

SURVIVAL GUIDE TO MOTHERHOOD

THE PARENTING PEP TALK
EVERY CHRISTIAN MOM NEEDS

KAREN STUBBS

FOREWORD BY COURTNEY DEFEQ

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Foreword

I REMEMBER EXACTLY WHERE I was sitting when I had one of the most all-consuming cries of my whole motherhood. I was on the side of my bed with the door closed. I was hiding from my toddler, newborn, and husband. The newborn happened to trigger this deep sobbing, but if I'm honest, it had been building for three years, and it all unleashed in a big way. I had tried everything in my power to help my baby girl nurse consistently, drink a bottle without barfing it all up, or to stop crying for just one minute. Larson had some serious colic and reflux, and I had hit my breaking point.

I realize now why the cries felt so deep in my soul. I truly have never loved something more than these girls in my entire life. And I've never wanted to do something more "right" with all my heart. I desperately wanted to fix this situation and was hoping either this screaming baby or baby Jesus Himself would physically write a three-step action plan for reflux on my bathroom mirror.

Sadly, neither of those things happened that day. But I do believe God entered a friend into my life right at that time. Her name is Ashley. All her babies had suffered from reflux, and she understood the maddening attempts to make those babies comfortable. Ashley didn't offer a miracle, but she offered sincere hope, godly encouragement, and some practical next steps. I didn't know how badly I needed those things to survive. Once I could stop sobbing and look up, I could see that God

did provide an answer. And He has been doing that for the last 16 years of motherhood in so many ways.

About five years into my motherhood journey, Ashley introduced me to Karen Stubbs. I read her books and studies long before we became friends in ministry. She's that kind of mentor and author that you just simply trust. If Karen's name is on it, it's simply "add to cart." Her podcast is at the top of my list because it's the next best thing to sitting across a meal with her. It's probably a good thing we don't live in the same city because I would just show up at her doorstep weekly for a pep talk.

Just like Ashley did for me that day, Karen has showed up in my life to offer me sincere hope, godly encouragement, and practical ideas for this journey called motherhood. Many times she has reached across a table or FaceTime or phone call with the most caring eyes and told me, "Courtney, you can do this!" That's what we all need, moms! We need a real friend like Karen to remind us that we will survive. That we *can* do it! And we are not alone.

In this survival guide, you will feel like you're chatting with a favorite aunt or big sister. I love that it's not just one giant pep talk from Karen—it has pages filled with practical ways to survive motherhood. She has picked what really matters in the chapters ahead, from discipline to confidence and sanity. I love that Karen won't downplay the hard, or overspiritualize every moment, or toss useless tips your way. Instead, she pours her authentic heart for moms and Jesus into every page. We need each other, moms. Grab a copy of this book for a friend who is sitting on her bed crying over a newborn. Or to the mom in carpool who is crying over a teenager. We will survive this together!

Courtney DeFoa

Introduction

FOR EVERY MOM

ALL OVER THE WORLD, moms are the same. Every mom loves her kids. And every mom wants to do this job well.

The crazy thing is, every mom worries that she is messing it up. Every mom wonders if it's always going to be *this* hard. Every mom feels lonely at some point. Every mom wishes someone would come alongside her to encourage her. To point her in the right direction. To remind her why this job matters.

I've been a mom for more than 30 years. I have four adult children, Kelsey, Emily, Taylor, and Abby. I now have six grandchildren (with more in the future, I hope). To be sure, I am blessed. I am letting you know how many children and grandchildren I have to let you know I have walked in your shoes. I have been where you are, and I understand. I know what it feels like when the weight of motherhood is squarely on your shoulders. I have parented through many days, weeks, and even months by myself while my husband was working.

I have felt the loneliness of motherhood.

My husband was a Navy pilot for 12 years and has worked for FedEx for 25 years, so I understand a traveling husband. I know that when

your husband is out of town, everything breaks! I, like you, have experienced the joys of motherhood and the pain of motherhood. I remember full well that sinking feeling of, *I can't do this! It is too hard.*

But moms, you can do this job, and you can do it well.

I know because I've done it too. I am here to walk with you—to teach you what I've learned over the years. Why? Because I know this is a tough job, but it is also a rewarding job. And though we may never meet, I have a passion to help you in this season.

Years ago, God put on my heart to start a nonprofit ministry to equip and encourage moms—all types of moms in all different stages of life. Since I started *Birds on a Wire*, I have traveled all over the US and even to a few other countries to speak to and encourage other moms. Now our podcast and curriculum materials reach moms all over the world, from Australia to Canada, Europe to India. We have truly become a worldwide community of moms!

I have talked to thousands of moms, read and answered hundreds (if not thousands) of questions, and here is what I've learned along the way: All moms have the same foundational needs, just wrapped in different packaging. We all have the same insecurities, whether we're living in Atlanta, Georgia or Cape Town, South Africa. We all have the same desires, whether we're staying at home or working full time. We all have the same fears, whether we have one child or six kids. We all have the same hope to get it “right,” whether we live in the city, the country, or the burbs. We, moms, all need the same thing: someone to walk with us as we do this motherhood thing the best we know how.

I wrote this book to be that someone. I want to pull up a chair for you over coffee, so that while we're talking about you and your children, I can reassure you that you are doing a good job and encourage you to keep going. I want to affirm that you are your child's biggest advocate, and you can do this! And I want to validate the fact that being a mom is

hard work. When your child pushes back against the discipline you've chosen, it's not because you're doing something wrong; it's because you are doing something *right*.

I want to keep you company when your fears flare up. What will your child's future be like? No one knows except God. I won't patronize you with a pep talk that everything will be fine, but I will counsel you to walk with Him. Invite Him into your mothering days. Give Him a front-row seat to your mothering journey. God's perfect love is greater than all fear. When you're struggling with self-doubt, asking, *Am I enough for my child?* I will remind you that the answer is this: not really...but God is enough. God will be there for you and your child. He will guide you as a mom.

When you confide in me about feeling lonely, I will nod in agreement, because being a mom is often an isolating role. And not only when your child is a baby and you are glued to their every need 24/7, but also in their older years as your children are growing up and moving away. It can be lonely even when you are surrounded by people, including other moms! Of course, you feel isolated when you're stuck in your own mind, alone with the problems that your particular child is facing. You're afraid to invite anyone into the mess because some way, somehow, you feel like you have created this mess yourself. How could you possibly share it with others? I want to be a safe companion for you in that place—the place where you need it most.

When you whisper, "Whatever made me think I could do this?" I will smile gently. Every mom feels the pressure of trying to figure out her child's needs. Because you're not sure, you're always taking shots in the dark. The constant pressure breeds insecurity. Even if you're rocking it in every other area of your life, your toddler or teenager is bringing you to your knees on a daily basis. The thought is always haunting you: *Am I basically doing a good job, or am I screwing up my child?* You're not the

only one questioning your competence and your sanity. It comes with the territory. I hope to teach you how to not just survive motherhood, but to thrive in it. And maybe even to enjoy it along the way!

Yes, in those long stretches of unending days that turn into speeding-by years, every mom needs a cheerleader. She needs the voice of someone whispering, “Keep up the good work; I believe in you. Don’t ever stop fighting for your children. What you’re doing matters more than you will ever know!”

Moms, I am in your corner. And this book is here to stand beside you. Think of me as your number one cheerleader, cheering you on from the sidelines, yelling, “*You got this!*” But I will not only be cheering you on; I will also direct you to God’s truth. I’ll encourage you to remember why motherhood matters.

So here’s to every mom around the world in every unique set of circumstances—all of us together on the same sacred landscape given to us by God. I pray that over these next ten chapters, you will be equipped with a few new tools in your toolbelt, engaged with the thought-provoking yet practical questions at the end of each chapter, encouraged in knowing you’re not alone, and empowered with the joy of the Lord.

Love in Him,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Karen".

An ordinary, down-to-earth mom who got through motherhood and lived to tell about it



CHAPTER ONE

Know How to Get Through the Day

I REMEMBER THE EARLY DAYS of new motherhood with my first child, Kelsey. I was so busy all day taking care of her, I hardly ever sat down! (Sounds familiar, right?) But when my husband, Greg, came home from work and asked me what I did all day, I couldn't name one thing I really accomplished other than watching the baby. How could that be? I was an intelligent woman, and she was only a baby after all. Why couldn't I get a few things done around the house while taking care of her? How hard could that be? But every single day was the same. If I got a shower in before 8:00 p.m., I felt like I was really winning in life. But moms, I did learn. And as Kelsey grew so did I. I think that is one big thing we all need to remind ourselves: we as moms will learn as we go; we will get better.

Being a first-time mom is hard. None of us really knows what we're doing; it's all new to us. Thank goodness for growth, right? Each month

you will learn as a mom, and each month you will grow. You will get better, I promise. When you start to feel down about yourself, remind yourself of what's true: This is your first time being a mom, and you will get better every day. Sometimes just that little encouragement from yourself can make all the difference in the world.

I remember teaching a class for young moms where a mom sat in the front row, listening intently and taking notes on everything I was saying. It's as if she was trying to learn all she could as fast as she could. After class one day, she told me, "I graduated with a business degree from the University of Georgia. I graduated with honors. I helped launch a company and ran all the marketing and sales. So why are my children rocking my world? I can't seem to get through one day without meltdowns from them or me. Then I look at my husband's life and his world hasn't changed at all. It's not fair."

I encouraged this mom that she wasn't alone in feeling this way, but I also told her the truth—a truth I'd had to learn for myself too.

"It's not fair that your husband's world hasn't changed while everything about your world has. But you need to embrace where you are and stop fighting it. Once you embrace this new role, everything will change. Give yourself and your children a little grace because you are learning every day. But when you stop fighting what you're learning and where you are now, you'll find a new perspective, and with that, a new ability to handle it all."

This mom listened intently to what I was saying. She nodded, letting it sink in. "I need to adjust my outlook and accept this is a stage of life."

"Yes," I encouraged her, "and if you do that, you will be happier, and so will everyone else in your family."

I wish you could meet that same mom today. She is killing it in the mom world. She now has four children, runs a social media marketing

company out of her home, and homeschools her children. She learned how to thrive as a mom and as a woman. But to do it, she had to change her perspective from the start.

One of the hardest parts of being a mom is the monotony of it all. It's not exciting, alluring, or even magical. Day in and day out, being a mom is the same old thing: wake up, feed the children, get them dressed, entertain them or take them to school, feed them again, put them down for naps, entertain them, feed them again, bath time, bedtime, hit repeat on it all the next day. As the children grow up, you swap out nap time with carpool time. This daily grind can be challenging and leave moms feeling like there must be something more.

Finding contentment can be a struggle for most moms. Life isn't what we dream of at times. Sometimes, it's just hard! What helped me the most in this feeling is when I realized that just because something is hard doesn't mean it can't be good. Yes, life can be hard and good at the same time. I don't know why I used to think that I should be happy all the time or that I should never struggle in life. I don't know if someone told me that or if I just made it up in my mind. Because the reality is, life is full of struggles and hardships, and motherhood is no different. Just because I have a bad day with my children doesn't mean I don't love them or I don't love being a mom; it just means we had a hard day. Keep in mind that every morning starts a new day—a new beginning. And with each sunrise you have new hope.

Children are like Crock-Pots. They take time to teach, to guide, to learn. That can be difficult for us as moms because we live in an instant world. We don't like to even wait ten minutes in a drive-thru line! But nothing is quick with a child. You cannot rush them. Some days it can feel like you're trapped in the movie *Groundhog Day*, with each slow and seemingly monotonous task on repeat. The good news

is, that's normal. We need to slow down our mentality when it comes to our children.



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Think about it! Have you ever been running late? Maybe you're late to work, or church, or getting to the store. You tell your child to put on their shoes. Moms, doesn't it take them forever? They are moving at a snail's pace with those shoes! And the longer it takes them, the more frustrated we get, right? So we rush them. We push them. But when we do that, they start to cry. That's when we realize we're

going to be really, really late. But moms, if we'll slow down our pace and give our children some time, it will help us and them in the long run.

I say that because I've learned it the hard way. I'm talking to you from 34 years of experience here. I know the more you try to rush a child, the slower they get. And I also know it's difficult to build in that extra time to give your kids. But it is worth it. Slowing down will help your entire day. In fact, it will help so many areas of your parenting.

In 2018, my daughter Kelsey was pregnant with her third baby and having major complications in her pregnancy. She had hyperemesis-gravidarum, which is severe vomiting and weight loss in pregnancy. At the time, Kelsey and her husband, Kevin, were living in California, where Kevin was a Navy C-2 pilot. Kevin was assigned duty in Japan for six months, and with Kelsey's sickness and two little children at home, everyone agreed it would be best if she moved to Georgia to live with us until after the baby was born.

Greg and I went from a quiet, empty-nester household where we went to the movies in the middle of the day (because we could!) and ate out whenever we wanted (because who wants to cook for just two

people?) to a household of five, two of them toddlers. From being foot-loose and fancy-free right back to the trenches of toddlerhood!

When Kelsey had her new baby, Talon, she experienced several complications after her delivery, and she was in and out of the hospital for two months. When Greg and I had the responsibility of watching the grandchildren, this idea of “children as slow cookers” came to me. One day, when I was trying to get the baby to sleep, he was a little fussy, and it was taking him longer to drift off. Talon was a newborn, so I wasn’t about to let him cry it out. That was for his mom to do when he got a little older. But on this day, it was taking forever to get him to sleep. I had a small window of time because the older two children were taking their afternoon naps, and if I could get Talon to sleep, I would have about two hours to myself. But there was no rushing this child to sleep. He fell asleep when he was ready, not when I was ready. And wouldn’t you know it? Talon fell asleep exactly the time the oldest got up from her nap.

Moms, you have this same choice in every moment of your day with your children. You can fight against them and try to force them into your world and your way. Or you can realize that children are like Crock-Pots, and they take *time*. That day, I, as the caregiver, had to slow my pace down to a child’s pace. And I had to do it over and over again. While those children were under my care, it wasn’t fair to have them run at my pace. It wouldn’t have worked for any of us. So I told my staff that until Kelsey was better, my first priority was the children, and I had to go at their pace. In other words, things had to slow down in every part of my life, or we were going to struggle.

You might be thinking to yourself, *This all sounds great, but how is it realistic? You can’t just stop living your life!* I agree with that 100 percent. You can’t completely halt your life to move at your children’s pace. Instead, you need to find a pace that works for you and your family.

On more than one occasion, I've been guilty of growing frustrated at my child for not moving at the pace that works for me. Maybe I set out to do a project, but my child doesn't cooperate. They won't play by themselves or with their siblings, and it messes up my ability to get things done. So I end up getting irritated because I can't accomplish what I set out to do. But it's not my child's fault; it's my fault. Not because I set out to do a project that needed to be done, but because I expected my children to adjust to a pace that only works for me. That isn't setting any of us up for success!

So how do you set the right pace with the right perspective? By remembering, again, that children take time. In all ages and in all areas, you've got to give them the time they need to learn and grow.

Children take time to discipline. That's because discipline is a long-term concept. Children won't get it in one session. I mean, how many times have you thought to yourself, *Why do I keep having to have this conversation with my child?* It's because it takes time to train up a child! (Proverbs 22:6). I truly believe that's why in Proverbs 31:28 Solomon writes of a mother, "Her children rise up and call her blessed" (ESV). As children become adults, they realize how much time their mother put in. They see how she was patient with them. They recognize that she let them go at their own pace. And for that, they are grateful.

I know I didn't realize how wonderful my own mother was until I had children of my own. Then I saw so clearly how she put in time with me and my sisters, and it paid off. It helped me realize that I needed to do the same with my own children. Now, as a grandmother, I see the benefit of all that time, but I realize most of you reading this book have many years to go before you get to that point. My encouragement to you is simply this: Hang in there! You are doing a great job!

And can I just give you a quick word of warning here? As your kids become teenagers, they'll need time as well. Teenagers take time to

mature and grow. You can't rush a teenager to act like an adult. They may *think* they're adults, but they certainly don't *act* like adults. You have to be patient with a teenager. You have to give them the time that they need. There is no rushing maturity. It moves at its own pace.

A mom of a teenage daughter once told me that her daughter kept getting into little fender benders with her car. The mom called me so exasperated, saying, "I know she's just not paying attention to what she's doing." Sure, her daughter was old enough to drive the car, but she wasn't yet mature enough to understand the consequences of making those mistakes while doing it. So I suggested a plan to help her daughter learn the lesson in a way that worked for her. I told that mom that the next accident her daughter got into, the daughter should be responsible to pay for the damages. The daughter had one more accident, and this time, her mom made her pay for the damages. That ended up being her last accident.

Teenagers have to learn on their own, and most of the time, life teaches them. I know this is challenging, particularly in the teenage years. We want to help them when we're ready, but we have to be patient. We have to let them come to us when they're ready. You can't rush a teen to open up, can you? If your teens are like mine, they usually choose to open the floodgates and talk at the worst possible times, like during a good movie, or late at night, or when you are in the middle of preparing a big meal for the holidays. Maybe teens do this to see if we are really listening or if we really care; or maybe they do it because they usually are only thinking about what seems like a good time to them. They're moving at their own pace. That's when giving them your time is crucial. But until they're ready for it, you have to wait. And while you're waiting, pray. Don't ever underestimate the power of prayer, especially during the teenage years.

The bottom line is, we as adults—we as moms—have to change

our perspectives on parenting. Changing our mindset will make all the difference in the world. We need to resist the struggle and embrace the time our children need. We need to slow our pace and get in step with them. We need to build in the extra time it takes to let them move at their pace. We need to do whatever it takes to make it work. Why? Because our entire family will benefit in the long run.

Here are a few practical ways you can find contentment as you navigate this new perspective on mothering.

1. Know the Work Is Worth It


There are many challenges in motherhood, but one of the hardest for me was continuing the work without seeing the reward right away. This slow pace of life that required me to be patient while my child was learning to obey, learning to have manners, learning to be respectful, learning to be responsible—it was difficult. It felt at times like my kids would never get it. I was worried that all my work was in vain. I want to encourage you that your work, your patience, your labor—none of it is in vain. Don't give up! Your child needs you to be long-suffering with them. I know it's hard. I know patience for their pace is difficult. At the end of most days, you are beyond exhausted.

When Greg and I were watching the grandchildren, we used to fall into bed at night so tired we could barely move. I felt that way when I was raising my four children too. But now that my children are grown adults, I can tell you without a doubt that all the work—the blood, the sweat, the tears—was well worth it. I see my children now, and I am so glad that I slowed my pace to put in the work when they were younger. Now I really see the fruits of my labor. I want to encourage all you moms out there struggling to put in the work now. You are running a marathon, and I am on the sidelines cheering you on! I'm yelling, "You can do it! Don't give up! You've got this! The work is all worth it!"

2. Joy Is a Choice

Living a life full of joy and fulfillment is up to you. We all know that a mom's life is challenging. But try to resist the urge to complain often about how hard it can be. Not because you shouldn't be honest (you should!), but because staying in that negative place will only make you a bitter person. The truth is, you can make just about any situation better simply by adjusting your attitude.

In 2002, Greg was recalled to active duty in the Navy after 9/11. His orders were for a year. At the time, I had four children, ranging in age from middle school to preschool, and the last thing I wanted to do was to parent those children alone. I started to go down a self-pity spiral. Greg told me, "You can do this. You are strong."



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I told Greg, "I know I can do it, but I don't want to do it!"

The more I thought about it that way, the worse my attitude became. I started blaming Greg for being in the Navy in the first place. I thought constantly about how "selfish" he was. I will spare you all the details because they aren't pretty, but the point is, I was not in a good place.

One day, it hit me. My bad attitude wasn't helping anything. It definitely wasn't changing my situation; in fact, it was only making it worse. So I made the decision to adjust my attitude. I decided to choose joy.

I chose joy because my children were a little older during Greg's deployment so three out of the four of them went to school, giving me a little break.

I chose joy because I was working part-time at a church, and this

small job gave me an outlet away from the home and much-needed conversations with adults.

I chose joy because I had great friends who encouraged me and listened to me.

I chose joy because Greg was not in harm's way while deployed, which gave me some security.

I chose joy because the children adjusted quickly. We had our days of course, but overall, they did great.

It was that simple. My situation was the same; I was still parenting four children by myself. What changed was my outlook.

I cannot stress enough the importance of your attitude. It makes all the difference in the world. And only you can change it. Do the heart work. In other words, examine your heart. Consider your attitude. If you realize it's not where it should be, make an adjustment. Don't get stuck on the fairness of it all. Get that thought out of your mind! It is not your friend, and it will not help you choose a positive attitude. Because the indisputable fact is, life isn't fair. In the mundane days of raising children, wake up each morning and embrace what's ahead of you with joy rather than resentment. You can't control much, but what you can control is your attitude. So choose joy!

3. Focus on the Now

Realize the importance of the slow days you are in the middle of living. Try to resist the urge to think that life is passing you by, because it is not. I promise, when you get ready to reengage in life at full speed, it will not take you long to jump back in. So focus on the season you're in now. Give yourself some grace. Celebrate the work you're doing and realize the importance of your job. Remember that God is the writer of your story. He is not limited by age, lack of work experience, or anything else you might believe counts you out in the future.

My career with Birds on a Wire did not start until my daughter Abby was a senior in high school. I worked part-time at a large church in Atlanta for 11 years and never once spoke on the main stage. After I left my job and started the ministry, a staff person from the church told me they never knew I could speak onstage. But God knew all along, and He is the one who gave me what I needed when I needed it.

Don't ever underestimate the power of God. Look at the people in the Bible we study all the time. They're all people God chose to use in a mighty way in God's timing, not their own timing. Look at Abraham and how old he was before he ever had his son Isaac. Look at Joseph and how he sat in prison for 12 years before God made him the second highest man in Egypt. Look at Noah and how he was an old man when God shared with him the plan to build the ark. My point? Trust in God's timing, not your own. Do the job you have been given today: raising your children. Treat being a mom like you are the top executive at a large firm in New York City. Give every day your fullest and do all you do for God's glory. I love the verses Colossians 3:23-24, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving." Resist the urge to be anxious about tomorrow. Let tomorrow take care of itself; you just focus on today.

And can I let you in on a little secret? Social media is the enemy here. We can be doing great, and then we start looking on social media. We see how amazing everyone else's life seems to be, and we have trouble with the way our lives are now. Trust me, people might be posting amazing pictures, but a lot of the time, that is all they are: pictures. Reality and pictures are two different things. You know the old saying: "The grass is greener on the other side." Well, from my vantage point, grass is greener where it is being watered and fed. Water your own grass and don't worry about other people's yards.

4. Each Day Is a New Day

Moms can easily feel like one day flows into the next day, and there is nothing exciting about any of the days. You know you are in trouble when walking to the mailbox to see if you got mail is the highlight of your day. One mom confessed to me that she looks forward to the weekends, not because she has any great plans, but because her husband is home on Saturday and Sunday. It's another person in the house, and that is such a treat. Another mom told me that she takes long walks



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in the afternoon with the children just to escape her four walls and get a change of scenery. They're struggling to see each day for what it is: a new day.

Take each day as a new and fresh start. I cannot tell you how many times, when I was parenting my children, I went to sleep asking God to forgive me for losing my cool with my children that day, for not being patient, for being lazy, or for having a bad attitude. I tried to start every morning thanking God for the day and asking Him to guide my steps. My daily prayers usually started like this.

Father, thank You for this day You have given me. God, I ask that I would glorify You in all I do today. Each day is a gift from You, and I appreciate this day and all that it will bring.

Moms, when I pray that I may glorify God in all that I do, that means *all*. I can bring glory to God in how I rock my child to sleep. I can bring glory to God in the way I clean my house, speak to my children, or talk to my husband. I can bring glory to God in the way I talk

to teachers, the way I drive, how I dress. I can bring glory to God in the way I guide my teenager, the work I do in my career, the way I prepare my child for college. I think you get the point. God is in our days—every part of them. Yes, even in the mundane.

Each day we have with our children is a gift. So when we have great days, let's celebrate them! And when we don't, let's remember that each day is a new day. A new opportunity to begin again. A new chance to glorify God in all we do as moms.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Growth can be hard to notice in the moment, but over the course of a season, it becomes clear. Reflecting upon your past few months (or even years), what's one way God has used this season of motherhood to change you for the better?
2. Think back to the times in the past week when you've felt stressed, frustrated, or inadequate. What sources of pressure are you putting on yourself—or your family—that lead you to feel this way? Which of those can you allow to fall away?
3. Just as you're watching your children face new challenges and develop new strengths, God is watching you do the same. What new challenges are you facing in this stage of motherhood? Can you see how God might be using them to strengthen you? (It's okay if you can't!) How can you ask Him to help you through these struggles?