

Hope for the Mom at the End of Her Rope



UNRAVELLED

**Stacey Thacker &
Brooke McGlothlin**

Foreword by TRICIA GOYER

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FOREWORD

From One Weary Mom to Another

You'd think that because I've written a few books for parents and, oh, about a gazillion parenting articles and blogs, I'd have this mothering thing down. I've been a mom for a while, so that should help too. The truth is, at the time I'm writing this my kids are ages 24, 21, 19, 6, 3, and 3. And I'm weary. *Weary*.

I get a lot of responses when I tell people that I'm a mom of six children. And then when I tell their ages people really get confused. After raising our three oldest children almost to adulthood, God led John and me to adopt three more. We adopted Alyssa (one of the three-year-olds) at birth, and just last year we adopted Bella (six), and Casey (three) from the foster care system.

I thought it would be easier the second time around. I learned how to set priorities and to focus on what's truly important while not trying to compare myself to others. After raising three kids—the feeding and fretting, bathing and battling, caring and correcting—you'd think I'd have this mom thing figured out. (Or at least that's what I thought.) Wrong!

I do have a few more tricks up my sleeve, and I've taken a major chill pill (or maybe it's just softening with age), but parenting is still hard. There are times I'm trying to bathe a cranky preschooler or discipline two children who are at each other's throats, and I wonder,

Why did I sign up for this again? There are moments when I hear “Mommy!” from the other room and I’d rather pull the covers over my head than get up and make a sausage biscuit. (I’m pretty sure my three-year-old boy eats sausage for breakfast every morning. “Sausage” was his first word!)

I get weary of power struggles, of putting my needs last, of trying to remember important things like making healthy meals, keeping electrical outlets plugged, and reading Bible stories in order to plant God’s Word in my kids’ hearts. And it’s not that I’ve stopped my mothering role with the bigger ones either. They need advice, clean laundry, and college essays previewed, but mostly they need a listening ear. They need someone to be outraged about their unrealistic Western Civilizations professor as much as they are. They need someone to ask, “What’s wrong?” when it’s obvious that something is. And as my oldest has become a parent himself, he needs advice on his parenting—which I only try to give when I’m asked!

Parenting is more work than I ever dreamed of. With kids on both ends of the spectrum I realize this afresh on a daily basis. Thankfully, I have God to turn to. He is my strength, my wisdom, and my hope. Thankfully, there are books like *Unraveled* that remind me I’m not alone; that point me in the right direction...but mostly point me back to God.

Feeling frazzled, overwhelmed, unappreciated, and downright weary? Well, you’ve come to the right book. Brooke and Stacey are moms who are walking this road as well and who are here to stretch their invisible arms through these pages to offer you a hug of understanding...and some pretty amazing advice too!

I know these women, and I know their hearts for moms. These pages have been bathed in prayer even as they’ve been filled with God’s Truth. Know that you, reader, have been prayed for. Know that you aren’t alone. Know that there is Someone who will be there

for you during your weary moments. And be encouraged as Brooke and Stacey share their own journey to finding strength and peace from the One who loves them most—the One, Jesus, who loves you most too.

Walking the weary (but joyful) road with you,

Tricia Goyer

INTRODUCTION

Dear Weary Mom,
If you are reading this a couple of things may be true of you. First, you are a mom. Second, you are weary, tired, and waving the white flag. You also may have seen the word *hope* and thought, “I could use some of that tossed my way.”

Ten years ago, I poured out my heart in a blog post called, “Steve Jobs, Me, and Being Fresh Out of Amazing.” Here is what it said:

The big news this week is that Steve Jobs has resigned as CEO of Apple. In a letter to the Apple Board and Community he said: “I have always said if there ever came a day when I could no longer meet my duties and expectations as Apple’s CEO, I would be the first to let you know. Unfortunately, that day has come.” As I read this, I had one thought: What happens when you are a mom, and you feel like you are not meeting your duties or the expectations of others but you can’t step down? Who do you let know?

Here’s the letter I would write if I had somewhere to send it:

Dear Lord (I figured I should go straight to the top), I have always said (well, lately anyway) that if I could no longer meet my duties and expectations as a wife, mom,

teacher, and cheerleader to the five others living in this house, I would let you know. Today, that day has come. I have yelled, screamed (is that the same thing?), cried, asked forgiveness, and yelled again. I've pretty much fallen short in every category. I am tired and not really good for much right now. The trouble is, Lord, that I need to be amazing and I'm fresh out of amazing. At least it sure feels that way.

Lord, I'm dry. Empty. Hit the wall. I got nothing. I thought I'd let You know. But then again, You already do. "O LORD, you have examined my heart and know everything about me" (Psalm 139:1 NLT).

To my surprise, the response from other moms was significant. Many moms commented that they could relate to my struggle.

My friend Brooke was one of these moms. She said, "I can so relate to what you're saying here, Stacey, because I feel the same way. Right now, I've got nothing to give. Nothing. Nada. I'm tired and don't feel well and honestly, I want a break from everything." From this conversation, *Unraveled* was born.

Brooke and I will tell you we don't have this all figured out. But it is our passion to encourage every mom who is overwhelmed by the weariness of life with the truth that God sees her—that he wants to meet her whether it is in the middle of her mess or at the end of her rope and offer her true and lasting hope.

Please know that we are so glad you are taking this journey of *hope* with us. We are praying for you.

Love,

Brooke and Stacey

CHAPTER 1

When Your Weakness Is All You Can See

Brooke

Beer and cigarettes.

Yep, you read that right. Beer and cigarettes. The phone call went something like this:

“Honey, I need you to come home now. The two-year-old is screaming because he wants to sit on my lap while I’m nursing the baby. The baby is screaming because the two-year-old keeps trying to sit on his head. When the two-year-old tries to sit on the baby’s head he can’t nurse. Now he won’t nurse at all and is screaming his head off. The bulldog has started crying because he wants to be fed (doesn’t everybody!!) and I’m going to explode within the next ten minutes if you don’t *come home and bring me beer and cigarettes right now.*”

He brought me a Coke and dark chocolate.

Long before that day, I had prayed that God would give us boys.

I wanted to raise men who loved the Lord with all of their hearts, who would choose to take a stand for what was right, who would be world-changers. It seemed to me at the time that there was a shortage of truly godly men in the world, and that as parents, we were losing the battle for the hearts of our sons. So during a time of self-righteous pride in my own ability as a mother (yes...this was *before* we had kids) I asked God to give us boys. And he indulged me.

My boys, like any number of other little boys in the world, were infatuated with being superheroes. My life as a mother of young boys included masks, swords, light sabers, and dueling bad guys to the death. Up until about age ten, there was rarely a day that went by in the McGlothlin Home for Boys that didn't involve someone wearing a cape.

I loved those days and prayed that they might always want to rescue damsels in distress, bring flowers to their mommy, and fight bad guys. Pretending to rescue those who are weaker made them feel useful and important. Running around our house with their capes flapping in the wind made them feel strong. I believe developing these characteristics in young boys sets them up for strength, compassion, and boldness later in life. Superheroes—those found on television, in storybooks, and (the best ones!) in the Bible—gave my boys something to pattern their lives after. And that's very, very good.

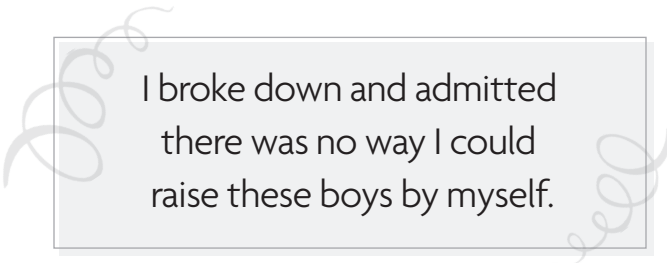
Yes, I want to raise strong boys. But most of the time, I must confess, I feel terribly weak.

Both of our boys are “those boys.” You know, the ones who are extremely high energy, impulsive, don't take no for an answer, would rather run than walk, only have one volume (LOUD), and generally wear their parents completely out? As little guys they fought a lot, were supercompetitive, and required a lot of physical activity. Now, as teens, they still bicker more often than not and can't stand to lose to one another. I've realized that there really isn't a stage of

mothering that isn't hard. It's just that the kind of hard we deal with changes and grows as our kids do.

Because of the way my boys often made me feel (worn out, weary, and a little bit like a failure sometimes) my inner voice, the one that likes to show me all my ugly, had a field day telling me I would never measure up as a mom.

The night I called my husband asking for beer and cigarettes, I was in a state of panic. I'm not a beer drinker, and I only smoked a few times in college (sorry, Mom and Dad). But as I sat on my front stoop in tears that night, cell phone in hand, toddler in the Pack 'n Play, baby in the swing (and the stinking bulldog tied to the chair), something in me snapped. After months of trying so hard to put on a brave and sure face to my friends and family, I broke down and admitted there was no way I could raise these boys by myself.



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Maybe you're stronger than I am. Maybe you're one of those moms who has it all together. Your children jump to attention at your every command, are polite to strangers, and dance a jig while they do their chores. Maybe you don't scare the neighbors by yelling, "Help me, Jesus!" at the top of your lungs multiple times a day.

But I do. And I bet if you're honest, your life isn't all peaches and cream either.

Of course, things do change as they grow up. It's been many years since that episode on my front porch, and I don't have anyone

tugging on me to nurse or trying to sit on a sibling's head anymore (okay...perhaps sometimes). My strong boys who had dreams of rescuing the helpless are now surviving and thriving in high school. We lost our precious bulldog to cancer and now have two energetic labs (and a perfectly white rescue kitty named Nermal). But I still have incredibly active, highly distractible boys who require a lot of my attention. Sometimes I'm tempted to think I'm all alone in my walk, and those days threaten to overwhelm me. My complete inability to change their hearts of stone into hearts of flesh makes my weaknesses blaze until they're all I can see.

We moms think we're all alone, don't we? Like no one else on the planet has experienced what we're experiencing. We think our problems are worse than everyone else's. We think our children's sinful hearts are more sinful than everyone else's. We think our weak spots must be hidden, and we can't imagine telling the truth about what's happening in our hearts. Sometimes, if we're honest, we even get a little mad at God for letting it all happen. It could sound a little like this...

I've dreaded this day for over a week. Cautiously, I peek my head around the corner, barely daring to poke it inside the door, and see that my worst fears have come true. I muster up all the courage I have, walk in the room, and find myself face-to-face with the non-crafty mom's worst nightmare: The crafty-mom birthday party.

The room is one big science experiment, literally. My friend Danielle has spent weeks preparing for the little boy birthday party of the century, and it shows. Green slime taunts me. Carefully crafted explosions that make little boys squeal with delight mock me. The entire table of elements taped above a table filled with edible petri dishes stares me down and makes me want to run and hide.

The kids are going to figure out my big secret any second now—Mama is the most un-crafty person in the world. Birthday parties stress

me out like nothing else. I'd hoped they would never know a birthday party could be anything other than a trip to the pool with all their friends.

Busted.

I sit down in a collapsible chair, thinking about how my own birthday party façade is collapsing bit by bit when those big, brown eyes look up at me...and he says it. The one thing that makes me want to give up trying...anything to ease this feeling of complete and utter failure.

"Mom, why can't our birthday parties be more like this one?"

Every summer the "I'm not good enough" feelings start to creep in and make me want to give up even trying to plan a good party for my boys. The fact of the matter is that I don't have a crafty bone in my body, and it never shows more than when I'm planning a birthday party. In fact, now that they're in high school I don't even try anymore. I hate sewing. I don't own a glue gun. I couldn't tell you where the tape is. Our glue sticks are all dried out. My boys bribe the neighbor's daughter to let them use her scissors and duct tape. So bad is my non-craftiness that at one point I actually considered hiring her to do craft time with my boys once a week.

My lack of crafting ability has grown my stress level to epic proportions, and my feelings of guilt and utter failure have grown with it.

One Thanksgiving I decided to force myself out of my non-crafty comfort zone and tried to prepare a day of wonderful education and hands-on experience for my boys. We homeschooled then and were always looking for ways to make the calendar come alive. It had occurred to me that my boys, then six and four, had never really learned the story of Thanksgiving. I decided it was time for that to change.

I spent hours at my local bookstore picking out the perfect books to communicate the message of Thanksgiving I wanted them to

remember. I scoured the Internet looking for an audiobook of the story of Squanto because my oldest loved learning about Native Americans. I painstakingly cut a Thanksgiving Tree from brown craft paper and decorated its branches with colored leaves made from outlines of my precious sons' hands, each one marked with something they were thankful for that day.

It was shaping up to be a wonderful success. That Thanksgiving Tree was my crowning crafty achievement, my very heart and soul hanging there on the wall. It should have been the best Thanksgiving ever...except it wasn't. In reality, I spent most of Thanksgiving Day sobbing—and possibly slightly hysterical—because I couldn't believe my sons could still be so selfish, ungrateful, and yes, *thankless*, after all I'd done to serve them throughout the month. They were disobedient, ugly, unkind, and downright mean all day long. Couldn't they see how my hands shook as I cut that craft paper into a tree? Couldn't they see the look of sheer uncraftery determination in my eyes as I traced their little hands and taped them to the wall each day?

I may have yelled. And screamed. And wept. And threatened. And shaken with anger over their petty arguments that were making our “celebration” a smashing...well...failure. I felt beaten down by their attitudes, and at one point literally curled away from everyone in the passenger seat of our SUV in something reminiscent of the fetal position. The words going through my mind?

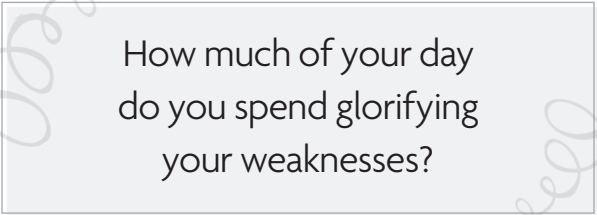
This will never change. I just don't have what it takes to be the mom they need. I'm a crafting failure so I must be a failure as a mom. I should just quit trying.

So be honest, mom. How many times since you brought those blue or pink bundles home from the hospital have you wanted to quit trying? Maybe it's something much more serious than crafting that makes you want to give up. Your areas of weakness could be

totally different, but I bet if I asked you to list them right now you could spout them off one by one.

How many times a day do you catch yourself thinking about what a failure you are, or how your one big mess-up will probably land that little person who watches everything you do straight in the counseling chair a bit later in life? How much of your day do you spend glorifying your weaknesses (dwelling on them, allowing negative internal commentary about them to beat you down) and wondering what will happen if everybody finds out the truth about who you *really* are?

Glorifying weaknesses—no matter how big or small—sucks our souls dry of the life-giving hope we need to just keep going.



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your weaknesses?

But there is a different way. I'm convinced that the place of our greatest weakness can unleash the power of God's greatest grace. Instead of glorifying our weaknesses, letting them control our lives and break our hearts, we can learn to use them to glorify God, confessing our weaknesses and trusting him to make them into something good.

It was during a phone call with a friend that I finally decided I might not be the only one with these kinds of issues. She interrupted our conversation to tell her son to stop what he was doing. When I heard her son scream "No I won't!" to his mama over the phone, I knew I'd met a kindred spirit...or at least another person who knew what I was going through.

It was a profound moment for me. One phone call empowered me to connect with another mom and tell my ugly truth, because I suddenly knew that if I felt alone and desperate in my mothering—consumed with the way my weaknesses were affecting my boys—there had to be other moms who felt the same way.

I chose to surround myself with community—to fill my life with truth instead of complaining, faith instead of fretting, grace instead of comparison, and yes...Coke and dark chocolate instead of beer and cigarettes. I stopped listening to the voices that pointed out my shame, beating me down, and began filling my heart with the voice of truth.

It all sounds simple when you read it now, but in reality it can take a while to make God's voice of truth the one you hear in your moments of great weakness. In 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, the apostle Paul puts it this way:

He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Whatever strengths and weaknesses we possess are all a part of God's plan for our beautiful, messy lives. He uses every detail of our mess for his greater glory, and he can redeem even our deepest, darkest, most daring mistakes until they're more beautiful than we could've ever imagined.

My friend Jess came to Christ in her late thirties. Prior to this, she led something of a double life—taking the moral high ground



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during the day, and struggling with promiscuity, pornography, and other sinful, damaging choices by night. At times paralyzed by depression and anxiety, she was crumbling from the inside out.

Desperate for relief, Jess found herself in the office of a Christian counselor. She tells her story like this: “Two things moved me forward during that time. First, the threat of being hospitalized. That scared me to death. Second, my counselor shared Philippians 4:13 with me, which says, ‘I can do all things through him who strengthens me.’ She also prayed for me during each of our sessions. No one had ever done that. Besides rote prayer and rosaries, I didn’t know how to pray. And to be honest, I had given up on prayer except in times of great need when I’d simply promise God that I’d change my lifestyle, my behavior, anything, if only he’d take away the hurt.

“One morning I was flipping through radio stations when I heard Michael W. Smith’s voice. The chorus of the song suddenly blared from my not-so-loud volume setting. I heard it loud and clear. I got it. I received it. And for the first time in my entire life, I believed it. At that moment, my life changed. It was never the same. I finally knew I was forgiven. Jesus Christ had died for me. Me! Now, I’m able to share my testimony of amazing grace with those God puts in my life. I know that if God can redeem the worst in me, he can do it for others too. I could never have made these changes in my life alone. I’m thrilled to tell others about what I’m not so they can clearly see what he is.”

The thing I love most about Jess’s story is that last sentence. “I’m thrilled to tell others about what I’m not so they can clearly see what he is.” It’s what 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 calls “boasting in weakness,” and it’s the very best way to see God be strong in your life.

So boast, Mom. Boast in the fact that you’re not good enough, not strong enough, not smart enough, *not enough* to be a good mom, and watch what God does. That’s right, boast. Tell the world

you don't have it all together, don't always know the right thing to do, and don't have all the answers. Admit that your kids sometimes have fistfights or shove each other off the new toy. Own up to the yelling and wiggle out of the straitjacket you've been wearing, bound up by a need to be perfect. Refuse those voices that cry out, "Failure! Mother mess-up!" and instead take them straight to Jesus. Even if they're true—especially if they're true—take them straight to the one who loves you and invite him in, trusting him to make his strength perfect in your weakness.

Boast in your weakness, and then be truly strong.