

10 SECRETS TO
BECOMING A
WORRY-FREE
Mam

CINDI McMENAMIN



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS
EUGENE, OREGON

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Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97402

www.harvesthousepublishers.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

McMenamin, Cindi

10 secrets to becoming a worry-free mom / Cindi McMenamini.

pages cm

ISBN 978-0-7369-6394-7 (pbk.)

ISBN 978-0-7369-6395-4 (eBook)

1. Mothers—Religious life. 2. Worry—Religious aspects—Christianity. I. Title. II. Title: Ten secrets of becoming a worry-free mom.

BV4529.18.M378 2016

248.8'431—dc23

2015028996

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Printed in the United States of America

16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 / BP-KBD / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*To the Only One who can calm the seas—as well as our fears—
and care for what we love far better than we can:
the Perfect Parent, the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Acknowledgments

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My heartfelt thanks to:

- My daughter, Dana, for your patience as I learned to trust God with all that I didn't know about how to be your mom. You turned out wonderfully by His grace. And you really did make this job an easy one.
- My armor-bearing friends—Connie Boyd, Lisa Pacheco, Amber Paulsen, and Barbara Willett—for your encouraging emails and powerful prayers as I struggled through the writing of this book.
- My wise, insightful, and beautifully Christlike college friend, Joani Bell, for giving me practically a whole chapter when I was stuck and needed stories moms can relate to with teaching they can emulate. I hope to be a mom like you someday, Joan.
- My own mom, Joyce, for teaching me to trust in God and take my concerns to Him in prayer.
- My other mom, Sharon, for loving me, Hugh, and Dana as your own.

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The Choice Is Yours

Imagine never having to worry about your children again. That would be the life, wouldn't it? No more sleepless nights, stressful days, or a stomach tied up in knots because of what your children are going through that you can't control, or what might happen to them that you constantly fear.

I'm sure you and I would never worry at all if we could be assured that our children would be happy, healthy, and safe all their days. But life comes with no such assurances. And while I personally can't promise the well-being of your children, I can offer you ten "secrets" through this book that I guarantee will change your life—and the lives of those you love—for the better.

The secrets in this book will help you eliminate worry, experience peace, and enjoy the task of parenting no matter how young or old your children are and no matter how much damage they might have done already. I'm not going to present "Ten Secrets to Make Your Child Behave" or "Ten Ways to Ensure They Never Get Hurt." Nor will I suggest how to convince them to make the choices you'd prefer. Instead, I'm going to offer you a partnership that promises peace and a lifestyle of leaning on the One who can do far more for and with your child than you ever could.

I'm inviting you into a partnership with the Living God that will change the way you think and act. And in this partnership, you will find the means to a worry-free, stress-free life.

I realize that by writing those words I am making a pretty big claim. But you see, I've walked through some of the situations you already fear and I've talked with many moms who have already experienced some of the very things you dread. And we've all gone through these situations in a partnership with the Perfect Parent whom we are convinced has our lives and the lives of our children securely in His hands.

Granted, there are so many variables that exist to cause us to worry about our children—their personalities and behavior, their environment, their friends or lack of them, their impulsiveness, their attitudes, their weaknesses, and their disposition toward the things that could derail them from their goals...and ours. There is a world outside their door that is waiting to gobble them up when it comes to destroying their values, challenging their beliefs, and luring them into materialism, greed, and a selfish way of life. Will they make the right decisions in order to succeed in life? Will they be happy and content? Will they hold on to the values you teach them? How will they raise their own children someday?

And what can we, as moms, do about it anyway?

Megan, a mom of four children under the age of seven, says: “I worry so much about my children getting hurt or even worse, dying. I get scared and think the worst. Maybe it's normal, but I don't like that feeling. I worry about when they get older, what they are doing at school, and if their friends are having any negative influences on them. The worry is constant and my kids are so young.”

And Sue, the mom of a 19-year-old son, said she has always worried, almost obsessively, over her son's physical safety.

“I worried countless times when he would be out with friends and I wouldn't be able to reach him. My initial response was often a paralyzing and dreadful feeling of fear. Just when I thought I couldn't take it any longer waiting to hear from him, he would text me. I would never wish upon anyone to experience the intense degree of fear I would feel. It was awful.”

But you and I were never meant to live that way.

Scripture says God has not given us the spirit of worry or fear, but of power, love, and a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7). And a mom can have a tremendously positive influence on her child when she is exercising not worry or fear, but God's power, love, and a sound mind.

I know that's the kind of mom you want to be—one who relies on God's power and love, and who has a sound mind.

Megan said, "My trust in God helps me to calm down, but I feel this trust in Him is stronger in other parts of my life, like my marriage and finances. I need to trust more in what God has planned for my children and their futures."

Megan is not alone in how she feels. Many worried moms believe in God. They just don't know how to connect their faith in God with their concern for their children. This book is written to share how you can take that step—one that will make all the difference in your life and your children's. It will show you, in a practical way, how to trust God on a daily basis with what is most important to you.

Trusting God with your children is not just wishful thinking and hoping God agrees with your prayers. This partnership I want to invite you into is a lifestyle of leaning on the Living God who can accomplish all that we cannot, and who can determine what is best for your child when you and I only think we can.

Why the Worry Must Go

Let's begin by looking at what worry does to us, our health, and our relationships.

1. Worry Stresses Us Out

Worry causes stress—and stress kills. Really, it does. Stress not only impacts a woman's health, appearance, relationships, and overall quality of life, stress prematurely ages us. Worry is also linked to

ulcers and other health problems. By choosing not to worry, you are investing in your health, which is a gift to yourself and your family.

According to a May 2014 Barna Research report, American moms are stressed, tired, overcommitted, and not sure how best to navigate work and family. While most moms with kids at home say they are satisfied with their family life (61 percent), for many it's also the greatest source of stress. In addition, moms (20 percent) are nearly twice as likely as women without kids (12 percent) to become stressed to the point of physical illness.¹ And worry plays a big part in that.

2. Worry Pushes Our Children Away

One reason children tend to not tell their parents all that is going on in their lives (or not be completely honest with them) is because they “don't want Mom to worry.”

While I was writing my book *When a Mom Inspires Her Daughter*, I asked daughters ages 12-40 about their relationships with their moms. Through their answers, I discovered that many daughters, regardless of their ages, said their moms worried about them too much. They knew their moms cared for them, but it concerned them, and at times annoyed them, that their mothers worried so much. By choosing not to worry, you are investing in your relationship with your children as well.

3. Worry Models Mistrust to Our Children

Worry says to our children and others, “God can't work this out.” Therefore, worry is the sin of having no confidence in God. I know that you, like me, aren't consciously thinking those words when you worry. But it's what we're communicating.

You don't want to display that type of mistrust to your children. How you live will, to a great degree, impact how your children live. What you worry about, they will tend to worry about. On the flip

side of that, where you put your trust will greatly impact how they will choose to handle situations in life too.

Even if your children don't imitate your faith or degree of trust, they will know where they should place their trust. Your choices—including whether you decide to worry or trust God—will speak louder to them than any lecture. Your choices will influence your children's choices well into their adulthood.

The Root of Worry

We tend to think that how much we worry is an indication of how much we love our children. But it is actually an indication of *how little we know God*. Because the more we get to know God as the all-knowing, all-loving, all-wise Perfect Parent, the more easily we will be able to trust Him with what is most important to us and experience peace—even if, right now, you...

- lose sleep at night worrying about where your child is.
- are fearful when it comes to your child's health or well-being.
- find yourself replaying past situations in your mind and thinking you could have responded to your child in a better way.
- are fearful of what the teenage years will hold for your son or daughter.
- are a single mom (or a mom who *feels* like she's raising her children alone).

The Journey Ahead

In this book you will hear from moms who have experienced what they thought was the worst, but saw the Lord come through in amazing ways. And in every chapter, you will discover scriptural

principles and practical guidance for eliminating worry from your life and experiencing God's peace.

You will also get a chance, at the end of each chapter, to apply what you've learned individually, as well as in community with other moms. The section called "Becoming a Worry-Free Mom—in Community" is meant for you to work through with another mom or two who also struggles with worry. Or, you can recommend this book for use in a group setting at your church or in someone's home. One of the fastest and most effective ways to give up a destructive habit like worrying is to come alongside others who can share accountability to one another.

Finally, each chapter ends with my prayer for you, or a prayer you can say yourself to help you grow in wisdom, knowledge, and intimacy with Christ so that you can be a worry-free mom and a wonderfully free woman.

Key to making all this happen is having a willingness to surrender your worries to the Lord. How does that happen?

The ABCs of Surrender

- **A - *Admit you do not have control over your child's life.*** Yes, you can control his or her form of entertainment, friends, and environment for a while. But as good of a monitor as you may be, your child will eventually make decisions on his or her own. And those decisions may, at times, grieve your heart. So give up that quest for control right now by saying aloud, "I am not in control of my child's life. God is."
- **B - *Believe God wants only the best for you and your child.*** Sometimes we fear that God will ask something of us or our children that we're not willing to give. When

you understand that God loves your child even more than you do, and that He loves you more than you can imagine, there is peace in placing yourself and your child in God's hands. After you've admitted you don't have control, take the next step and believe that His control of your life, as well as your child's, is truly a good thing.

- **C - Commit yourself to a deeper knowledge of God.** I strongly believe that the extent of our worry is directly related to how well we know God. Notice I didn't say our worrying is related to how well we *trust* God. The reason is this: When we truly know Him and understand all that He is capable of, we can't help but trust Him. Through familiarity and intimate knowledge comes trust. So commit yourself right now to reading through this entire book, completing the application sections, and getting to know God better than you ever have before. As you do, your worries will fall by the way-side. And you'll have a new, healthier habit: trust.

The Choice Is Yours

Are you ready to depend on God to do the heavy lifting with the worries that are weighing you down? You can choose to be controlled by your circumstances (and keep worrying), or you can yield yourself to the One who controls all circumstances.

Choose to be controlled by the still, small voice of the One who can still any storm...the One who beckons you to be still and know that He is God over everything, including your children.

Choose to partner with the Perfect Parent.

What If I'm Not Doing This Right?

Secret 1: Partnering with the Perfect Parent

If you've ever thought *What if I'm not doing this right?*, you are not alone.

Every one of us has wondered, at one time or another, if we're up for this task of mothering or if we're just messing up our kids.

What if I'm not involved enough in their lives?

What if I'm holding them back?

What if I'm too strict?

What if I'm not strict enough?

What if my own dysfunction is rubbing off on them?

No, you're not the only mom who wrestles with insecurities and thoughts that you're in over your head. And you're not the only mom who beats yourself up when your children behave badly, when you discover they were in an unsafe situation, or when they make a choice that breaks your heart. As moms we blame ourselves for not being able to discern their every need, for working too much and seeing them too little, for being on the phone when we should be in their faces, and for not knowing the latest when it comes to what might be in their food—or in the air—that is now linked to causing cancer.

We blame ourselves, feel the guilt, and believe we are solely responsible for how they turn out.

Kelly, a young mom (who, in my opinion, has it together far more than many moms I've observed) worries about how she is raising her only son, three-year-old Dexter.

“Since I'm a natural worrywart, I have many concerns. I worry that he will pick up our bad habits. I worry that we could be doing more to help him be successful in the future and be all that God intended him to be. I worry about whether or not we are building a good foundation for him to develop a relationship with God that he can depend on.

“I also worry about how he treats others and if he is learning respect. I worry that his happy spirit might diminish. I worry that we are too hard on him or provide too much pressure, and that we give in to his demands too often. I worry too about what effect it will have on him with all grandparents, cousins, and immediate family living long distance from us, and about the type of environment he is growing up in and how different that is from my and my husband's childhood experience. I worry about the food we eat and how all the new additives and sugars might affect his development and his ability to learn.

“As he approaches grade school, I worry about the exposure to peer pressure and what questions he might come home with; playing sports and the competitiveness even at young ages; affording the type of schooling best for my child to learn and reach his full potential; and managing a school schedule with both working parents. I also worry about our ability to steer his interests in the right direction and give him the best opportunities to explore, making sure there is time to be a kid and play.

“I worry about navigating what he sees and hears in the world. Obviously, we go out, get on planes, go to malls, and visit other

people, but once he goes off to school he'll be exposed to different values.”

Sometimes Kelly even worries about what Dexter worries about—his fears at noises in the middle of the night, his thought that bad guys might enter the house while they're sleeping, and so on. And sometimes she's worried that her concerns are causing *him* to worry.

“Many times he can sense when I am upset or worried, which I worry that I shouldn't project in front of him.”

Oh the cycle of fear, worry, and guilt that we put ourselves through!

The Weight on Our Shoulders

According to a 2014 Barna Group report, the average woman who is a mom is stressed because of all she believes she should be able to do:

There is a new reality for women in the 21st century—it's a different world with different goals than it was even a generation ago. As little girls, today's women didn't grow up with only dolls and toy kitchens and princesses and visions of idyllic domesticity and motherhood behind a white picket fence. They were given these, but also given a little plastic doctor's bag and a coloring book full of potential careers to choose from.

“You can be anything you want, child.” It's a message of empowerment and it's beautiful. But, as many of those young girls grew up, a message that was once meant to convey opportunity has begun to feel like a pressure cooker. What once was “You can have it all” has now become “You need to have it all.” You need to have the perfect job, the perfect husband, the perfect house, the

perfect kids, the perfect play dates and craft nights and date nights and do-it-yourself Pinterest projects and #nofilter Instagrams.²

We are told we can have it all. And we *want* to have it all. And we want to *do* it all, provide it all, and get it all right. As my friend Stephanie Shott says in her book, *The Making of a Mom*: “It’s pretty hard to be all and do all when you’re really just overwhelmed by it all.”³

We place such heavy expectations on ourselves that we end up becoming stressed-out moms carrying unbearable loads. And yet God never expected us to live that way. He never put any expectation on us to do it all. He meant for us to depend on Him to do the heavy lifting. That’s why He put commands before us like...

- “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10).
- “Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you” (Psalm 55:22).
- “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).
- “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me...For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:29-30).
- “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer... let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6 NASB).

God wants to do a work in you and me as we rely on Him for help with a task that, at times, seems daunting.

The Root of Our Insecurities

There are a number of factors that can contribute to our parenting insecurities and make us moms who worry.

How We Were Raised

Many moms I interviewed for this book were insecure about their mothering abilities because of how they were raised. For example, Kadee, a young military wife stationed in Japan with three young girls, says she prays for the assurance that she's doing "a good job."

"I didn't have godly parents and my husband didn't either, so we don't really know what we are doing when it comes to raising godly children," Kadee said. "I just hope and pray that we are doing good by our children and they are being well taken care of."

Do you ever look at what you didn't have and wonder if it's causing a deficit in your children's lives too? If you had a mom who never spent much time with you, it might be second nature for you to keep to yourself and your work and not spend much time with your own child. Or if you experienced very little communication with your mom, it might be difficult for you to talk with your child on a deeper level. If you were verbally or physically abused, you might be afraid that those negatives will surface in your own parenting (we will explore this further in chapter 6). In whatever way you were raised, you might feel that it impacts your ability to be a good mom.

Our Children's Needs

We also tend to feel unsure about our mothering abilities because of certain needs our children have. Maybe you have a child with special needs, or you gave birth to a set of twins when you weren't expecting any more children, or you have a child with a temperament similar to or unlike your own. Maybe you've adopted a child with deep-seated insecurities and abandonment issues that you aren't sure now how to deal with. Maybe you have a child with ADHD or food allergies or some other condition that requires an inordinate amount of attention that you wonder at times if you can

even give. Those situations, and others like them, can make any mom feel intimidated and discouraged.

How Our Children Are Behaving

We can also doubt our ability to parent by the way our children behave. Unfortunately, *none* of our kids behave as instructed 100 percent of the time. All children have minds of their own and will, at times, do the strangest, stupidest, grossest things. And as we stare on in horror all we can do is gasp...or pray. See if you can't relate to some of these worries or concerns, all of which I have heard *numerous* times, by the way, over the past 20 years of ministering to moms:

"I can't understand a word he says. How will he ever succeed in school?"

"He eats every wretched thing he finds on the ground. How will he ever live past four years old?"

"He can't keep his fingers out of his nose. And he can't keep those boogers out of his mouth!"

"I don't know where she heard that word. She certainly didn't learn it at home!"

"I never imagined she would do such a thing. I did not raise her that way."

"I can't believe she got another tattoo!"

"All I have to do is breathe and I embarrass them. What gives?"

"I never thought I would be saying that about my own child."

"Who would've thought my child would _____?"
(Maybe by now you can fill in the blank with your own unexpected reality.)

If your child seems out of control right now, you may be feeling as though you are unqualified for what is to come in the days ahead.

What Others Are Saying

Sometimes we end up worrying about our inadequacies—or questioning our parenting abilities—based on what others say to or about us. Jamie, a mom of six children (three of her own and three she inherited from her husband), says, “I continually tell moms, especially new ones, that there is no one way to be a good mom. All moms are different and all children are different. If there was a single right way, everyone would be doing it. It’s easy to feel guilty and beat yourself up as a parent. All you can do is pray, read Scripture, and make the best decisions you can.”

God Understands Your Concerns

When it comes to how you were raised, your children’s needs, and the seemingly difficult task before you (whether you’re caring for an infant, toddler, child, teenager, or young adult), I’m sure you’ve heard well-meaning people say that God gave you that child “because He knew you could handle it.”

I won’t suggest, however, that God “knew you could handle it” and that’s why He gave you the kids you have. That would imply there is something intrinsically great in you and me that enables us to be amazing moms. I will venture, instead, to say, “God knew you wouldn’t be able to raise your children without Him,” so He put those kids in your care (and made you the mom that you are) so you would lean in close to Him and depend on Him every step of the way.

That, my friend, is the first secret to becoming a worry-free mom: entering into a day-to-day reliance on the One who knows all things and through whom you can do all things (Philippians 4:13).

The Source of Our Confidence

We all have some sort of baggage or dysfunction in our past. (Think about it—what family is truly 100 percent *functional*?) And all of our children, to some degree, have special needs or require additional time, or have their bad behavioral moments (no matter how old they are!). The reality of life is that you and I, and our children too, are broken individuals who will experience temptation, make the wrong decisions, endure a season of rebellion, and so on. But here's your confidence: God not only selected you to be your children's mom (whether through birth or adoption), but He knows exactly what you struggle with in relation to what type of child or children He's given you. And He has a way of even orchestrating the circumstances you and your child go through so you will learn to partner with Him to get through this journey.

All through the Bible, we read stories of how God chose seemingly incapable individuals to accomplish great tasks, and we can be encouraged to know God can do the same in our lives.

For example, there is Moses—that Hebrew baby who was set adrift on the Nile River so he wouldn't be slaughtered by the Egyptians, and was rescued by Pharaoh's daughter to grow up as royalty in the palace. He was chosen to be God's deliverer of the Hebrew nation. But it wasn't because he was educated in Egypt and had close ties to the Pharaoh. God chose Moses *after* he had been away from Egypt for 40 years, herding sheep and getting to know God a little better. In fact, Moses claimed to be "slow of speech" (which may mean he stuttered or didn't speak well in public), and yet God made *him* to be His mouthpiece to the intimidating Pharaoh of Egypt.

Moses was no Toastmasters' graduate. He wasn't a guy fully confident in his abilities. That's probably why God chose him. In fact, Scripture calls Moses "more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth" (in the King James Version he's called "very meek").⁴ Now,

if I were going to assign someone the task of delivering hundreds of thousands of people out of the hands of a powerful and oppressive nation, I wouldn't exactly pick the meekest person I knew. Yet God wanted someone who would *fully depend on Him* for the task at hand. God wanted someone who would readily admit the power was not his own, but came from God. God wanted an incapable human for a superhuman task. So He chose a weak vessel into which He could pour His vast strength.

I believe God wants to do the same with you and me. I believe He wants you to fully depend on Him as you raise that strong-willed, high-need, attention-deficit, tantrum-throwing, or nerve-wracking child in your home.

Yet there are certainly times we wonder if even God realized what He was doing when He made us moms.

Seasons of Doubt

Kadee felt the heaviness of the question “What did I do wrong?” when her second daughter, Lily, was two years old and diagnosed with “failure to thrive.”

Little Lily wasn't gaining weight as rapidly as she should have for her age, according to a chart used by medical professionals that determined optimal height and weight at various ages.

“I feel like a horrible mom,” Kadee told me in a text when she received the news. But Kadee wasn't a horrible mom. She had two little girls, thirteen months apart, and the older one was a voracious eater and the younger one wasn't. Lily wasn't complaining about not getting enough food. She certainly wasn't starving. She just wasn't keeping up with a specific growth chart. And because Lily wasn't making a fuss about it, wasn't sick, and apparently wasn't starving, her “condition” pretty much went unnoticed.

The doctor prescribed a special diet and close monitoring of

how much Lily was eating. The family drastically altered their meal-time routine to make sure Lily was eating the proper amount of the proper types of food. Within a month, Lily was gaining weight appropriately and the pressure lessened with each month that followed. Kadee now has a third child and told me recently that when little Eliza turned two, she was also diagnosed with “failure to thrive” and Kadee was told to go through the same routine all over again.

I’ve heard that same story repeatedly—a common situation in the babies’ developmental years that is easily remedied and yet moms carry guilt about it, not realizing many other babies also go through the same “disinterest in eating” phase.

Stages of Life

Many of our insecurities about parenting surface because we find ourselves in a situation that is new or different. As a result, we feel as if we’re in a circumstance no one else has encountered or will understand. But Scripture tells us in Ecclesiastes 1:9 that there is nothing new under the sun.

During my daughter’s early teenage years, I remember saying—out of frustration—“I don’t know how to do this. I’ve never parented a teenager before!” (Now that must have been real comforting for her to hear, don’t you think? To have a mom who admits she’s clueless. Either that, or it made her feel she had some sort of edge over me.) That was the day I went into my study, closed the door behind me, got down on the floor, and called upon God—the Perfect Parent—who has gone before me into every stage of life my daughter will live through, and every stage of parenting I will experience. That’s when I went to *the God who knows the future* for help one day at a time.

Raising our children is all about helping them navigate the changes and stages of life. But those changes and stages can throw

us for a loop at times and cause us to question our abilities or effectiveness as a parent. Thankfully we have a God who knows exactly what's coming, will walk with us through the circumstance, and reminds us that this too will pass.

In Ecclesiastes 3:1 we are told, “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.” The next seven verses list “a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build,” and so on.

We will look more closely at that passage in chapter 4, at which time I will share insights on how to preserve your sanity during your children's different stages in life. But for now, I want to encourage your heart with this: There will be times when you doubt your abilities as a mom, and times you feel very confident. There will be times you are failing miserably, and times when you get it right. The important thing to remember is that through all that you face, you have an Unchanging God who will be a steady, immovable rock you can cling to when things start swirling around you.

Trust His Faithfulness

As your children go through varying stages of temper tantrums, bad attitudes, feeling embarrassed at your presence, unexplained irritability, moodiness, and hormonal changes, remember this one thing: You have a God who never changes. His ear is always bent toward your voice. His arms are always available for you to run into. His words of wisdom are always there for your benefit.

Usually when change occurs we become uncomfortable because a situation is unexpected or catches us unprepared. But if you think about it, our lives are all about change—changing jobs, changing houses, changing neighborhoods, changing churches, changing computers (as you upgrade and learn a whole new system),

changing phones (and losing all your contacts). And oh, how the changes can sometimes make you feel as though you're going crazy! Unless you are firmly grounded in the One who never changes.

Scripture says God is the same from age to age. He “does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17). He is an immovable rock. And His wisdom, compassion, and stability are there for us when we absolutely don't know what to do.

So although there is a time to weep and a time to laugh, He is there to comfort us when we need solace. And although there is a time to mourn and a time to dance, He is there to grieve with us and celebrate with us as well. And although there is a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, He is there giving us the wisdom to know which season is which and how we are to get through them.

I'm so thankful that Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 does not include “a time to receive God's help; and a time to depend on your own devices.” Rather, *every* season is a time in which we are to look to God for His help.

Scripture reassures us in all 26 verses of Psalm 136 that God's “lovingkindness is everlasting” (NASB). That means His character will never change. Unlike your child, God will never go through a stage in which He feels moody, unmotivated, indifferent, temperamental, or unwilling to help you. Because God doesn't go through stages, you can depend on Him to be a steady anchor when everything around you is changing and has you feeling panicked.

God always knows what He's doing in our children's lives. And get this: He always knows what He's doing in *your* life as well. So let this God of Stability help you be as stable of a mom as possible through all the changes in your children's lives. I guarantee that, if you haven't already, you'll be asking yourself repeatedly, “Am I getting this right?” But you and I don't have to ask that question anymore. We don't have to wonder if we have the right formula, the

right set of rules, the right advice, the right personality, or the right responses. We have the right God. He's powerful. He knows all things. And He gives wisdom, generously, to anyone who asks Him for it (James 1:5). So by looking to Him and His Word, we can gain all the help we need. And we can lose all reason for worry.

Your Next Step

In the introduction of this book I had you start with the ABCs: (1) **A**dmit you are not in control; (2) **B**elieve God wants only the best for you and your child; and (3) **C**ommit yourself to a deeper knowledge of God. Your next step is to follow the instructions in Philippians 4:6-7:

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 (NLT).

To worry about nothing and instead pray about everything is easier said than done. You might be wondering: *How do I find the time to pray? And how do I know if I'm praying enough? How do I remember to pray about everything? How do I not get discouraged if I pray and nothing seems to happen? And besides, sometimes it's hard to pray.*

You're right. Sometimes praying *is* difficult. But probably not for the reasons you think. It's not because you don't say the right words or have the right techniques or set aside the perfect place to pray. Our heavenly Father tells us that when we are in relationship with Him we can come boldly and confidently—at any time—and ask Him for what it is we need and be assured that He hears us (1 John 5:14-15). Yet there is an enemy of our souls who doesn't want

us praying. He wants to distract us, discourage us, and make us believe that our prayers are ineffective and a waste of time.

And yet prayer is one of the most effective things you can do for your child. It certainly carries more weight—and productivity—than worrying. God wants us to talk to Him about our children, our concerns, and our hopes and dreams for them. It's the way we open the door and let Him into the daily decisions—and anxieties—of parenting.

Author Robert Jeffress makes two observations about prayer: (1) you will always struggle with prayer; and (2) you don't have to be good at prayer to be effective.

Jeffress explains that Paul used the term “strive with me in prayer” when he wrote to the Christians in Rome (see Romans 15:30) because prayer was, indeed, a struggle. “When we pray we are, first of all, wrestling with an enemy who is bent on our destruction,” Jeffress says.⁵

Satan knows how effective our prayers are. As James 5:16 says, “The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.” Satan knows how much the living, all-powerful God bends His ear to listen to the requests of His own and therefore he will do anything he can to distract you, discourage you, or delay you from praying. He will cause you to want to give up before you start. Or to feel overwhelmed and think, *There's so much to pray for I don't know where to start, or God knows what I'm going to say anyway, so I'll just let Him read my mind.* (I know, that's a pathetic cop-out—one that I've used multiple times myself, in fact.) And of course, Satan harasses us with this thought: *You're no good at praying, so don't think God will even listen to you.*

I guarantee you will find it difficult to set aside concentrated times to pray, to have the confidence to pray, to know what to pray about and to wonder if you're praying well enough or correctly. But

that's where the beauty of Jeffress's second point comes in: *You don't have to be good at prayer to be effective.*

Jeffress cites, in his book *I Want More!*, the example of Paul and Silas in prison. They had asked the Roman Christians to pray for their release. Apparently the Christians had prayed, but evidently they weren't convinced their prayers would have any effect. God caused an earthquake in the vicinity of the jail, and Paul and Silas escaped. When they came to the door of the place where the small group was praying for their release, the group wouldn't even let the men in. They didn't believe it was them! How's that for a lack of faith and power in prayer?

And yet God released those two men...despite the lack of faith, lack of zeal, and lack of hope exhibited by those who were praying.⁶

That is so encouraging to me. That tells me that you and I have hope too. That when we utter, "Please help me, Jesus," He will. That when we say, "I don't know what to do with this child; please intervene!," He will. And when we are at our wit's end and full of grief because of choices a child has made, He absolutely hears and gives us the peace that no one else could. God's response might not come the way you expect, but He will take your prayer and do something with it.

If you're starting to think, *But I've already tried praying and it didn't accomplish much*, or *I'm not very good at praying*, be assured of this: Prayer not only changes much, it changes us.

According to Philippians 4:6-7, prayer is what brings peace to our hearts. Even though God already knows what you're going to say, He wants you to pray because of the peace that accompanies your heart, mind, and soul once you've been in His presence. How loving of Him—God doesn't want us to miss the beautiful, restful, calming experience of communing with Him.

Becoming Active in Prayer

Here's a process which spells out the word P-R-A-Y that you can begin incorporating into your life right now to start gaining the peace you need as a parent:

P—Pray to Commune with God, Not to Get What You Want

Are you in a state of continually talking with God, or do you pray only when things have gone wrong or you need help? As you develop a daily communication with God, you will come to trust Him as easily as you breathe. Trust will be a part of you, like a close friend. And worry—that deep, fearful anxiety of what might be—will soon be a stranger who no longer pesters you.

That's what you want—the kind of everyday relationship in which communication with and trust in God is the most familiar friend to you and worry becomes a distant stranger.

R—Reach Out for Help

Rebecca, a mom of two young daughters (whom you'll hear more from in the next chapter) says, "Like most moms I know, I feel like a deer in the headlights half the time, wondering, *What's the right response or plan or consequence?* But I am unbelievably blessed by the other Christian wives and mothers in my church who are willing to reach back and help a sister in need—sharing God's truth, no matter what, letting me know I am not alone. Satan wants us isolated and insecure; God wants us in the glowing light of a community of women who have been there and are willing to share what He has taught them." And Kadee, whom we met earlier in this chapter, said the instruction and wisdom of other moms has helped her tremendously: "I am a first-generation Christian in my family, other than my great grandparents, so I've had a lot of self-learning to do

as a Christian parent. But God is faithful and has provided me with the right leaders and friends to help me do right by my children.”

Do you have a community of mentor moms who can help you (and to whom you can minister as well)? If not, here are some suggestions:

- If your kids are preschoolers, find a MOPS or similar moms group at a Bible-teaching church in your community. These groups are full of encouragement, support, and practical help.
- Become a part of The Laundry Moms community (www.thelaundrymoms.com). This is an online community of encouragement and support for moms. You'll find helpful articles, daily reminders of what matters, and a host of loving, experienced moms who are available for you. You can also find The Laundry Moms on Facebook and Twitter.
- Learn more about the M.O.M. Initiative (M.O.M. stands for Mothers on a Mission to Mentor Other Mothers). This organization, started by my friend Stephanie Shott, provides biblical resources and support that give mentors and small-group leaders the confidence, courage, and community they need to connect with other moms.⁷
- Are you a single mom? Check out SMORE (Single Moms Overjoyed, Rejuvenated, & Empowered!), an alliance of compassionate women whose goal is to encourage single moms to reach their full potential. This dynamic group of caring women based in Texas get together yearly for retreats that offer some tender loving

mom time with other women who understand the pressures and concerns faced by single moms.⁸

- Finally, get articles, advice, daily encouragement, and meet other moms like you who are taking the “Worry-Free Challenge” at my Facebook page: Worry-Free Moms.

A—Ask God for Wisdom, Not Necessarily the Answers

Oswald Chambers wrote, “Spiritual lust causes me to demand an answer from God, instead of seeking God Himself who gives the answer...Whenever we insist that God should give us an answer to prayer we are off track. The purpose of prayer is that we get a hold of God, not of the answer.”⁹

I’ve learned to daily seek God for wisdom so I can have His mind, not my own. It’s like consulting that Voice within that knows better than you do how to handle and respond to parent-child issues and concerns.

Y—Yearn for a Closer Walk with God

I am convinced that every relationship we care about, every area in which we hope to succeed, everything that means anything to us comes down to how closely connected we are with God. As we learn to love God, we are empowered to love others. As we serve Him, we are enabled to serve others. As we value His opinion of us over others, we are able to better and more maturely relate to our kids, especially as they get older. As you long to know God more, to please Him in every respect, it will show in your parenting.

But most of all, as you lean in closer to God and look at what His Word says about who He is and what He’s capable of, you will live with confidence rather than fear. And you will find yourself becoming a worry-free, wisdom-filled woman and mom.

Partnering with God

I hope you are ready to drop your guilt and insecurities and recognize that you are part of a team in which the primary parenting is coming from Someone who never gets it wrong. Parenting, after all, is a partnership. Whether we admit it or not, the sovereign God of the universe knows what your children's future holds. He knows what your children will become, how they will contribute to this world, and more. Don't you want to be a part of that exciting journey? Partner with Him now...it's never too late. And He will carry you through the days—and years—ahead.

Putting It into Practice

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A Prayer for Partnering with God

God, thank You for giving me the child(ren) that You did. Thank You for assigning me this task, knowing full well I would need You to get me through it. I surrender to You my insecurities, my confusion, my weaknesses, and even the things I think I am really good at, knowing You will exchange them all for Your confidence, Your wisdom, and Your strength. I surrender to You—not with an “I’ll do my part, You do Yours” mentality, but “I surrender to Your complete control.” Forgive me for my desire for control, which results in my worry. Help me to remember that in everything, You are God over all. And no matter what You decide to do from here on out—in my life and in my children’s—I trust You. Let the adventure begin.

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Becoming a Worry-Free Mom —in Community

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For Thought or Discussion: In what areas of parenting have you most wondered, *Am I doing this right?*

1. Read the following verses and record any insights you gain about how God can encourage or help you as a mom:

Psalm 22:19—

Psalm 25:4-5—

Psalm 31:3—

Psalm 121:2-3—

Proverbs 3:5-6—

Philippians 4:6-7—

1 John 5:14-15—

2. Who can you reach out to who has gone before you in the parenting journey? How will you reach out to her or them this week?

3. Read James 5:17. In what area(s) do you need to ask God for wisdom?

4. What is one thing you can do, starting today, to lean in closer to God?