I told her that she was a good mom. I saw how concerned she was and how much she wanted to do the right thing.

I wished I had the "one answer" for her, but like so many parenting challenges, there wasn't a cookie-cutter solution.

And even though I wasn't able to give her anything more than a few suggestions of what I might do in her situation, I saw hope in her eyes when she left - the hope that comes from telling someone else your struggles.

As I drove home that morning, I thought about some of the times I've been in that mom's place: grappling with how to handle a situation with my kids, wanting so badly to have it all together, or know the right answer.

And I thought about the advice one of my friends gave me a while ago about parenting:

"When in doubt, just love them."

Just love them.

No matter how many books we read, or how many kids we raise, none of us has *all* the right answers *all* the time when it comes to parenting.

Yes, there is much we can learn and yes, there are definitely things we should do and not do (I'm not saying take a wing-it approach to raising your kids).

But there is also grace in the journey.

And love.

And you shouldn't beat yourself up about not being perfect. In fact, sometimes it's not the big, intentional lessons we set out to teach our kids that make the biggest difference. Often, it's our small, everyday actions that we do in simply living life...

I remember a while ago when my daughter Katie and I were out grocery shopping. She stopped in the parking lot and told me to wait a minute. Then she turned and ran in the opposite direction, a couple cars over. She bent down, picked up a piece of half-crumpled paper that was on the ground, and ran back over to me.

"Had to pick this up," she said.

And I realized... those times I've stopped and picked litter up off the ground... she *noticed*.

Then, a couple days later, she and Luke went to the snack bar at the gym while I sat at a table nearby. I'd given them \$5.00 to split a smoothie. When she came back and sat down, I asked her if she'd gotten any change.

She smiled and said, "Yeah, but I put it in the tip jar."

And again, I thought...she sees when I do that.

These weren't lessons I deliberately set out to teach her.

They weren't things I read about in books or learned in a parenting class. I didn't have a neat checklist or plan around teaching her these ideas. They were things I just *did*.

And seeing her do them too was a reminder of how everyday things can impact our kids, even on the days we might not necessarily feel like we have it all together.

Sometimes, it's our lack of perfection and polish that can provide the biggest opportunities for teaching. Our kids can learn from our good examples *and* our mistakes. And when we are real and admit when we don't have all the answers, they will see that we are human and that sometimes we mess up too.

So if you are feeling less than organized, less than perfect, less than "together" today, be encouraged. You don't have to be perfect to have a positive impact on your kids. Have grace for yourself, and for them.

And just love them.

- *When was the last time a parenting situation arose to which you didn't have an answer? How did you ultimately respond?*
- *What do you think it looks like to just "love" your children in a difficult situation?*
- *What impact do you imagine it might have on them?*

When in
doubt...



Genny Heikka

13 - FOUR THINGS I WON'T TELL MY KIDS

by Becky Kopitzke

"And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" John 8:32 NKJV

I stood in the corridor of my daughter's dance studio waiting for ballet class to finish. The walls were lined with posters of kittens and violins and satin toe shoes, each displaying some cutesy motivational quote.

- If you dream it, you can do it.
- Nothing is impossible for you.
- Now is your time to shine!

Do those words make you feel warm and fuzzy? Or, like me, do you raise your eyebrows?

I'm all for building my children's confidence. But there's a big difference between puffing up and pointing up. Here are four popular statements you won't hear me saying to my kids.

1. You can be anything you want to be.

No, my precious girls, you will be exactly who God designed you to be—beautiful, unique, valued, and loved. He gave you certain gifts and abilities, chosen just for you by a perfect and purposeful God, and if you spend your life discovering and using those gifts wisely then you will be successful in the deepest sense.

Still, always remember that what you do is not who you are. You are a child of God, period (John 1:12). Don't compare yourself to anybody else, and don't for a second believe God was sleeping on the job the day your talents were doled out. You are you for a reason.

"I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well" (Psalm 139:14 NIV).

2. Believe in yourself.

Believe first in your God who created you and is capable of doing amazing things through you (Philippians 4:13). Yes, you are powerful, more powerful than you know, because Christ's power is at work within you.

"He replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you'" (Luke 17:6 NIV).

3. Follow your heart.

Don't follow it; protect it. The heart is deceitful beyond cure (Jeremiah 17:9) and it can get you into a lot of trouble if you don't check it against the truth of God's word. Study your Bible, surround yourself with true friends who will hold you accountable, and pray, pray, pray so that when your heart tells you one thing and God says another, you'll know the difference and can choose wisely.

"Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it" (Proverbs 4:23 NIV).

4. You deserve to be happy.

Of course your mother wants you to be happy. But who in this world deserves it, when the wages of sin is death? (Romans 6:23). Praise the Lord, my darling girls, for grace.

Understand that blessings aren't your right; they're a gift. And sometimes, although we might not see it at the time, our troubles can be a gift, too.

"For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:17–18 NIV).

Our kids are going to hear a lot of well-intended garbage as they grow. Let home be the place where we cut through the hype and teach them to love themselves—why?—because God loves them first.

So next time I'm waiting outside the door for my daughter's ballet class to end, I'm thinking I just might take a Sharpie to one of those posters. **Nothing is impossible for you WITH GOD!**

- *What popular statements in our culture would you take a Sharpie to?*
- *Are you equipped with enough knowledge of Scripture to separate truth from lies?*
- *What verses do you have your children memorize to build their confidence correctly?*

14 - How to Talk to Your Teen Girl So She Will Listen

by Melinda Means

“And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart” Ezekiel 36:26 NLT

She longed to be a princess.

And in my eyes, she was.

As a little girl, my daughter spent countless hours playing dress up and imagining she was Belle, Cinderella, Jasmine or one of the other magical characters from storybooks.

It was a time that holds so many sweet memories.

Fast forward about six years. Suddenly my “princess” is acting more like a pill. *And I’m totally caught off guard by the transformation.*

Overnight, it seemed like, “Mommy, what do you think?” was abruptly replaced with, “I know, Mom! You’ve told me this stuff, like, 1,000 times already! Do I really have to hear another lecture?!”

What happened to the girl that *wanted* to hear my thoughts? The one who hugged me tight and loved nightly “tuck-ins” where we’d pray and giggle?

What happened to the girl that wanted to hear my thoughts?

That girl liked me. This girl traded death stares with me. Her growing demands for independence and my growing desire to protect and control placed us on a collision course. Our clashes weren’t pretty. Sadly, we both often spoke to each other like adolescents. She was 12. I had to be the grownup.

So, one day I laid a journal on her bed and hoped for the best.

She didn’t want to hear my words, but maybe she would *read* them.

The first entry I wrote told her how much I loved her and wanted to communicate with her. Not with angry words that left us both feeling empty and hostile, but with words that expressed my heart.

Written words could be well-thought out, instead of spewed with heated emotion. They could be read and re-read when she was ready and open to hear what I had to say.

I had no idea how she'd respond.

Then, just before she went to bed that night, she gave me this: "Thanks for the journal, Mom. I think it's a good idea."

Really? I had a good idea? Maybe there was hope for us after all.

Over the past four years, a number of factors have improved our relationship — prayer and maturity (hers and mine!) — but the journal was a key component in opening her heart. And mine.

I've written many "lectures," apologies and words of advice that I'd never have been able to finish if I'd verbalized them. Plus, they are there for all posterity. One day, she might dismiss them as the rantings of a mom who doesn't "get it." **But maybe a year later, she'll view them in a whole new light.**

God is patient in this way with His children, too. He keeps speaking to us, even when our hearts are hard. Even when we don't think He "gets" our longings and hardships. He waits for the day that we come to Him with our eyes opened to the wisdom we once lacked the perspective and maturity to embrace.

A while back, I wrote a long and heartfelt note in the journal. At the end of the day, I looked in her room and saw the journal in the exact same place I'd left it.

"So, are you going to read the journal?" I asked her, trying to act nonchalant.

"Yes, Mom. But sometimes I like to save it so I have something to look forward to."

Now that's something to write home about.

- *What struggles are you having talking to your children as they grow up?*
- *Would you be willing to try the journal idea to help open lines of communication?*
- *How should it affect your parenting when you consider God's patience with His children?*

**NOT SURE HOW TO TALK TO YOUR TEEN...
TRY JOURNALING YOUR HEART TO HER. IT CAN BE
A KEY COMPONENT IN OPENING HER HEART.**

Melinda Means

15 - How to Raise Thankful Kids in a Thankless World

by Lindsey Bell

"In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you"

1 Thessalonians 5:16 NKJV

I'm sure every parent has been there. You're watching your child open presents at his birthday party and notice a sack full of clothes from Aunt Nita. You can tell by the look on his face he's not thrilled with his new gift. You can also tell by the look on Aunt Nita's face she is.

You hold your breath and wait. Will he thank her anyway, even though he's not super-thrilled with the clothes?

Raising thankful children is a difficult task, especially in today's culture where people rarely send thank you cards anymore and are able to get everything they want with the swipe of a credit card or the click of a mouse.

My son's fifth birthday party was a few weeks ago, and he said thank you to every single person who brought a gift. (Sure, it took some coaxing from me, but he still did it, right?)

Along with encouraging our children to say "thank you," there are several other ways to help them learn to be thankful. Here are a few I came up with:

1. Practice.

Set up a pretend birthday party and practice saying "thank you" for each gift your children receive. This could be done right before a child's birthday as a reminder of how he should act as he opens presents.

2. Involve your kids in service.

Service, especially in regard to those who are less fortunate, has a way of helping children realize how blessed their lives really are. Instead of shielding your kids from those who are less fortunate, encourage them to reach out and help (with your supervision, of course).

3. Read books and watch movies about being thankful and generous.

One great book is The Giving Tree by Shel Silverstein. My son also loves the Boz the Bear books about thankfulness. Willy Wonka and The Chocolate Factory serves as a great example of how greed can negatively impact someone's life.

4. Require thank you cards.

From the very beginning, make it the norm to say "thank you" and to write thank you notes. If your children know it is expected of them (especially if you start this young), it will become a habit.

5. Tell your children why thankfulness is important.

Help them understand that Aunt Nita put a lot of thought into the new clothes she purchased. Also help them understand that gifts cost money. Teach them the value of a dollar, so they will recognize the sacrifice someone might have made to buy a gift.

6. Thank the Lord every night at dinner for the things he has blessed you with each day.

And while you're at it, make sure and include non-material things in your list of blessings. If you make it all about the "stuff" you have, your kids will also make it all about the "stuff" they have.

7. Set a good example.

If you want your children to say "thank you," then you need to say "thank you." Be thankful to the grocery store checker who loaded your groceries into your cart. Be thankful to the gas station attendant who gave you the correct change. Be thankful to your husband and your children and the Lord.

As you model thankfulness, your children will follow your example.

- *What other things can you do to encourage your children to be thankful?*
- *How can you teach them to demonstrate thankfulness about school?*
- *Which of the seven tips will be easiest to implement? Which ones would be the most difficult?*

As you model thankfulness, your children will follow your example.

16 - 30 Ways to Pray for Your Children and 30 Ways to Teach Them to Pray God's Word

by Stephanie Shott

"The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results"
James 5:18b NLT

It's time to think about back-to-school, routines, schedules, school books, homework, field trips and report cards. I was a homeschool mom for eleven years and whether my kids were in public school, private school, or I was homeschooling, I always enjoyed getting back into the routine.

But it wasn't easy.

It's hard being a mom. There's a lot on your plate and the days seem to begin to run together.

The M.O.M. Initiative wants to make it easier for you and help you prepare your child's heart for the days ahead. Maybe your child is just entering kindergarten, six grade or even graduating high school this year.

Wherever they are in their education, the one thing they need more than anything is to HIDE GOD'S WORD in their heart and understand how to pray to a God who loves them so much He sent His Son to die for them.

It is God's Word that will change their hearts. It is God's Word that the Holy Spirit uses to convict them of sin.

It is God's Word that will ground them for the storms they are sure to face and strengthen them in their faith.

It is God's Word that they can learn to lean on, count on, and pray back to God so that they will have the amazing opportunity to see how real God is in real life.

It's what we pray for our children...that God will be real to them...that they will run after Him, love Him, trust Him and live for Him all the days of their lives.

So we want to share with you a way you can teach your children how to pray Scripture for themselves and hide God's Word in their heart at the same time.

WHETHER YOU HOMESCHOOL OR YOUR KIDS GO TO PRIVATE, PUBLIC OR VIRTUAL SCHOOL, THIS IS A GREAT WAY TO HELP YOUR KIDS START THEIR SCHOOL DAY!

CLICK THE LINK BELOW FOR YOUR FREE DOWNLOADABLE VERSES & PRAYERS TO GO WITH THEM.

Praying Scripture with Your Kids (30 Downloadable Prayers)

And an extra bonus PDF that makes it easy to pray for specific character traits for your children. **Just click this link for 30 Prayers to Pray for Your Kids.**

- *Do you struggle with teaching your children to pray?*
- *What are some areas you need to focus on with your children in prayer?*
- *What fears or doubts do your children struggle with that can teach them to pray about?*

It's what we pray for our children...
that God will be real to them...
that they will run after Him...
that they will love Him,
trust Him & live for Him
all the days of their lives.

Stephanie Shott

17 - Are You a Hover Mother?

by Cheri Gregory

"Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it"

Proverbs 22:6 NKJV

Jonathon's always been an easy-going kid. A classic Phlegmatic/Amiable personality who wants nothing more than peace.

He asks for so little from me. And when he does express a preference, he's so pleasant, almost apologetic, about it that the easiest thing for me to do is say, "Yes, of course!"

I received an early warning that this could become an unhealthy pattern one day when Jonathon was about five. Our family was hanging out with my brother's family in our living room. Jonathon, who was relaxing on the floor, said, "Hey Mom, could you get me a glass of water?"

As I jumped up from the couch and headed to the kitchen, my sister-in-law, Karen, asked, "Why don't you get up and get it yourself?" To which **Jonathon responded, "I've become accustomed to having my mother get it for me." Well.**

I realized that it was time for me to quit catering to a child who could so clearly articulate the phrase "I've become accustomed." But realizing and quitting are two very different things.

I didn't quit.

I just re-defined what I was doing as "developing a strong relationship with my son." As "understanding his unique needs. As "helping him get to know his personality and learning style strengths."

In the fifteen years since that incident, if you'd told me I was a hover mother, I would have adamantly denied the possibility.

But recently, when I loudly questioned God's wisdom in allowing both my young adult children to become involved with small planes, Jonathon quipped, "That's because He knows they fly higher than helicopters."

Oh yes he did.

And fifteen years later, I have the hard evidence that meddling -- by whatever name you want to call it -- is no laughing matter.

Last year, during his sophomore year in college, Jonathon took Organic Chemistry. And for the first time in his academic career, he struggled. He and the teacher were not a good fit. He didn't understand the concepts. He didn't know how to learn the material.

Many practical options were available to him. He could have set an appointment to talk with the teacher. He could have gone to the campus Learning Center for tutoring. He could have enrolled in an online video course for extra help.

However, he did what he'd "become accustomed" to doing: nothing.

I don't know that he consciously waited to be rescued. But he certainly did not have the skills, or even the motivation, to seek and receive the help that was ready and waiting for him to take initiative.

For the first time in his life, he failed a course. The financial price was high, but the emotional toll was far higher. He began to spiral into anxiety and despair, totally out of character for him.

Had I been willing to experience the small pains of expecting Jonathon to become increasingly independent through the years, he might not have faced the overwhelming pain of unnecessary failure as a young adult.

- *Do you tend to be a hover mother?*
- *What are you doing to prepare your children to be independent adults?*
- *What are some telltale signs in your children that you might be doing too much for them instead of allowing them to take on new responsibilities, develop independent decision making, and bear the brunt of their choices (good or bad)?*



Be careful that you don't become a hover mother!

**Hover mothers develop kids who will do what they are accustomed to doing...
*nothing.***

18 - The Gift of Getting It Together

by Stephanie Shott

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." Ephesians 2:10 NKJV

My hubby and I planned a staycation a couple years ago and I was super excited about the long list of things I was going to get done. I had a week laid out that would look something like Spring Cleaning on steroids.

But somehow I blinked and the week flew by and there were only a few check marked on my mental to-do list.

I didn't think I really needed to write it all down. After all, we have iPhones and apps that organize our lives now, right? But what I seemed to have slowly discovered the hard way is that there is no app or calendar system that beats the feeling of accomplishment and freedom I get when I write it all out, put it on my fridge, and check it off as I go along.

Okay... so maybe you can do that on your smart device too, but this girl is going old-school when it comes to my to-do list. But whether you use an app, a calendar on your smart device or you go ol' school like me, a measurable plan in place is better than a mental list any day.

Getting organized may be tough. Staying organized may be a tad tougher. **But being organized gives you the freedom to not only do the things you want to do, but also the things for which God created you.**

Routines, schedules and disciplines in our lives helps be more together in every area of our lives. Studies show organized people generally get more done, get more rest, and have more free time. I don't know about you, but I could use me a little of all that!

But, for me, being organized seems to come in waves. Sometimes I'm so organized my spices are in alphabetical order. Others times, I have piles of clean laundry on my couch for so long, we just start getting our clothes from the couch instead of from our dresser drawers.

Can you relate?

The thing is, our homes run more smoothly and our lives are much less chaotic when we get it together.

When you think about it, getting it together is a gift we give to ourselves and a gift we give to our families. Here are some ideas to help you get organized in 5 areas of a woman's life.

G - God: Getting it together with God will overflow into every other area of your life.

R - Relationships: Prioritizing relationships (God, family, friends, others) strengthens you and your family, and places significance to the most important relationships in your life.

E - Exercise/Health: Keeping yourself fit physically and mentally will not only make you feel healthier, but it will also help you be disciplined in other areas of your life.

A - Abode: Managing your home well will create an environment where life runs smoothly, your home is a sanctuary, and your children will want to come back well after they have left the nest.

T - Time: It's the stuff that life is made of. Until we can manage time, it's hard to manage anything else.

It's not always easy to get it together, but when we get it together in one area, we tend to get it together in other areas. And we don't have to do it all at once.

Here are some practical ideas to help you in a few of these areas:

God: 10 minutes in the Word, 10 minutes in prayer every morning before you head out.

Relationships: Make Wednesdays Wifey Wednesdays. Do something special for your hubby.

Time and Home: Create a chore chart and a daily schedule for yourself. You'll be amazed at what you get done when you write it all out.

Oh... and here's some help. **[Click this link for a free PDF](#)** from The MOM Initiative that will help you get it together in the area of your goals, appointments, schedule, menu planning, and even books you plan to read with your children.

- *What are some areas in which you need to get it together?*
- *Do you struggle with organization? Do you feel like you can never get it together? Are you often frazzled by your never-ending to-do list?*
- *What good works do you believe God wants you to do this week? How can you be prepared and more intentional about doing them?*

19 - Slaughtering the Sacred Cow of Busyness

by Kathy Howard

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." John 10:10 NIV

Our culture values busyness. In fact, many of us have bought the lie that "busyness" is good. That "busyness" proves we are in demand or indispensable! But all busyness manages to do is drain us physically, emotionally, relationally, and spiritually. If we don't have time to rest, renew, or relate, then we are too busy! Jesus came to give us abundant, "full" lives, not busy lives.

I challenge you to do something that could change your life, your relationships, and your faith. Use the following prompts to seriously evaluate the way you spend your time. The goal is to move from a "busy" life to a life that is full of God's plans, purposes, and peace.

1. **Start with prayer** - Ask for God's guidance and wisdom as you seek to bring your life in line with His best.
2. **Involve your family** - You need their support. Explain what you're doing and why. Your entire family could sit down together and prayerfully consider your commitments, including church activities.
3. **Make a list** - Be thorough. Include daily, weekly, and monthly activities. Include your individual activities and those of your family—anything you do on a regular basis.
4. **Wait** - Prayerfully let the list sit for a few days. Ask God to show you what things are from Him and what are not. Ask God to help you determine the limits of your time, resources, and energy.
5. **Discover your place of service** - God *does* have a place of service for you in your local church, so ask Him where He wants you. God has put the body together just as He determines and you are a part. Just keep in mind He does not intend for you to be a foot *and* a hand *and* an eye *and* a toe *and* an elbow . . .
6. **Make cuts** - Cut out activities and involvement as God directs. Unless God says otherwise, fulfill any commitments where people count on you, but do not volunteer for further service in

that area.

7. **Set limits** - for yourself for future activities too. You might base limits on a number or amount of time. Set some limits on your children's activities too. Teach them now how to live life at God's pace, with plenty of room for Him.

Now make a fresh commitment to God. This is an appointment you *should* have on your calendar every day. If you have fallen out of the habit of a regular quiet time, then you will need discipline to rebuild it. If your time with God has been rushed, commit to slowing the pace. **Use some of that new margin to foster intimacy with God.**

- *In what ways have you bought into the way our culture values busyness?*
- *What do you think is the difference between a "busy" life and a "full" life? Which would you use to describe your life?*
- *What is the biggest drain on your time and energy?*

Adapted from chapter 3 of "Fed Up with Flat Faith: 10 Attitudes and Actions to Pump Up Your Faith" by Kathy Howard. www.kathyhoward.org ©Kathy Howard, 2014

Moving from Busy to Blessed

1. Start with prayer
2. Involve your family
3. Make a list
4. Wait
5. Discover your place of service
6. Make cuts
7. Set limits

20 – Invasion of Chaos

By Tara Dovenbarger

“... the cares of this world ... choke the Word, and it becomes unfruitful.” Mark 4:19 NKJV

Have you ever sent your young child to school in her pajamas, when it wasn't pajama day? Not just any child, but your exceptionally innocent child who happens to have cognitive impairments, which do not allow her to speak? I hope not.

On this particular day I dug in my heels, determined to get it right. In the past, I overlooked pajama day due to my frenzied schedule. But not this time! **I strutted my innocent child to the bus wearing her bright pink pajamas and proudly waved her off.**

The bus rolled back the humbling facts that afternoon. My child who couldn't speak all the years before marched through the front door, jetted directly to the calendar, pointed, then said clear as a bell, “NO,

NO, NO PAJAMA DAY MOM. NO PAJAMA DAY.”

Ouch!

I felt like giving up. I did try. Life just became too hectic and disorganized to slow down and write details on the calendar. And my child faced a day of humiliation because of my hurried mistake.

I have to stop and wonder; is humiliation the biggest risk our children face with our unorganized and frenzied lives? Is there more at stake than just a chastening experience?

Yes, God's Word tells us there are deeper dangers to a hectic life. The steady invasion of chaos becomes a war against our primary job as moms. Our number one goal is to teach diligently our children the Word of God when we, “sit ... walk ... lie down ... and rise” (Deuteronomy 6:6-7). When our lives become too busy to even write down details on our calendar, how can we even hope to have enough time to teach our children the Word of God?

Care must also be taken while we diligently teach our family His Word. Jesus warns us about the frenzy of the world, which threatens the Word He puts in us. He compares the stress of life to weeds and thorns that choke the life of God out of us; “...the cares of this world, ... choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful” (Mark 4:19).

The weeds and thorns nourished by our overloaded agenda will destroy the growth of God's Word in our children's lives as well as our own.

Let's slow down. It is time to simplify our schedules, so we can focus on our primary job of teaching God's Word to our children, and allow time for God's Word to take deep root.

- *What weeds and thorns of unnecessary demands can you dig out of your life today?*
- *What step can you take to stop the "steady invasion of chaos" from your home?*
- *Do you ever struggle finding time to teach your family God's Word? How can you begin to make this a priority?*



Let's slow down, simplify our schedules, teach our children God's Word and give it time to take deep root in their hearts.

21 - Six Ways to Get Your God Time and Help Your Children Get Theirs

by [Dana Bailey](#)

"But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the LORD God my refuge that I may tell of all your works." Psalm 73:28 ESV

As a mom with little ones very close in age I have often struggled to have a consistent quiet time.

About the time I think I have a great routine down something changes. My toddler who used to sleep late now wakes up early and my husband started working from home.

With the every-changing fluidity of motherhood and life, I've had to learn how to be creative when it comes to getting my "God time" in. **Making time for the Lord in my day won't guarantee my everything will be better, but it will help me be better and I will be better prepared for what does happen in my day.**

As a mom of 11 (yes... 11) kids who tries desperately to guard her "God time" and wants to teach my children how to do the same, I thought I'd share with you a few things I've learned:

1. **Keep my Bible open all day** - I learned this from Ruth Bell Graham. She would keep her Bible open in a central place and when she had a moment she would sit and read. Now we have Bibles on our devices and can take our Bible with us everywhere we go. Teach your children to keep their Bibles open all day too. Make it fun to run over, read a verse or two with your kids.
2. **Meditate on the Word** - Pick one passage of Scripture and meditate on it all day. I learned from my mom to write Bible verses on index cards and put them up wherever I will spend a lot of time. I will pray them to the Lord and personalize it. Teach your children how to meditate on the Word by speaking God's Word out loud and talking about the verse they read throughout the day.
3. **Pray without ceasing** – *"Be gracious to me, O LORD, for to you do I cry all the day"* (Psalm 86:3 ESV). As a mom this is so important. We can be in a constant conversation with the Lord all day. When I do this I am better able to keep my focus on what is important instead of what is urgent. Make prayer as natural as breathing for your children by praying out loud for them and with them.

4. **Pray for 5 minutes** - *"But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you"* (Matthew 6:6 ESV). If you can't find five minutes in your day to pray then you are way too busy. I just mentioned praying all day, but spending five *uninterrupted* minutes of prayer will calm your heart, refocus your mind, refresh you, and prepare you for your day. Many times my five minutes of prayer were done in my bed before I got up in the morning. It is a perfect way to start my day, with my mind focused on the Lord instead of my to-do list. Your children will mimic you. **Let them see you pray for 5 minutes and pray with them for 5 minutes so they will be participants of their own faith and not spectators of yours.**
5. **Use a devotional** - I get several devotionals in my inbox. I also have several favorite devotional books. While apps are handy, I still like my books so I can highlight what speaks to me. Help your children pick out an age-appropriate devotional for themselves to read each day.
6. **Have devotions with your kids** - This changed my life. Many years ago, I suffered from depression. I spent no time in the Word, but I did lead my kids in a morning devotion time. One morning the Holy Spirit spoke to me during our devotion time and really got my attention - all while I was "teaching" my kids about God. The Lord can use whatever He wants to speak to us, even a child's devotion book.

I know these things may sound really simple but they can help busy moms like you and me tuck ourselves away with God every day and help us keep focused on the Lord and His Word throughout the day. Five minutes may not seem like much, and to be honest, I treasure those times when it is much more, but for those days when life gets crazy, I am still determined to get my time in with God.

If you miss a day or two or you are in a season where sitting down is impossible, you can practice these five things and still be refreshed and prepared to go about your day.

You will never regret the time you spend with the Lord. Never!

- *How difficult is it for you to have a God time every day?*
- *How important do you think it is to spend time reading the Bible and praying every day?*
- *What difference do you see when you make time for God?*

**Help your children become participants of their own faith
and not just spectators of yours.**

Stephanie Shott

22 - Set the Date!

by [Holly Smith](#)

"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" Micah 6:8 ESV

Soon after our engagement, my Chris and I set the date for our wedding. No haphazard thing, we set the precise day and time. That one detail alone, allowed for us to further plan, invite and ready ourselves for the GRAND DAY!

There were travel arrangements, flowers, luncheons and dinners, locations, and a vast array of other factors that needed to be set, as well. **It was a beautiful day - all because we planned specifically for the event to happen.**

On our twentieth wedding anniversary, we wanted so badly to plan a special day amid low funds. It didn't just happen, though. We had to make arrangements for our children, reserve a lovely spot in Estes Park and set aside the money to cover those items and the gas. **We didn't plan very well. It wasn't perfect. But then and there, God taught us about daily bread and His faithful provision.**

So as we begin to prepare our hearts for the end of summer and beginning of a new school year (and really all year long), **I wanted to share with you one secret that has kept me over the several years...set a date with God.**

Don't just say it or think it. Write down the day and time on your calendar! Let it be an event.

I love how Steve Farrar writes that quality time comes in quantity time. To me, that means that when I schedule a purposeful time to be alone with God, I am anticipating it will be quality time with God.

It is no haphazard thing. Set the date, the time, the LOCATION and plan for the materials you'd like to have along. Sometimes I take my camera (like here [on my fall-filled walk](#)), a journal, pen, and my Bible. Sometimes I carry nothing but an open heart willing to see what God has in store for our time. I go anticipating!

And you better believe the event is not just for you alone. This time is for the two of you - you and your Savior - walking together. So I talk with Him. I listen. I get very still and I feel His nearness. HE plans to not only be in attendance, but to take a major part in our time together.

He plans for you. You are written on His very Hand and He cannot forget your time together. He never will.

The time will be beautiful. It may not be perfect, but He will teach you and help you embrace the gifts His Holy Spirit has given you. He applies a salve of peace, joy, patience, understanding, wisdom, and love. He directs your path and shows you this is the way, walk in it.

For all those gifts and a thousand beside, I challenge you to set the date(s) this school year with the LORD. It will be the one school supply that should be at the top of the list!

- *Do you currently have an intentionally consistent date with God?*
- *If not, what is keeping you from setting one?*
- *What do you think you would gain from spending regular, quantity time with God?*



**He plans for you. You are written on His very Hand and
He cannot forget your time together. He never will.**

Holly Smith

23 – Tuning in the Morning Anchor

by [Julie Sanders](#)

“O God, You are my God; Early will I seek You; My soul thirsts for You; My flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water.” Psalm 63:1 NKJV

Like a well-planned symphony, morning begins. Digital chimes shatter my peaceful dreams, and on cue, my husband stirs to turn on the news, inviting the early morning anchor into our bedroom. I silently beg for more minutes, more peace, more quiet. Before I muster groggy groans, the dog calls from the kitchen and scratches out a request on the door.

Feet hit the floor as a distant shower joins the background score. “I’m tired,” “Let me out,” “I’m hungry,” “Mom?” and “Honey?” ring out in synchronized chorus. The phone waits silently, but promising. Like a cymbal closing a song, the coffee maker’s beep signals an end to the first verse.

Before a bite is eaten or a shade raised, morning voices have me running in all directions.

Voices fill each day of the school year, like ammunition in a game of dodge ball. Whatever the style of schooling, the year brings new voices into the choir - teachers, curriculum, coaches, peers, parents, and administrators.

Trying to respond to every statement, request, and question leaves a mom feeling unsure about whose voice should command her attention. With so many people vying for our ear, how do we cut through the noise and know where to turn?

People in your life may not even wait for the alarm to sound before they beg to be heard, and they will rarely give you a day off. Every mom knows that if it’s too quiet, something’s wrong! **Don’t wait for a healthy silence to set in; take initiative to turn up the right voices and turn down the wrong ones.**

Early - Before the noise starts, tune in to the voice of the Lord. “In the morning, LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly” (Psalm 5:3 NIV). The whole day will be different when you carve out precious minutes while it’s still quiet. For mothers, this usually means acting before anyone else stirs or other voices compete with the one of God’s truth. **Steps to success are easier than they may seem to a sleepy mama:**

- Get out of the bed.

- Sit up in a chair.
- Open your Bible and read it.
- Pray out loud (this helps when you're groggy).
- Coffee is awesome, but optional.

Sacrificing a few minutes in bed pays off all day. The enemy tries to fool us into thinking we need more sleep to answer the chorus of voices, but what we need more is to hear the voice of God through His word and prayer.

By starting early, a mom sets the tone in her home, sets the direction of her schedule, and sets her perspective to handle what comes her way. God is the true "morning anchor."

Daily – There's no shortage of voices telling a mom how to mother. Turn on the TV, scroll down the screen, or open a magazine to hear the experts. Listening to God's voice daily keeps a fresh flow of His principles moving through our hearts, minds, and mouths. We need to know His truth as the authority we can count on.

As we listen to His voice, we have His words to repeat. A regular habit of listening to God's take on life prepares us to navigate each day's challenges with Him as the anchor.

Simply – If it's hard to listen to the one Voice that matters most, the voice of God's truth, then turn down the competition. Simplify life to amplify God's voice.

Evaluate and eliminate excessive voices in your world if they make it hard for you to attend to God's word and His Spirit. If prayer is always interrupted by the phone, a to-do list, or a neighbor, it may be time to find a closet and hide.

Moms are problem solvers: Put your phone away when you pray. If a digital device leads to distraction, use paper resources for reading or journaling. If a long passage of Scripture overwhelms you to discouragement, be realistic and choose a manageable portion. If all of the expectations of people drain you and draw you away from God, say, "No," and limit the voices you listen to. To hear what's being broadcast on the "main channel," turn down the competing noise in your life.

Every mom will hear a cacophony of voices each day. **There is one Voice we must hear to be the mothers we are called to be.**

Start early each morning, persist each day, and simplify to amplify God's truth to you. We will be greater moms when we listen to the voice of the true "morning anchor."

- *Do you struggle with getting busy with life before you bask in the presence of God every morning?*
- *What are the things that seem to be competing noises in your life that may prevent you from tuning into your morning anchor?*
- *Have you made God's voice the most important voice to help you navigate your life as a wife, mom, friend, co-worker, servant of God, and every other area of your life? If not, how can His voice help you most today?*

Wonder how you can find time to tune in to God's voice?

**Steps to success are easier than they may
seem to a sleepy mama:**

- Get out of the bed.
- Sit up in a chair.
- Open your Bible and read it.
- Pray out loud (this helps when you're groggy).
- Coffee is awesome, but optional.

Julie Sanders

24 – Will I Be a Good Mom?

By: [Melissa Mashburn](#)

"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Romans 10:17 NKJV

Spoiled. Self-centered. Sassy. Three not flattering words used to describe myself as a young adult. Married shortly after my twenty-first birthday to a man I had only known for ten months, I settled into my own perfectly planned out world. Not knowing that God had something so completely different planned for me.

Less than two months into life as a newlywed the walls came crashing down when I found out that I was pregnant. This was not a part of my plan for my life at this point. The pregnancy threw my emotions into overdrive and our blissful new marriage turned into a war zone. We fought all the time. I was sick all day long for six months. It was here that God began to break me.

My husband had been brought up in a Christian home, with a loving mom and dad, and it was during this time that my mother-in-law gave me a Bible. It was a beautiful Life Application Study Bible, but it was for my twenty-first birthday, and I was an unbeliever.

Why would she give me this?

Why for my 21st birthday?

Why did she hate me?

These are the honest to goodness questions that ran through my mind during this time, and even through my mouth to my husband. That Bible sat in the box in my bedroom for months after my birthday. Just looking at it frustrated me, but my husband assured me it was a very nice gift and his mom meant well. I still didn't understand, but left it out just in case she stopped by the house. She planted a seed ([1 Corinthians 3:6 NLT](#)) and I didn't even realize it.

My world had been turned upside down and in a few short months I would be a mom. Me, a mom. *How did that happen?* I could barely take care of myself and I certainly didn't have life as figured out as I thought I had. *What was I going to do?*

Then it happened. I went over and picked up that Bible and started reading it. I had no clue. I had never read it before, so I started in Genesis. While I was reading my husband walked in and I hit him with about a bazillion questions.

- *What's the deal with Cain and Abel?*
- *Oh my, did you know there was a prostitute in the Bible?*
- *Did Lot's wife really turn to salt?*

He just looked at me and giggled a little, then flippantly said, "Don't you know those stories?" I shook my head and said I had never heard them before. This one little moment opened the door to lots of discussions and some healing in our fractured, frazzled newlywed life, but the questions still floated around in my head.

How can I be a good mom? I'm so self-centered and I can barely take care of myself. What if I mess this up? Will I be a good mom?

It was there, in the middle of the night, eight months pregnant, wide awake that I just sat up in bed and began to sob. In that moment of brokenness, I cried out to God and asked Him to take over my life. I laid down my will and let Him take control for the first time ever. That seed that my mother-in-law planted had been growing.

"As soon as I pray, You answer me; You encourage me by giving me strength." [Psalm 138:3 NLT](#)

I had no idea what kind of mom I would be, but that was a fear I would no longer face alone. God had a plan and a purpose for my life ([Jeremiah 29:11](#)) and I could finally rest in that and not try to figure it all out on my own.

I learned God could help me be a good mom. And I've discovered He can also help me navigate these back-to-school days with my kids and every other day too.

- *Have you ever wondered if you will be a good mom? Asked God to help you?*
- *If you are pregnant or a new mom, what scares you the most about this stage of your life?*
- *Who do you lean on when your world just doesn't go as you planned?*

I wondered, "How can I be a good mom? I'm so self-centered and I can barely take care of myself. What if I mess this up?"

But I've learned through the years that God can help me be a good mom.



25 - The Black Hole of Hard Days

by Christen Price

"When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears and delivers them out of all their troubles."

Psalm 34:17 NKJV

Do you ever feel like you are this huge black hole that bad things keep happening to? I know there is the common expression, "when it rains it pours" and sister, I'd have to agree. I hate saying that; it makes me sound so pessimistic. But, some days are just extremely hard, especially being a mom.

- Days when you, your husband, and your kids are all sick with a stomach bug. All you desperately want is a day in bed but you have to take care of everyone else.
- When your air conditioner breaks in the summer heat, your computer freezes, and your dishes just keep piling up in the sink. Your house looks like you never clean even though you do try.
- It is especially hard on the days when you have to fight the crowds at Target for back-to-school supplies, get ready for gymnastics, have something on the table for dinner, and go to work early for an event.

Being a mom is an ever-evolving balancing act and some days we get it together better than others. Some days aren't a big black hole of bad things; it is on these days we remember that life really is good and God really is on our side.

I cherish the days when I wake up early, have my devotion, and make a list of things to do on my "sanity checklist" before my girls get out of bed asking for chocolate toast (they already love Nutella). I feel like myself, like I can do this mom thing. I'm thankful for these days because they give me hope when I'm in the black hole.

I'm sure my fellow MOM's have tons of advice on these pages about "getting-it-together." They are experts at meal-planning, organizing, and creating structure in the midst of chaos. I admire them and soak up their advice because lists really do help me feel more together. **But, when I'm in my black hole days, I don't want a list. I want a shoulder to cry on, a friend that says, "I feel that way too."**

That's the advice I want to give you today, sweet mom. I feel like you do. I am a mess. I wonder if something is wrong with me. I feel extremely guilty when I have to work instead of being at home with my kids. I eat frozen pizza on weeknights.

On my black hole days, I allow myself to cry; really cry. I try hard not to take out any anger on my husband but sometimes I do show my temper. I apologize. I remind myself that I am loved and that this is only temporary.

When you don't feel like you have it all together, allow yourself some grace. **Mama, you are doing a million different things for many people. Be proud of your efforts and remind yourself that there is always tomorrow.** The list doesn't have to be completed all in one day. You are allowed days of grace.

Being a mom is a tremendous gift but it also takes a tremendous amount of work. Some days you will rock this mom thing and other days you will want to hide under a rock. That's part of the balancing act so just go with it. Whether you are having a great day or a black hole kind of day; have hope, show grace, and be proud to call yourself a mom.

- *Do you have a shoulder to cry on when you're facing those black-hole days?*
- *What are some of the emotions you struggle with when you're knee-deep in a black-hole kind of day?*
- *How do you - and how could you - handle it when you blow it with your kids?*

When I'm in my black hole days, I don't want a list. I want a shoulder to cry on, a friend that says, "I feel that way too."

Christen Price

26 – Are You Kidding Me?

by Debbie Taylor Williams

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, PEACE, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...” Galatians 5:22-23 NAS

Lauren, my thirty-year-old daughter, looked across the kitchen bar from me as I unloaded the dishwasher one morning. “Are you kidding?” she laughed. “Mom, you really do things ahead of time,” she commented as I placed the plates and silverware on the table for dinner. For a few months, Lauren, her husband, and their two boys, one and a half and three, stayed with us while they house shopped. It was then that Lauren got a bird’s eye view of my early childhood organization and what kept me sane when she and her brother were school age.

You may agree with Lauren that I did things a “little ahead of time.” BUT, it worked for me and it might work for you. Before you decide, evaluate:

- Do I typically feel rushed on school mornings?
- Do I find myself angry because so much is piled up for me to do?
- Do I know what Galatians 5:22-23 says about being filled with “love, joy, peace, patience,” but find them on my wish list rather than on my heart?

I understand. I remember the day that I “lost it” with the kids. Guilt overwhelmed me. I realized that I could pray a thousand times, “Lord, fill me with *your* spirit. Give me *your* peace and patience with my kids.” **But, if I wasn’t getting enough sleep, I was asking God to do something in my body for which it wasn’t created.** It wasn’t created to go without sleep. Why is sleep illusive? Often because we’re not organized. Get a little more organized and you’ll get a little more sleep. Get a little more sleep and you’ll be a little more peaceful, patient mom.

Steps for GETTING IT TOGETHER: Do it NOW. Do it the NIGHT BEFORE.

1. Loading the Dishwasher.

Loading/unloading the dishwasher takes time. So, cut out unnecessary steps. See that cereal bowl you just rinsed that you’re about to put in the dishwasher and take out the next morning? It’s clean. You’ve already run it under the hot water with a sudsy sponge. Save yourself some time. Grab the dishtowel, dry it, and set it on the counter for cereal in the morning. You’ve eliminated unnecessary steps.

2. Unloading the Dishwasher.

Stop! Don't put the plates, spoons, and glasses in the cabinet. Aren't you going to have to pull them out for the next meal? Instead, set them on the table or counter. You're ahead of the game. Add the napkin and the table is set!

3. Making the Bed.

You may think the bed has to be made perfectly and that will take time; therefore you'll do it later. But, chances are the unmade bed may become another item on your long "to do" list. Instead, eliminate it. While getting out of bed, throw the covers up toward the headboard. Chunk the decorative pillows on the bed in a swift move on your steps to the bathroom. Voila! Bed made. Maybe not perfectly made, but off your "to-do" list.

4. Prevent Homework and Special Project Surprises.

Have you ever passed the grocery store, arrived home, gotten little one out of their car seat, everyone settled, only to have your five-year-old announce, "I'm supposed to take cupcakes tomorrow." Not fun! Fuming, you load the kids back in the car, asking, "Why didn't you tell me on the way home?"

Rather than repeat this situation more times than you'd like, use drive home time to visit with your child rather than chat on your cell phone. Talk to your children about their day. Ask them, "What's up for tomorrow? Any field trips? Are you having a party? Does mommy need to stop by the store? What did your teacher ask you to bring?" Look through their folder before you arrive home. Save yourself some time and exasperation.

Getting it together begins with you but will flow to your children. A few time savers will give you a few more minutes in bed. And more rested you can then pray, "Lord, fill me with Your love, joy, peace, patience," and He will. I'm not kidding!

You have an outside source of love, joy, peace, and patience through the Holy Spirit. **Pray and ask God to fill you with His Spirit each morning.**

- Which of the above time savers might work for you?
- Are you aware that God wants to help you?
- How does your ability to "Get it together" affect your children?

Steps for GETTING IT TOGETHER: NOW & the NIGHT BEFORE

1. Load & Unload the dishwasher
2. Make the bed
3. Prevent homework & special project surprises



27 - From Crazy to Not so Crazy

by [Dana Bailey](#)

"But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way." 1 Corinthians 14:40 NIV

I knew I was losing my mind. There was no question about it. It was gone, never to return again.

I had just had my fifth baby and my oldest wasn't even five years old yet. Yep, my mind was gone! It was not an old wives' tale that with each pregnancy you lose brain cells. **Five babies in less than five years had wiped out every brain cell I had.**

Little things were big things. Getting dressed to go somewhere was much like an Olympic event. Cooking dinner or simple household duties were major jobs with five little people following me around and demanding my time. **I am not a naturally organized person. But since I read in scripture that God is a God of order and we are made in His image, then I knew there was an "orderly" gene in me somewhere. I just had to find it.**

So, I began asking the Lord to please help me. We were drowning in clutter, messes and disorganization. Just once I wanted to say to a kid, "Go put your shoes on" and they would know exactly where BOTH shoes were.

I found a book (sorry, I don't remember the name of it) that became my answer to prayer. It was written by a mom with a house full of kids. SCORE! **This mom helped me find my "orderly" gene. Here are a few of the things I learned:**

1. **Make a list of what needs to be done daily** - I learned to do this the night before. When I got up the next morning I had a plan. I knew where I needed to start. This helped me a lot because so many times I would get up without a plan and become frustrated by the horrible mess and give up before I ever got started.
2. **Get your kids involved in your day** - We made beds together and unloaded the dishwasher together. When I did laundry, the kids did laundry. I taught them as we went along.
3. **Chore training** - We have a saying in our house, "If they are old enough to make the mess, they are old enough to clean it up." Of course this doesn't go for babies. But my 14-month-old son Charlie is already learning how to pick up his toys after he plays with them. I made up a chore chart when I was first learning how to manage my home. I assigned simple age appropriate chores to the kids and then I taught them how to do their chores. The actual

training time never took more than 5 minutes. I wanted my kids to learn how to take pride and ownership in the home they lived in and learning how to take care of it was the first step.

4. **Routine** - My routine became the lifeblood of my day. I had no schedule before, we just flew by the seat of our pants and the end result was a stressed out exhausted mom. I divided my day into one-hour slots and then I came up with a simple schedule that I tweaked until it finally fit us. Keep it simple!

These are only 4 things, but they totally changed my life. My home went from a frantic, crazy disaster to a not-so-frantic, crazy disaster. I mean, when you have five kids in less than five years, crazy is just part of it. But it was a doable crazy. And my brain cells, which were beginning to return, would be sucked out again by six more babies over the next fifteen years.

- *When you walk in your home, how does it make you feel? Stressed, frustrated, peaceful?*
- *If you struggle with clutter in your home? If so, why do you think you do?*
- *Were you taught as a child to be orderly?*

*4 things that totally changed my life
and helped me
get it together.*

*My home went
from a frantic,
crazy disaster to a
not-so-frantic,
crazy disaster.*



28 – The Standard Mom

by Julie Sanders

"Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live ... they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God."

Titus 2:3-5 NIV

Six o'clock and the kitchen smelled empty. She passed a bag of crackers to the kids, explaining dad wasn't home yet and dinner would be in an hour. They grumbled about being hungry as they ran to their rooms, and she turned doubtfully to the refrigerator for inspiration.

Good intentions of making a weekly menu had gone sour like the jug of milk on the door. A faint memory of frozen ravioli sent her digging through the freezer; finding a bag of green beans, long ago fallen behind the shelves, produced hope. No one needed to order pizza tonight!

The pasta and veggies began to simmer, as if it was planned when Thursday still seemed far off. Feeling encouraged, she decided to set the table and light a candle; a candle makes everything feel right. She had to relocate a week old stack of paper to make room for plates, and a pile of clean towels on a chair had to be tossed on the couch. Tripping over a backpack, she turned to pull candles out of the pantry, but an avalanche of taco seasoning packets fell out instead. **She was losing her resolve.** Opening the cabinet, she breathed a frustrated sigh to find that the glasses were all either still in the dishwasher or scattered around the house where people watched TV, did homework, or just got in a hurry.

Just as she opened her mouth to call the kids for a search and rescue cups expedition, a glance around the kitchen revealed six pairs of shoes left under stools, below the coat rack, and under that forgotten backpack. **The stress of mess bubbled up in her mind and heart just as pasta froth began to spillover the edge of the pot.** Fortunately, her husband came in right on cue, so she handed him a spoon and directions not to burn dinner, while she escaped for a five minute sanity break, feeling proud of herself for resisting a meltdown. She raced past bags, shoes, hungry kids, and more papers on the way up the steps.

Shutting the bedroom door, she closed her eyes and breathed a sigh of relief. **"What is wrong with my messy family? Why can't they get it together?"** she wondered out loud. And opening her

eyes, her eyes were truly opened. **She realized their bed was covered with laundry and the chair was plastered with cat hair; there was nowhere to sit. She was living in a mess.**

As the keeper of their home, she was keeping chaos. Perfection wasn't the goal, but a peaceful atmosphere was. The family had accepted the standard she set and had settled for neglect as normal. If she wanted her family to get it together, she needed to take the first step and change the atmosphere.

The piles and shoes and taco packets could wait, but the pasta was ready and the kids had poured Dixie cups of milk for everyone. They waited nervously downstairs to see how the lady of the house would emerge. She lit the candle and received a hopeful kiss from her husband before they all sat down and gave thanks.

Silently, she prayed her own prayer, asking the Lord to help her see their life with new eyes and to manage their home in a peaceful way. The family doesn't need candles every night, but they do need to see evidence of her love for them, the fruit of God's Spirit in her and an example of a mom letting God keep her priorities together.

Lord,

I'm so glad you love me whether or not I'm in a mess or getting it together. I want to care for my home and family in a way that reflects your standards of order and diligence, grace, and peace. Would you open my eyes to the standard I'm setting? Help me to grow my skill in creating a climate that's an earthly picture of Your gifts.

- *Do you feel like you know how to manage your home? Is there an older, experienced mom around you who can give you some tips?*
- *What excess or clutter can you eliminate? Start with one pile, one shoe at a time.*
- *Need a fresh view of your environment? Take pictures of each room, wait two days, then view them with a friend, spouse, or alone with the Lord.*
- *What one thing could you do today to show your family a standard of peaceful, diligent habits?*

As the keeper of their home, she was keeping chaos.

Perfection wasn't the goal,

but a peaceful atmosphere was.

Julie Sanders



29 - A Backup Plan for Moms

by Stephanie Shott

"She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household is clothed with scarlet"
Proverbs 31:21 NKJV

Have you ever felt like your household would fall apart if you were gone for just a couple of days?

Moms tend to be the glue that holds the fabric of the family together and keeps everything going according to plan.

So, if you've ever been on a retreat, a weekend with the girls, had to have surgery and were out of commission for a week or so, you know how chaotic and confusing things can be at home.

It seems like no one knows where things go, how to get things done, when appointments are, which meds to take when, what bills to pay and when, or what to buy at the grocery store.

ALL moms need a backup plan.

Something that condenses the important things you do on a daily basis so those *must-do* things don't slip through the cracks.

When you read through Proverbs 31, you find that she was one crazy busy woman... just like you and me. But Proverbs 31:21 reminds us that she wasn't only busy doing the her daily duties, but **she planned for the future and prepared her family for unforeseen days ahead.**

Proverbs 14:1 tells us a wise woman builds her house. Now, I've never built a house, but my hubby has remodeled one and I can tell you that a lot of planning and preparation go into it and there are certain permits that need to be pulled in order to be sure that it can withstand the test of time and the forces of nature.

If you and I are going to build our homes to stand the test of time and prepare our families for an unforeseeable future, it's a good idea to have a backup plan in place so you will have less worries the next time you decide to go on a ladies retreat, on a weekend trip with your friends, have to have surgery, or just have a bad cold and don't feel like peeking your head out from under the covers.

The MOM Initiative has prepared an super easy **BACK UP PLAN FOR MOMS** for you. All you need to do is **click this link, download it and print it out**. Fill it out and...Viola (*WHAALAA for girls like me who like things to read the way they sound*)! You've got a backup plan for your family!

Now go look in the mirror! You are looking more and more like the illusive Mrs. Proverbs 31 Woman every day! ;-)

- *What are some things you do that your husband would not have a clue about how to handle if you were out of town?*
- *When you look at the BACK UP PLAN FOR MOMS we provided, what might be missing that you need to add?*
- *Does the Proverbs 31 woman intimidate you as much as she intimidates me?*



"She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household is clothed with scarlet"

Proverbs 31:21 NKJV

30 - Tips to Maximize Your Time

by Kathy Howard

"So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom" Psalms 90:12 ESV

Moms have so many responsibilities and tasks that consume our time. It seems that the relatively unimportant tasks require the most time, leaving less time for the really important things like quality time with the kids or a good night's sleep.

It only makes sense to figure out ways to spend less time on the routine to make more time for the rest. The following tips will help moms make those "have to" tasks more efficient, thus maximizing the remaining time for the important.

1. Meal prep

- Chopped veggies – Chop all the veggies you'll need for the week at one time
- Ground meat – Brown hamburger meat for more than one meal at a time
- Double recipes 1 or 2 times a week – Freeze the extras and keep for a busy day or to take to a sick friend
- Plan your meals a week or more at a time – check out www.CookingForTheRushed.com
- "4 Weeks to Fill Your Freezer" – See www.MoneySavingMom.com
- Meal co-op – Gather a group of friends who will make recipes in bulk and share with each other for variety
- School lunches – Prepare multiples of single-serving, mom-approved lunch items for a week and store in fridge. Now the kids can pack their own lunch!

2. Laundry

- Ironing – Foil under the board cover will generate heat & "iron" both sides at once

- Train yourself & the family to minimize laundry by setting a few “dirty rules.” Here are a few examples:
 - If you tried it on and changed your mind, it’s not dirty.
 - If you only wore the dress pants to church once, hang them up.
- Wash “pre-sorted” laundry – Give each kid laundry safe mesh bags to presort their dirty clothes into darks, lights, etc. Wash and dry the whole bag and return to kid for folding!
- Wash larger loads less often
- Turn teens’ laundry over to them

3. Cleaning

- “Time-Pockets” - make a list of household chores that can be done in 15 minutes or less. Work your way through that list when a “time pocket” pops up
- Only if it’s really dirty – don’t vacuum, mop, dust or do any cleaning chore just because “it’s time.” Wait until it truly needs it!
- Learn to “Speed Clean” – check out “Speed Cleaning” by Jeff Campbell
- “House that Cleans Itself” by Mindy Starns Clark

4. Organizing

- Evernote App – Don’t waste time searching or trying to remember. Keep all your notes, ideas, and resources in one place
 - Keep things where you use them
 - Clean out closets and drawers – Stop wasting time cleaning stuff you never use and looking through the clutter to find needed items
- Which of these tips do you struggle with most?
- What are some ways that your good time management might have a positive affect your children and your home?
- What are some things that are consuming your time these days?



31 - How Do You Measure the Ideal Mom?

by Lynn Mosher

"Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies" Proverbs 31:10 NKJV

What is an ideal mom? Is there such a thing? And how could you measure her?

Measure defined means a unit or standard of measurement; the extent, dimensions, quantity, of something; any standard of comparison, estimation, or judgment; and so on. Some of the synonyms are model, example, scope, portion, scale, test, pattern, and gauge.

So, taking that into consideration, how do you measure a mother?

*by how tall she is?

*by the size of her brain?

*by the size of her gloves?

*by the size of her shoes?

Well, yes and no. As Christians, we usually use the ideal woman (or wife) description in Proverbs 31 as the standard of measurement. Her worth being far above rubies, so it says. In addition, verses 28-29 tell us:

Her children stand and bless her; so does her husband. He praises her with these words: "There are many fine women in the world, but you are the best of them all!" (TLB)

But how do you measure that?

*By their love for her in the eyes of her family, you can measure how tall she is.

*By the scope of her thoughts, words, and prayers, you can measure the size of her brain.

*By the extent of her giving and doing for her children, you can measure the size of her gloves.

*By where and how she walks, you can measure the size of her shoes.

I guess if we went by that, a valuable mom would then be very tall, have a very large head, and have large hands and feet. Well, I know that sounds silly. But not if you apply it spiritually.

I love this quote: ***"The measure of a woman's character is not what she gets from her ancestors, but what she leaves her descendants."*** ~ unknown

As a mother, how large am I, spiritually that is? How do I measure up to all this? How do I leave my daughter and my sons those values and character that I desire them to have? How do I make my husband and family proud of me and not bring shame to them? How am I an example to others?

To be and do all that is necessary, my life must mirror one pattern, one example, one standard...Jesus!

Other than the character traits of Proverbs 31, Paul listed several other traits in his letter to Titus.

The older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things—that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed. (Titus 2:3-5 NKJV)

All this, plus grace, strength, and faith, were passed on to me by my mother and my grandmother...so what am I leaving to my children? How do they see me? How do others see me? How am I being measured?

Not all mothers can stand the scrutiny of the ideal mother description. Not every mother will be "the best of them all." **Many come from backgrounds that did not supply the best conditions for learning to be a great mom.** Others lack the communication skills to relate properly with their children. Therefore, trusting in the Lord becomes essential.

Proverbs 31 is the survey for which every mother should self-analyze herself. Is she following the Lord in all she does? **We all as mothers fall short. However, having the desire in a mother's heart to show love and care to her children is the beginning.**

- *If you are a mother, what are you passing on to your children?*
- *What is an ideal mom to you?*
- *How large are you as a mother?*

Only God Himself fully appreciates the influence of a Christian mother in the molding of character in her children.

Billy Graham

EXTRAS to Help You Get It Together:

- [FAMILY GROCERY LIST](#)
- [WEEKLY MENU PLANNER](#)
- [100 DATE NIGHT IDEAS](#)

Back to School PRAYER Supplies:

- [Back to school prayers for our kids and teachers](#)
- [ABCs of Praying for Students](#) (printable bookmarks under "Prayer Resources")
- [Praying for the Teacher](#)
- [Praying for Kids as They Go](#) (printable reminder for mom's prayer time)
- [Real Moms Praying for Real Teachers](#)

Back to School Supply List for Mom:

- [How to be a Parent Teachers Love](#)
- [Bullyproof Your Child](#)
- [Beatin' the Back-to-School Blues: A+ Advice for Moms](#)
- [Breakfast Cheat Sheet](#) (printable to help with breakfast)
- [Best Advice for First Time Homeschooling Parents](#)
- [How to get kids to share about school](#)
- [Talking to your child about school \(when he doesn't want to talk\)](#)
- [10 Back to School Tips & Dozens of Ideas to Make it Happen!](#)
- [Top 5 School Supplies](#) (printable post card to send with kids)
- [5 Easy Back-to-School Traditions](#)
- [Our Back-to-School Tradition](#)

Supplies for Special Needs:

- [What to do if you suspect your child has a learning disability](#)
- [5 Back to School tips for Your Special Needs Child](#)
- [The ADHD Bill of Rights](#)
- [IEP Checklist](#)
- [7 Tips to Help Parent Your ADHD Child](#)

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HEY MOMS!

We celebrate motherhood together and The MOM Initiative is not only an online ministry to encourage you in your journey, but to link you with real life moms in your community.

We are inviting moms from across the globe to join the MILLION MOMS COMMUNITY who are STANDING UP and BOLDLY COMMITTING to RAISE THEIR CHILDREN FOR CHRIST!

Click this link and JOIN the MILLION MOMS COMMUNITY today!

HEY MENTORS, MINISTRY LEADERS & SMALL GROUP LEADERS! JOIN the REVOLUTION and BEGIN A MOM GROUP...

Beginning a MOM Group is easy and you're never alone to try to figure it out. We help you tailor a MOM Group uniquely suited for you that will minister to moms of all ages and help you not only minister to moms who know Christ but also reach those who don't!

*A **MOM Group** can be one-on-one or it can be a one or two with a group of 30. It can be in your church, in a home, in a park, a prison, a playground, a community center, a crisis pregnancy center, a doctor's office, the mission field, or wherever young moms can be found.*

AND DID YOU KNOW THAT IF ONLY 3 MOMS IN 1/2 OF THE CHURCHES IN THE UNITED STATES WOULD MENTOR JUST 3 OTHER MOTHERS, THAT WOULD TRANSLATE INTO REACHING OVER A MILLION MOMS FOR CHRIST and IMPACTING OVER 2.5 MILLION CHILDREN?

That's why we do what we do...but we need YOU to help us impact a million moms for Christ. It's easy, it's missional, and we are here to help!

To get started simply...

1. Fill out the form found by **clicking this link**.
2. Download the **MOM GROUP MINISTRY AGREEMENT** and mail it to us so that we can make it official and list you on our online database!

(We can't wait to partner together with you to minister to the hearts of moms!)