

**S H E
I S
Y O U R S**

**J O N A T H A N A N D
W Y N T E R P I T T S**



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SHE IS YOURS

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I prayed for this child, and the LORD answered my prayer.
He gave me this child. And now I give this child to the LORD.
He will serve the LORD all his life.

1 SAMUEL 1:27-28 ERV



PART 1

HER RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD



HER PREPARATION



WYNTER | I have a vivid memory of being a new bride, sitting on our sky-blue sofa and making the call to tell Jonathan we were pregnant. The call went something like this.

Me: Hey! You are not going to believe this...

Jonathan: What is it?

Me: Well, you know how I haven't been feeling well?

Jonathan: Mm-hm.

Me: Well, today my aunt told me she had a dream about a beautiful, curly-haired baby girl with big brown eyes... You know what that means, right?

Jonathan: [silence]

Me: It means someone in the family is pregnant...

Jonathan: [silence]

Me: It's us! I took a test!

Jonathan: Whoa, babe!

[A few moments of nervous laughter, followed by more silence.]

Jonathan: Okay, let me go. I just started a round.

Me: Huh? You're just going to keep golfing?

Jonathan: Yep... I mean, well, I was... Okay, I'll just play nine.

Me: Yeah, good idea.

Now, many years later, we laugh at this exchange often. But let me be honest: The longer I sat alone on that couch while Jonathan finished his round of golf, the more I wondered if God had made a mistake. Better yet, I wondered why we had let this happen. It was not the plan.

JONATHAN | Wynter is referring to a phone conversation that took place just two short months after we'd said "I do." It also happened to be two weeks after our college graduation.

Our goal was to get married while keeping in step with everything our peers were doing. We had a five-year plan. I can't help but laugh as I write this because our plan was to settle down, climb the corporate ladder, build wealth, and travel the world together before adding children to our lives. Getting pregnant right after we got married was not our plan.

Needless to say, I am so grateful for our lack of planning ability in this particular area. Had our plans played out, our lives would look drastically different. Instead of climbing ladders, we celebrated our first wedding anniversary with a three-month-old baby girl. Our second baby girl arrived two and a half years later, and a set of fraternal twin girls just two and a half years after that!

So, here we are. Four girls in all.

At one point or another, you realize that parenting is a charge you are completely unprepared for. Thankfully, no matter how adequate or inadequate we feel, God has graciously given us His Word as a template. We have an example to follow as we prepare to raise the daughters He gave us.

WYNTER | When I think of the word "prepare," my mind immediately drifts back to one of my earliest memories of the biblical

character John the Baptist. This is probably because when I was a little girl, his was the loudest voice in my church's Easter play. The chosen male actor would march right down the dimly lit middle aisle and loudly proclaim, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord!" Year after year I grew to expect his entrance, but year after year his gruff and sudden appearance caused me to jump. His loud voice sent a tiny vibration through my chest, and as he marched, he would choose faces from the audience to look at directly while delivering his message.

At that age, I doubt I had ever read John's words written in the Gospels, but each year I anticipated hearing them—"Prepare ye the way of the Lord!" I was drawn to the character, his appearance, his sound, and his words.

So with my eyes wide, I would sit on the edge of my seat and watch as he moved with purpose toward the front of the auditorium. The bright light would shine on him as he stood alone, yet surrounded by the crowd that was already in place. This is when I would get my best visual of John the Baptist.

He never looked like the other characters in the play. His clothing was not colorful; it was plain and tattered. His voice was neither celebratory nor joyful; instead, it was boisterous and sharp. The hair on his head and on his face was unkempt, and it was obvious that he chose to focus on more important matters.

Quite frankly, he was odd.

Yet somehow, despite the discomfort that his oddity caused, the weight of his message captivated the attention of all who heard it.

Now, I do not claim that my church's portrayal of John the Baptist is 100 percent accurate. However, the truth of his message commanded my attention then and does so even more today.

As parents, we are called to prepare the way for God to work in the lives of those He has gathered around us—especially our children.

If your wide-eyed daughter has ever stared at you and wondered why you seemed so odd, then maybe it is because you, too, have made your way to the front of the crowd. Maybe you are standing in the light and commanding her attention with a message of truth.

I want you to know that you are not alone, and that you are doing what God has asked you to do.

Now, don't worry. If you have never felt odd or awkward in front of your daughter, just be patient. Seek God's truth and choose to live by it. Causing discomfort, speaking truth boldly, and standing alone in the crowd are all parts of this journey of preparing the way for God to work in her life.

In preparing the way for our girls, we are to make ready and create an environment where the love and truth of Jesus Christ may flourish in their hearts.

On the contrary, to prepare does not mean to manipulate, force, or craft a plan that will ensure the success, safety, and salvation of our daughters. As tempting as it is to try, that is their Creator's job.

We have a job, but we do not have ownership. John the Baptist's job was to prepare the way for those who were in need of Jesus's gift of salvation, and so is ours. Of course, we have many tasks to complete, but all those tasks revolve around the fact that Jesus Christ should be central in our lives and in the lives of our girls.

Jonathan and I were both fortunate to grow up in homes where the Bible was more than coffee-table decor. Rather, the words were woven into every detail of our lives. Like it or not—and most days it was “not” for me as a child—this was a reality, and it has shaped my life and the way we parent our girls today.

As you can imagine, this was not ideal when I was a selfish five-year-old who did not want to share my dolls. Being raised solely by my mother, I spent a considerable amount of time with my grandparents. Thankfully, despite my father's absence, his parents were

still very much in the picture. My grandmother in particular was always quick to tell me when I was not being nice and when God was not pleased with my actions. “Do to others as you would like them to do to you” (Luke 6:31 NLT) played on repeat for most of my young years.

Later, as a college student, I remember calling my mother in tears because I was lonely. My mother did not coddle me with her words, but she shared the importance of trusting God’s timing and being a good steward of the season I was in by spending my lonely days seeking Him. All I really wanted was for her to pray that God would send me a boyfriend! Instead she chose to push me toward the Bible.

I quickly learned that if I didn’t want to know what the Bible had to say on a matter, I shouldn’t present my problems to my family. God’s Word was at the core of everything they said and did. They relied on the Bible and pointed to God’s view in all situations. What we listened to, what we watched, and how and with whom we spent our time were brushed against the Bible and how it applied to the details of life.

And it did not stop in my home. Whenever possible, my mother invited our friends, our neighbors, and—much to my embarrassment—random strangers from the local grocery store into our walk with Christ.

As a child, I remember my mother gathering me, my brother, and a group of neighborhood kids to study the Bible and talk about the way it related to the issues we faced daily. We met on Mondays, so we creatively named it Monday Night Bible Study. (I know, very original!) On most of those Monday nights, I also remember being annoyed. Being the youngest in the group, all I wanted to understand was why it was taking me so long to grow up!

Looking back now, I’m so grateful for my mother. Not once did she ignore or dismiss our actions, thoughts, or conversations as

trivial. On those Mondays and throughout the week, as we gathered in our small dining room, she affirmed each of us in God's love and assured us that there was nothing in the Bible that was not meant for us.

Yes, I remember being annoyed, but I can't ignore my very vivid memories of Monday nights. My mother's diligence and her commitment to truth are important reasons why Jonathan and I now gather our own girls to make sure they, too, understand truth and practice holding to its standard. I never want my girls to think that God's Word does not apply to them. So no matter how difficult it is to schedule, we find time to study together.

As adults, you and I may not speak the same language as our daughters. They don't think the way we think, and they don't necessarily care about the things we care about. They oftentimes don't even think we "get it." However, their Creator "gets" them—because He created them. He has things He wants to tell them, such as why He cares about their friendships, their outfits, and even their science tests.

I realize there will be times when their beliefs will be challenged by peers, teachers, and others. However, like my own mother, I am committed to sacrificing my time, convenience, and comfort to make sure their lives are drenched in truth.

My prayer is that their understanding of, belief in, and reliance on God's Word would be so ingrained that their consciences would automatically detect the lies that will inevitably come their way.

JONATHAN | Wynter's childhood was different from mine in many ways, but the high regard given to God's Word was a mirrored value. God's Word was taken as truth, and I couldn't go far without running into the implications of that reality. It affected how I related to the Creator of the universe and the people around me.

We have already mentioned the word “truth” quite a few times, so let’s define what we mean. The truth is what God says about anything. Every single page of the Bible has truth written all over it.

Basic truths are things you really don’t have to teach your children. For example, you don’t have to teach your children that it’s wrong to hit. They have a built-in moral compass that exposes this offense before you have a chance to even correct it. It might not keep them from doing it, but it will most definitely bring shame.

Even this very fact is found in Scripture. Romans 1:20 says, “God’s eternal power and character cannot be seen. But from the beginning of creation, God has shown what these are like by all he has made” (CEV).

So no, you don’t have to teach your daughter that there is a right and a wrong. Catch even a one-year-old doing the wrong thing, and you will see her trying to cover it up.

My family was not perfect by any means, but we were committed to God’s Word. In fact, if you came into my home, you couldn’t avoid the face of Jesus. His picture was literally hanging on our walls! But even more than that, He was at our table when my mom or dad led us in family devotions. He was in our prayers at breakfast, lunch, and dinner, before we left for school, before we went to bed, and any other time we needed to call on Him. And He was in every single parental discipline confrontation.

Before you start thinking my parents were “Bible-thumping fundamentalists,” let’s get one thing straight. They were and they still are, but not in a negative way. You see, my parents’ lives were changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ. His love shaped their marriage, their family, and everything they did in life. It still does. Their imperfect lives, glued together with the love of God, created a light for my path.

I continue to thank God for my parents with all my heart. With

all they could muster, they made sure that I tasted God's goodness, and that I experienced His love and grace in the good times and bad times (of which there were plenty).

Our family stuck out like a sore thumb in rural South Jersey. My mom is a Midwestern German, and my father is a Northeastern African-American. In a time when being an interracial couple was unpopular at best, they were also raising a Christian family. I distinctly remember arguments in high school and college with friends who adamantly disagreed with marriage between races, specifically between black and white. Some of them even used Scripture to support their view, albeit out of context.

On top of this social challenge, we had financial difficulties. My parents were both hard workers, but they had five kids. This meant that my mother spent most of her time at home. Once we were all in school, she was able to teach at a small Christian school, but the income was small. For most of our childhood, my father moved from one job to the next. The 1980s economy wasn't the strongest, and we struggled. I never remember missing a meal, but we did split a candy bar five ways on more than one occasion! Through it all, my parents made sure we knew that God was our provider and that His Word was our primary source of guidance.

Their faith wasn't dependent on positive circumstances. I witnessed consistent, prayerful, submissive, and intentional discipleship of Jesus Christ in their everyday lives. This doesn't mean they were perfect. It only means that they ran toward Jesus. When things went well, they praised the Lord. When things went badly, they sought the Lord and still praised Him. They were fully dependent on God and fully accountable to His Word. I saw a joy in their hearts as they served the Lord, and that joy was their strength.

I'm thankful my parents believed Psalm 34:8, which says, "Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge

in him.” Because of their faith, I tasted the goodness of the Lord. I watched my parents follow Jesus with their actions, not just with their words. One of the greatest takeaways from my childhood was experiencing the grace and love of God personally, leaving little doubt in my mind regarding its truth.

Following our families’ examples, Wynter and I are committed to digging our heels into God’s Word and evaluating our lives against its truth. As you already know, we do not do it perfectly, but we try. Around the dinner table, sprawled out on a bed, or sitting around the living room floor, we worship together, open God’s Word, and take turns reading and discussing what He is saying to us as often as we can. We want to be well equipped to live it out, first with our girls and then with everyone else who crosses our path.

WYNTER | Jonathan is right: The time we spend together growing in God’s Word is one of the most consistent pieces of our family puzzle. We value it and we treasure it. That said, you should know that our time together is laced with chaos more often than not. Just picture it—four girls, two parents, a dog, and the Bible. We have experienced every form of pandemonium you can imagine. I don’t even feel the need to go into details here—just let your imagination run wild!

Regardless of what it looks like, taking the time to seek Christ together and grow your family in His truth must start with your willingness to do the work.

I remember one day when our middle daughter, Kaitlyn, was six years old. She was tucked away in her room playing alone. Suddenly I heard her call out for me to come.

In a panic, I rushed to her and found her sitting proudly in front of a new puzzle she had just completed. “Mommy, Mommy—look how fast I can put this puzzle together!” She was beaming.

In an effort to attain my full attention, she glanced up at me again and said two very familiar words: “Mommy, watch!”

I stood in the doorway and watched as she carefully flipped the puzzle over onto the floor, keeping each piece intact. Next she placed them, one by one, back onto the emptied puzzle board in the exact same order as she had flipped them. She completed the puzzle in a matter of seconds, and she was so proud.

By her definition, my sweet girl had definitely put the puzzle together at a record-breaking speed. However, by any other standard, what she did would not be considered praiseworthy.

In this moment, I found myself faced with a happy girl and an internal dilemma. I could simply congratulate her and rejoice in her “success,” or I could ruin her excitement with a bit of truth. She had not succeeded. By taking the shortcut, she had cheated.

In all honesty, I thought long and hard about this one! She was happy with the job she did, and I was busy folding the first of six loads of laundry that had been blocking my doorway for five days. Walking away from this one would have been an easy response. “Does it really matter?” I thought.

I took a deep breath and decided it did. It mattered. I needed her to know that regardless of the details, I was committed to maintaining the standard.

I knelt down and explained to her why she didn’t really break a record with the method she used. She was crushed, and she melted right before my eyes.

“But it’s so hard that way, Mommy,” she whimpered.

She was correct. Putting a puzzle together can be difficult. It takes patience and concentration. Many times it’s simply trial and error when trying to figure out which piece fits where. However, to count a puzzle completion as a success, you have to start with the pieces completely disarrayed. That’s the true definition of putting a puzzle together.

Here's what I learned about truth from this less-than-perfect example. We cannot lower the bar or change the rules when we are tired, preoccupied, or saddened by our daughter's disappointment. Whether the task is as simple as putting a puzzle together at six years old or a more complicated scenario—such as how to handle a teenager's dishonesty—our priority is bringing her to the standard of God's truth.

If we are committed to God's Word, we will challenge her to rise to a level of truth in all areas of her life now and pave a sure path for her to follow when she begins to walk alone.

JONATHAN | You may be thinking, "This is all great, but my childhood did not include Monday night Bible studies, family devotions, or pictures of Jesus on the wall."

Please know that we don't mention our childhoods to give credit or boast of some sort of advantage. We are far from perfect in our parenting and in our understanding and application of God's Word. We each have a journey and testimony of God's grace in our lives, and we will share more of that in the following chapters. Although our families planted God's truth in our hearts, there was still plenty of work to be done as we grew up—and there still is today. However, we are grateful for the examples that were set before us because they testify to the effectiveness and importance of establishing a family's roots in the Word of God.

If you are already actively using God's Word as the standard for your family, our prayer is that you continue. We pray you'll grow even deeper in God's Word—even amid the chaos that comes with it! If you have never considered using the Bible as your standard and measurement for truth, then we encourage you to begin. A good place to start is with a family time of devotions to God, spending a few minutes reading the Bible after a meal or before bedtime. It's never too late to start!

Keeping God's Word at the center of your life is essential to successful parenting. So let me ask you this: How committed are you to doing the work of knowing God's Word and applying it to your life? After all, leading others to Him is possible only if you seek and follow Him yourself.

This is not a guilt trip. We ask ourselves this very question daily. As parents, our passionate pursuit of a real and vibrant relationship with Jesus has a direct impact on our ability to lead our daughters to God's grace.

When creating an environment that welcomes God's presence, we must rely on His Word—the Bible. Without it as our foundation, it's impossible to succeed—at anything!

Here are a few helpful tips.

- *If you have multiple children of varying ages, you can create a schedule, giving each child a turn to lead your time together.* This not only builds them up in God but also builds them up in patience, grace, and kindness for each other. Don't get frustrated if cooperation doesn't happen right away. We must admit that we are works in progress ourselves.
- *If you ever entertain guests or extended family, use it as an opportunity to invite them into the conversation.* We have found that our girls' interest is piqued when they get to hear about someone else's journey with God. It gives them a different perspective and reminds them that we aren't alone on this journey.
- *Get creative.* God has given you everything you need to succeed. It comes down to allocating time and attention and being willing to approach the table of hardship. Treat it like a workout. Everyone works out a little

differently, depending on their preferences. Spiritual exercise is no different.

- *Have fun.* Worshipping and spending time with God can be fun. Yes, learning can seem boring, and routines can start to feel old, so make sure you are doing things to inspire your daughters. Open their minds and captivate them. The options are limitless!

We encourage you to be consistent. Be committed. Be patient. Remember that God has not asked us to perfect our daughters before leading them to His grace. He has called us to create an environment where they see His grace lived out through us, in a way that lines up with His Word. Jesus entered the chaos for us, so we choose to enter the chaos with our girls.

LET'S PRAY

Father,

I know that You have called me to prepare the way for my daughter to know You. And I'll admit, sometimes this call seems overwhelming. On most days I don't feel prepared myself, much less ready to prepare her. So I come to You in full transparency, asking You to help me to do what I cannot. Remind me that I cannot do it on my own, nor are You asking me to.

Help me to own my role while relinquishing the results to You. Help me to continually use Your Word as the standard for all topics, and give me insight into Your Word that I might lead her to it. Holy Spirit, give me new insight and even favor with my daughter, that she might trust me. Give me creativity. Give me passion.

And help me to remember that knowing You should be fun and exciting. Thank You for trusting me with this incredible task, and lead me as I lead her.

She is Yours, and I trust You with her.

Amen.