

Busy Moms' Devotions to Go



**Lori Z.
Scott**

**MOM-entum:
Finding God when
Life Picks Up Speed**

Moms' Devotions to Go Series

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MOM-entum: Finding God When Life
Picks Up Speed

Lori Z. Scott

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Dedicated to:

My writing friends Carolyn Scheidies, Val Gwin, Kay Tira, Linda Whitlock, Cheryl Russell, Kim Mailes, Trish Berg and editor Jean Ann Duckworth;

both sets of parents (Ziemer and Scott) for their encouragement and support;

my children, Michael and Meghan, for being the best part of my day;

and Jim, my soul mate.

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#1
Worn Out

He gives power to those who are tired and worn out: he offers strength to the weak.

Isaiah 40:29 (NLT)

Life picked up momentum when my children reached school age. Each year that my two children grow older, it feels like there are more and more demands on my time. Sometimes it's hard just keeping track of all their activities. Dance, soccer, swimming, youth ministries, parties, clubs, fundraisers, school carnivals, church - the list goes on and on. And I'm not alone. It seems that a lot of today's moms don't sleep well, eat on the run, or even work part-time. We do it all and still find time to do the laundry.

Even so, a life full of activity takes its toll. At the end of the day, we're often physically and emotionally drained. The reality is, we're just plain worn out, like the well-earned holes in the right knee of all my favorite jeans.

In fact, while studying the sorry state of my jeans one night, something puzzled me. Why did they only have holes in the right knee?

Mentally, I reviewed my day. I'd knelt to hug, tie shoes, pick up toys, clean spills, and paint walls. I'd knelt to search for lost library books, marbles, teddy bears, homework, game pieces, and car keys. I'd even knelt while I watched a little television, as the dog was in need of a good petting.

Suddenly a sad realization came to mind: there was an important kneeling position I'd neglected in my day. I'd forgotten to pray.

Maybe the reason I felt so empty when my days were so full was because I left God out when I put everything else in. As I contemplated that thought, God gently whispered to my spirit: “If you spent more time in those jeans wearing out both knees in prayer, you wouldn’t feel so worn out.”

Isaiah 40 says God gives power to those who are tired and weak. If we let Him, God gives us power by encouraging our hearts, calming our fears, and giving us a more balanced perspective. He listens to our frustrations and heartaches when we pray. He quiets the noise of our emptiness and then fills us up with songs of praise. He provides us with enough strength to make it through another busy day.

Now every time I pull my worn jeans out of the dresser and slip them on, I think about spending time with God in prayer. After all, with so much going on, I have a lot to pray about. I haven’t worn a hole in the other side of my jeans yet, but I’m working on it.

Prayer: Father, please grant me strength to meet every challenge I will face today with grace, wisdom, and prayer. Amen.

Take a Breath

Cut some small shapes out of an old pair of jeans or worn out shirt. Decorate a notebook cover by gluing the scraps down to it. Use your notebook as a prayer journal.

#2

Not So Grate

“...his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work.”

1 Corinthians 3:13 (NIV)

After tasting one of my grandmother’s casseroles (an enticing blend of onion, cheese, and potato), I secured the recipe. It looked simple enough. I resolved to make it for my family.

Setting out the ingredients, I read the first direction: Bake potatoes with skins until just cooked. I looked at the clock. I didn’t really have time to bake those potatoes in the oven the way Grandma did. Plopping all six spuds in the microwave, I zapped them.

Ten minutes later, they still weren’t done, but I went on to the next step anyway: Cool, skin, and grate the potatoes. Deciding that cooling would take too long and that I could just leave the skins on and work around them, I skipped the first two parts. It did save time, but I scorched my fingers while grating the hot potatoes.

Time evaporated as I mixed all the ingredients together. Convinced myself that increasing the oven temperature to 450 would cut my cooking time in half, I cranked up the heat and stuffed the casserole to bake in a cold, preheating oven.

As a busy mom, I often cut corners while cooking. Once when I forgot to buy chocolate chips for a cookie recipe and didn’t have time to run to the store, I substituted chocolate syrup. (I think the kids used the resulting creation as hockey pucks.) I’ve also used baking soda in the place of baking powder with a similar outcome. (They’re both white powder. How different can they be?) I even forgot to remove the cellophane from a batch of cinnamon dough, producing fine looking rolls with a surprisingly attractive plastic glaze.

But back to my potatoes. At first, my plan seemed to work. The top layer of casserole came out nicely browned. However, when I served it, my shortcuts revealed themselves. The inner layer remained cold and unchanged. We ended up throwing the whole thing out and eating macaroni and cheese instead.

My cooking mishap mirrors life. We get busy, run out of time, and shortchange our spiritual walk. The “top layer,” our outer appearance, may look all right, but on the inside we remain cold and unchanged. We neglect to take the time to truly develop godly attitudes.

Nothing tastes good half-baked. Not casseroles, and not character either. Instead of going through the motions of worship and convincing ourselves we’ll get the results we want, we need to develop patience. Let God work, using character-building fire set at just the right temperature for just the right amount of time to produce rich flavorful life.

Prayer: Father, help me make time to spend with you learning the wisdom of your ways. Let me act with patience as your Spirit works in my life to create godly character. Amen.

Take a Breath

Here is my grandma's potato recipe. I later discovered that you can cut corners on it by substituting a 20 ounce package of frozen hash browns for the potatoes. Extra cheese may be added too.

Grandma's Potato Casserole

Ingredients:

6 large potatoes

½ cup butter

1 cup sour cream

1/3 cup green onion, chopped

1 ½ cup shredded cheddar cheese

1 can cream of chicken soup

2 cups crushed cornflakes

Ham, diced (optional- I like it without.)

Bake potatoes with skins until just cooked. Cool, skin, and grate. Add onion and cheese to potatoes and set aside. (Add ham, if so desired.) Heat soup and butter together. Remove from heat. Blend in sour cream. Pour over potatoes and mix. Place in buttered casserole dish. Top with crushed cornflakes. Dot with butter. Bake for 45 minutes in a 350 degree oven.

#3

Two Places at the Same Time

No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

Luke 16:13 (NLT)

“Mom, how am I going to get to the YWCA?” my daughter asked. Her eyes looked big and worried as she tugged on my arm.

“Let me think a minute,” I said. I had inadvertently scheduled myself to lead a teaching seminar at the same time as her swim lesson. I quickly thought through my options.

If the kids rode the bus home like I had planned, they’d arrive when my teaching ended, but too late for Meghan to make it to swimming. But since I was working, I couldn’t pick them up. None of my baby sitters could drive yet, and my husband couldn’t leave work early. I considered rescheduling the seminar, but that would mean leaving half a dozen phone messages to college students who may or may not actually get it on time. Plus, changing the seminar on so short notice wasn’t really fair to the students. Many of them had arranged their work schedules to mesh with the seminar date.

Mentally, I kicked myself for overlapping activities. The situation made me wish I could imitate some of those Hollywood movies and make a clone of myself to help carry the load. But as much as I wanted to, I couldn’t be both places at once.

I ended up calling a good friend for help. She bailed me out. With her own four kids in tow, she not only picked up my children from school, but drove Meghan to the YWCA and stayed with her until I finished work.

My mishap reminds me of the verse from Luke 16. No one can serve two masters. The Bible clearly points out we will be devoted to one and despise the other. Much as we may want to place two things in the number one position, we can't. Our hearts can't be in two places at once.

When daily pressures threaten to consume every moment, it's time to check our priorities. Despite what we may profess to be of utmost importance, our actions will reveal our true master.

It's helpful to evaluate where our hearts lie with self examination. For me, that means asking questions like: Do I promise to pray for a friend then forget? What do I set apart time for, reading my email or reading my Bible? Do I seek to do God's will each day, or am I pushing my own agenda without consulting him?

We can't be two places at once. So where are you?

Prayer: Father, I want stay close by your side, but I am lured away by my other commitments.

Give me an undivided heart. Amen.

Take a Breath

Schedule a board game night with your family. As you spend time with your family, remember to spend time with God.

#4

Death Note

I will be your God throughout your lifetime—until your hair is white with age. I made you, and I will care for you. I will carry you along and save you.

Isaiah 46:4 (NLT)

My daughter, Meghan, uses boxes to create things, like dollhouses or castles. Making a mailbox was her best idea yet. She cut an opening in the front of an empty soda box, attached a paper flag on the side with a brass fastener, mounted it on a stick, then placed it outside her bedroom door. She cut scrap paper into postcard-sized chunks to write messages. Finally, she made a mailbox and stationary for me to place by my bedroom door.

We spent the next several weeks mailing each other letters. Meghan sent fun notes like “Roses are red, and pink, and hi, Mom, how are you doing?” Sometimes she’d sneak out of her room at night and leave a note for me. Often, those letters were simple requests like, “Ples (please) can I have some blue paper, tape, and siccors? (scissors) I relly (really) need them.” One time she wrote, “Mom, you are the best part of my day.”

I sent her letters with silly poems, jokes, compliments, or questions she could write back and answer. I hoped my words would make Meghan feel special, provide her with encouragement, and let her know how much I loved her.

Words have that kind of power, and the written word brings with it a sense of intimacy. Letters in particular have a warm feel. They address you by name, and speak to your heart. Line by line, they reveal thoughts that might otherwise remain unspoken. You can hold letters in your hands, and treasure them in your heart as you read and reread them time and time again.

One weekend instead of playing at home, Meghan spent most of the day at our neighbor's house. When she came back home, she hugged me and told me how much she'd missed me. That night in my mailbox, I received a very special note. She wrote, "I love you and miss you mom I hop (hope) you don't diy (die)."

I don't know why her mind wandered to the topic of death. Whatever the reason, I appreciated her sweet words. I wish I had written something like that to my grandmother before she passed away.

Sometimes in the busyness of life's daily demands, we forget to tell the ones we love what they truly mean to us.

God doesn't forget. God has written a love letter to us called the Bible. We can hold God's love letter in our hands, and treasure his words in our hearts as we read and reread them, and draw intimately close to God, our Father. After all, words have that kind of power.

Prayer: Father, thank you for speaking to us through the Bible. The words of encouragement and hope we find there warm our hearts and lift our spirits. Amen.

Take a Breath

Write a letter to your mom, dad, husband, or child telling them what you appreciate about them.

#5

Interruptions

These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far away.

Matthew 15:8 (NLT)

When Meghan had a high fever and sore throat, I took her to the doctor's office. We sat for over an hour in the waiting room before the nurse finally called us. After the examination, Meghan started playing with various toys in the room while I listened to what the doctor had to say.

The doctor was in mid-sentence when Meghan tugged on my arm. "Mom, these blocks are stuck together. Can you pull them apart?"

Intently focused on the doctor's advice, I shoed her away. "Wait until we're done talking. Don't interrupt."

Several times Meghan attempted to capture my attention, and several times I ignored her, holding her at bay with a stern look. Finally, after the doctor left, I helped her.

Later that week, after waiting all afternoon for a free moment to complete my Bible study, I sat in the kitchen praying while the kids played. I had barely started when Meghan came in and tugged on my arm. "I can't find my Baby Annabelle doll."

Keeping my eyes closed, I said, "Play with something else until I'm done."

With a huffy voice, she said. "I don't want to play with something else. I want Baby Annabelle."

Sighing, I opened my eyes. "Well, look in your closet."

One minute later, Meghan interrupted again. “She’s not there.”

All thoughts of prayer now gone, I stood up. “How hard did you look?”

Meghan shrugged. I walked to her room where, upon actually moving some clothes off the closet floor, I uncovered the lost toy. Then Meghan handed me a pretend diaper, thus ending my quiet time.

As we played, I felt as if God had a lesson for me. I mentally compared the difference between the doctor visit, when I did not tolerate Meghan interrupting my conversation, and today’s quiet time, when I did. In both cases, I sat before someone important trying to learn something of value. In the first situation, I remembered what the doctor told me. In the second situation, I remembered little because God barely got a word in edgewise.

The contrast brought to mind a verse from Matthew 15 that says, “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far away.” With shame, I realized that I had given the doctor more respect than I had given my holy God.

How many times do we let our children, the phone, the laundry, television, or (fill in the blank) interrupt us when we pray? Are we honoring God with our lips, but letting our hearts drift far away with each interruption?

Prayer: Father, keep my heart close to you. Amen.

Take a Breath

Set aside five minutes of uninterrupted prayer time.

#6

Broken Window

But now God has shown us a different way of being right in his sight—not by obeying the law but by the way promised in the Scriptures long ago.

Romans 3:21 (NLT)

We kept an old mattress in the toy room in case overnight guests needed extra sleeping space. To allow plenty of play space during the day, we propped the mattress in front of a window.

My kids and their neighborhood friends soon seized on this playroom novelty. They climbed, punched, and ran full force into the mattress. They tilted it to build forts or toppled it flat and jumped on it. When the cloth covering tore, I set down rules.

“No more kicking at, jumping on, or running into the mattress. You might damage it more. Plus, if you keep tackling it like it’s a football player, you might break the window behind it. So hands and feet off.”

Though the children thought I overreacted, they reluctantly agreed. But as time passed, they remembered the joys of grappling with the mattress and assaulted it again.

We went through this rule forgetting, rule reminding cycle several times. Then one day I heard the boys wrestling around. When I checked on them, the mattress lay sprawled on the floor. A large spider web shaped crack showed in the window. I scowled. “What happened?”

Three faces flushed; three sets of eyes looked downcast. “The window broke.”

Then accusations started. “He pushed... no, he ran... no, he did this...”

Giving them a stern look, I said, “You all knew the rules about the mattress. What reason did I give you for not doing those things?”

Glancing guiltily at each other they mumbled, “The window might break.”

“Exactly,” I snapped. “I told you not to mess with it, I told you why, and you did anyway. And the window broke, just like I said it would. You may not like my rules, but I have rules for a good reason, and it’s usually for your protection. You’re lucky no one got hurt.”

Later, when I reflected about the window disaster, a thought came to mind. Throughout Scripture, God calls us to live holy lives and reminds us to follow his commands given for our own good. (See 1 Thessalonians 4: 1-8 and Deuteronomy 10: 13-14) Yet just like the boys were unable to keep my reasonable command, Romans 3: 20 tells us that no one keeps God’s commands. Therefore, if we just relied on our own effort, we could never be made right in God’s sight.

Thank God the Romans passage doesn’t end there. “But now God has shown us a different way of being right in his sight—not by obeying the law... (but by) trusting in Jesus Christ to take away our sins. And we all can be saved in this same way, no matter who we are or what we have done.” (Romans 3: 21-22)

Prayer: Father, thank you for forgiving our sins and taking our punishment. Amen.

Take a Breath

Read all of Romans 3. Thank God for his gracious kindness and forgiveness.

#7

Forgetfulness

But watch out! Be very careful never to forget what you have seen the Lord do for you. Do not let these things escape from your mind as long as you live! And be sure to pass them on to your children and grandchildren.

Deuteronomy 4:9 (NLT)

I patted my pockets. Empty.

“Has anyone seen my car keys?” I called.

“NOOOooo!” came the answer from my children. With increasing frustration, I continued to look under piles of flyers from school, in my purse, on the counter, by the dryer, inside the refrigerator... all the places I typically misplace my keys. No luck.

Sometimes I feel so scatterbrained. For example, a few times I’ve made trips to the grocery store with the specific purpose of picking up a missing ingredient from a recipe. But when I get to the store, I often forget why I went to the store in the first place, and return home with two packs of gum, various sale items, and a squeaky toy.

I’ve also forgotten things like doctor’s appointments, fundraiser deadlines, skating parties, and sports practice. And besides keys, I’ve misplaced jewelry, underwear (yes, sadly I went two weeks without bras before I finally located them!) bills, birth certificates, and the dog. Maybe I just have too much on my mind.

“Jim!” I yelled to my husband. “Have you seen my car keys?”

He poked his head into the room. “No. Try retracing your steps.”

Since my husband owns a remarkable memory, and since I felt desperate, I took his advice. Step by step I followed the path I trod when I last returned home. Plopped my work bag in the corner. Ran to answer the phone. Took a message. Got a snack out for the kids. Let the dog out. Dashed upstairs to change clothes. Checked my email....

Aha. Right there in nowhere land between the computer room and the kitchen. "Found them!" I yelled.

My husband shook his head. "Where were they this time?"

"In the candy dish. And I found my arm brace too!"

"Imagine that," he said dryly.

We all have times when we forget things. Sometimes our days are so packed with activity, it's hard not to. When we feel the stress of life, it can be easy to forget that God loves us and easy to forget that all we do should be motivated by a desire to obey God's will. In Deuteronomy, God reminds us to retrace our steps. Go back. Revisit the love we first experienced when we turned to God. Remember His faithfulness and all that He has done for us. Don't ever let those memories escape our minds. Not only that, He encourages us to share our testimony with our children and grandchildren.

We have something great to remember! And something memorable to pass on.

Prayer: Father, today remind me about all the great things you have done for me. Let me share these thoughts with my children. Amen.

Take a Breath

Make a list of goals for today and cross each item off when it's completed. Try this for a week and watch how many things you remember.

#8

Treadmill and the Tree

We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from start to finish.

Hebrews 12:2 (NTL)

Keeping fit is important to my physical and mental well being, so almost every day I make a point of working out. I usually exercise early in the morning before the kids wake up.

In warm weather, I run outside. I enjoy the melodic songs of robins that accompany the rhythmic pad of my shoes on the pavement. The sun winks low in the sky, its glowing rays coloring the clouds soft gold. The wind carries the aroma of grass and fresh rain. My heart sings, and I feel like I could run forever.

When the weather cools, I spend a lot of time on the treadmill in our cluttered garage. Plodding along, I watch the tedious tick of red digital numbers on my clock. My shoes sound heavy on the rotating belt. Garden hoses curl nearby like gigantic snakes. The garage smells like a lawn mower engine. I feel like quitting.

On such days, one thing that keeps me going is looking out the single garage window at the cottonwood trees lining the horizon, and at one taller tree in particular. With eyes firmly focused on it, the surrounding clutter seems to fade, and time seems to pass more quickly.

The contrast between my running experiences provides spiritual insight. As mothers, we do a lot to keep the family running smoothly, from making meals to cheering on the sidelines. Like running on a warm day, when surrounded by pleasant things, our energy runs high. Managing these routine tasks seems a breeze. Volunteer work? No problem. Errands? We're ready to rock.

But when commitments pile up-- laundry, dishes, meetings-- we can feel like we're on a treadmill. We continue to plod along because we know these tasks are important to our family's well being, but we face each challenge with little enthusiasm.

How can we survive the treadmill syndrome, those dreary days when our energy feels low and we just wish we were done? Hebrews 12:2 says that "we do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from start to finish."

Just as I looked through the window and fixed my eyes on the cottonwood tree, so we can look beyond each nagging task and fix our eyes on a tree, the cross our Savior hung on so long ago. This puts our commitments in perspective.

The Bible encourages us to do everything as if serving the Lord. If we aren't thinking about God, we probably own the treadmill syndrome. But by breaking down each daunting project into smaller daily goals and then praying for sufficient strength to meet each goal, we can fulfill our responsibilities with greater personal satisfaction.

Prayer: Father, thank you for the cross. When I fix my eyes on you, I feel your presence in my everyday struggles and routines, and that gives me great encouragement. Amen.

Take a Breath

Use an index card. Write Hebrews 12:2 on one side and draw a cross on the other. Use it as a bookmark in this devotional to remind you to focus on Jesus.

#9
Teasing

“Don’t be afraid!” Elisha told him, “For there are more on our side than on theirs!”
2 Kings 6:16 (NLT)

My kids and the neighbor’s kids clambered into the car after school one afternoon, laughing and chattering about their day. All except my son. His face looked flushed and angry. “What’s wrong, Michael?” I said.

He glared back. “Nothing.”

“Something must be bothering you,” I pressed.

A tear trickled down his cheek. He wiped it away roughly. “Everyone hates me.”

“No they don’t.”

“Yes they do!” he shouted. “They make fun of me all the time. They push me out of line and call me stupid. No one wants to play with me.”

His outburst shocked the other kids. They tried cheering him up, but that seemed to only frustrate Michael more. “You don’t understand!” he snapped back.

Michael’s good friend Matt in particular seemed upset. When I dropped him off, he gave Michael a thoughtful wave goodbye.

Later, Michael and I talked about the teasing episode. It broke my heart. We prayed, but resolved nothing. Michael felt hurt and betrayed, but didn't want me to talk to the teacher or the offending child. That evening, worn out from all the pressure, Michael fell asleep early.

I spent an agonized night in prayer. Motherly instincts yearned to step in and make things right, but Michael feared that might lead to more teasing. I didn't know what to do. Little did I know, but God was already at work.

The next day, Matt stood up for Michael. Despite the danger of backlash from the tormentor, Matt confronted the bully in a caring but unyielding way. Everything I wanted to do as a parent that would've exacerbated things, Matt did in such a way as to not only rectify the situation, but provide Michael with great encouragement. An amazing change occurred in Michael after Matt acted on his behalf. The teasing didn't stop completely, but knowing he had a good friend he could count on to stand by his side helped protect Michael's heart and buoy his confidence.

As busy moms, our "bullies" may include work, family, caring for an aging parent, or a multitude of other tasks. All these stresses press against us and may cause fear and anxiety. But Matt's actions are a good example of what God does for us. We are told in 2 Kings 6:16 not to be afraid. God is on our side, and he's greater than anything the world can dish out. Nothing can stand against our great God.

It's also helpful when dealing with hurt, sorrow, frustration, or anger to enlist the aid of a friend. Their prayers and support can help buoy our confidence.

Prayer: Father, thank you for standing with me in every situation. Help me be the type of friend who can support others and give them the courage to face their problems. Amen.

Take a Breath

Write down three obstacles you are facing today. Now pray about each one and ask for God to give you strength to overcome them.

#10
For Sale

*But you will not leave in haste, or go in flight: for the Lord will go before you, the God of Israel
will be your rear guard.*

Isaiah 52:12 (NIV)

When my husband accepted a new job, the mom in me wanted to take charge of the moving process. I soon learned I had little control of anything. As I marked off each calendar day, anxiety seeped in. How would the kids handle it? What about finances? And, an even bigger obstacle, could we sell our house in such a short time?

I slept fitfully. I snapped at my children for no good reason. I got teary-eyed around friends. I hovered near the phone, waiting for the realtor to call. I ate entire jars of pickles in a single day.

Needing relief, I sought comfort by reading my favorite book of the Bible, Isaiah. Often the words didn't even register on my consciousness. Nonetheless, the familiar passages soothed me. Each time anxiety rose to an overwhelming level, I'd set my pickles aside and read.

When a nearby house put up a "SOLD" sign, panic struck. Why did their home sell and not mine? I wanted to trust God to work things out, but didn't He realize we were running out of time?

In sheer frustration, I prayed. "Lord, I know you often answer prayers in dramatic, sometimes last-minute ways, so we learn to depend on you. But I'm having a hard time waiting. I just want you to know that if we sold our house early, before it became critical, I'd still see Your Hand in it."

Then with a sigh, I opened my Bible. As soon as I started reading, Isaiah 52:12 hit me. “But you will not leave in haste, or go in flight: for the Lord will go before you, the God of Israel will be your rear guard.”

I sat back, stunned. I’m not used to God answering so quickly, but He did. God had gone ahead of us. The paperwork to purchase a new home had gone through. And here He promised to be our rear guard, taking care of what was left.

Immediately I thanked God and surrendered my worries—house, kids, finances-- into His care. It’s hard to explain, but He replaced my fears with confidence.

Feeling giddy, I shared the passage from Isaiah with my husband, insisting that we would get an offer soon. He laughed at my optimism. That night we got an offer on our house, which, without hesitation, we accepted.

Like most mothers, much of our anxiety stems from the desire to control all the variables in our lives. But put your fears ‘for sale’: in any circumstance you might face, God is in control. He’s already gone ahead of you, and He’ll protect your rear. God can replace your fears with confidence.

Prayer: Father, I trust your goodness. I place the fear I face today into your hands, for you are infinitely better qualified to carry it than I am. Amen.

Take a Breath

Write down a favorite Bible verse and post it on your refrigerator.

#11

Equipped

And now, may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, equip you with all you need for doing his will. May he produce in you, through the power of Jesus Christ, all which is pleasing to him.

Hebrews 13:21a (NLT)

When my mother volunteered me to be the keynote speaker at a Mother-Daughter banquet, my first thought was, “Okay. That sounds like fun.”

But when she told me how many people were attending, and that my sisters would be in the crowd, doubt set in.

Mom seemed unfazed. “You’re a teacher. You’ll do great.”

To me, instructing a handful of six-year-olds suddenly seemed a whole lot more appealing than facing a room packed with adults. I wondered: Should I accept this engagement? What would I talk about?

I prayed. I prayed some more. I prayed for something to say, and an idea formed. Solidified. I accepted the job. I practiced. Prepared overheads. I was ready.

Or was I? When the day arrived, my anxiety skyrocketed. I started sweating. Forgetting my speech. Feeling faint. As I sat at the head table waiting for the announcer to introduce me, I begged my sister Linda to continue praying for me. “I don’t think I can do it,” I whispered, ready to cry.

Then it happened. I can't fully explain it, but I took a big breath and stepped up to the microphone. All fear drained from me. I felt confident. Energized. I felt God's presence holding me up. And I soared.

As I reflected back on that experience, three things occurred to me. First, God gives us desires and abilities that make us particularly well suited for certain tasks. For example, teaching daily in the classroom provided me with strong communication skills needed to serve as a speaker.

Second, God further prepares us through his Word. God can speak to us through Scripture to provide wisdom, reassurance, and confidence. This better trains us to face new challenges.

And finally God equips us to go beyond our capabilities. Operating within God's will doesn't mean life will be easy. Hard work, perseverance, and determination are characteristics that God can use to help us succeed. But God can also work through our weaknesses, fears, and sorrows. It has been said that the flesh accomplishes little, but through the spirit, God allows the flesh to do great things. This may be why the writer of Hebrews prays for his fellow believers, that God would equip them with all they need for doing God's will.

As busy moms, sometimes life gets tough and we feel ill-equipped to face it. We whisper, "I don't think I can do it." It's then God gently whispers back, "Then let me."

Prayer: Father, today equip me with all I need to accomplish your will. Amen.

Take a Breath

Pull out some old sport equipment and play an impromptu game with your kids.

#12
Letting Go

Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding.

Proverbs 3:5 (NLT)

A picture of a mother and daughter on a sunny beach hangs in my bedroom. With long hair billowing, the mother kneels by the child. An oversized straw hat hides the child's face. The caption reads, "A mother understands what our hearts are saying."

I was reminded of this tender thought the day I left my youngest at school for the first time. When we approached her classroom, I said, "Bye, honey. Listen to your teacher. Don't forget to wear your jacket if you go outside. I'll pick you up soon."

What I didn't say was it seems just yesterday you started crawling. I can't believe you're in Kindergarten! Now I have to share you. Someone else will be there to dry your tears, watch you learn, and cheer you on. Even though today formed a little lonely spot in my heart with your name on it, I know that, like all kids, you must grow and change. And I must let you. Letting go is part of life.

Holding my hand tightly, my daughter opened the classroom door and entered. A dozen children were already there exploring this new child-sized world. Laughter and chatter swirled around them and echoed off the walls. Rainbow colors filled the room like firecrackers. The air carried the smell of chalk and markers. It looked like a clean and fresh and happy place.

I watched anxiety flee from my daughter's face as excitement flushed her cheeks. Her eyes sparkled with delight. Slowly she released my hand and waved at her teacher. Whether or not I was ready to say goodbye, she was.

Giving her one last hug, I said, “You are very precious to me. I love you.” And I let go.

As I walked away, she ran back for one more kiss. Her smile looked as broad as a sunbeam. “I love you too, Mommy!”

Like the mother in the snapshot on my wall, I understood what her heart whispered. Some things never change, and holding on is part of life. Holding on is part of life.

Aren't you glad God understands what our hearts are saying? Whenever God brings us change, He provides a measure of mercy to endure it. We have the added security of knowing that God never changes. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is always compassionate, merciful, loving, faithful, patient, and gracious. If we do as Proverbs 3:5 suggests and trust in the Lord with all of our heart, we can let go of past failures, and hold on to God's promises. (See also Isaiah 26:3 and Jeremiah 17:7.)

Prayer: Father, today I let go of my anxieties and fears and hold on to your steadfast love. Amen.

Take a Breath

Write a special note to your child and slip it into his lunchbox or backpack.

#13

A Tangle of Dog Legs

When you go through deep waters and great trouble, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown! When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you.

Isaiah 43:2 (NLT)

I have a friend who occasionally stops by for overnight visits. She brings along her dog—much to my dog’s delight. Both dogs came from the same animal shelter and both are mixed breeds about the same size.

Jasper, my friend’s dog, is slow and happy-go-lucky. His heavy breathing and the tilt of his head emphasize the loose jowly skin around his face. My dog, Jezebel, is quick and fierce, and owns a set of teeth much too big for her petite terrier mouth. They love romping and playing whenever they can.

One evening the dogs got carried away. They’d been cooped up for a large portion of the day and wanted some playtime. Running around the yard in circles chasing each other wasn’t enough, so they came inside and proceeded to race around the kitchen. The dogs tumbled and rolled, nipping at each other in a friendly way. Finally Jezebel decided she’d had enough and walked away.

But Jasper still had energy to burn. He launched himself at a disgruntled Jezebel. They flopped over on their backs, a blur of gray and white fur. Before I could step in, Jezebel reacted like a crazed shark. When she found an opening, an unprotected leg, she snapped down on it hard with her oversized canines.

“YIPE!” End of playtime. Still, I couldn’t help laughing. In the tangle of limbs, she’d accidentally bitten her own leg.

As I reflected on Jezebel's mistake, I felt grateful for God's protection.

Many times my children have been poised to 'bite their own legs,' so to speak. They don't always look for cars before crossing a busy street. They aren't always careful to carry scissors point down. They sometimes horse around on the stairs. I'm just as bad. In the winter, I often drive too fast. I'm not very attentive to details, like turning off the water I'm boiling for tea. Still, unless something drastic happens, I seldom consider how God extends his protection over us. It's comforting to remember that even in everyday life situations, God keeps us secure.

Don't worry. God's still there for the big trials too. If you read Isaiah 43:2, you'll see it talks about deep waters, great troubles, and difficulty. That's one big dog fight! Yet it's coupled with an awesome promise. God is with us then, always, and ever. That doesn't mean that we won't feel the effects of the turmoil around us. We are, after all, caught up in the tangle. But it does mean that God can carry us through it.

Prayer: Father, thank you for your faithful protection in all circumstances. I place my day in your hands. Amen.

Take a Breath

Check the batteries in your fire alarms and practice a fire drill with your kids. Talk to your kids about safety precautions, but remind them that God is with them in all situations.

#14

Meals on the Go

Is anyone thirsty? Come and drink—even if you have no money! Come, take your choice of wine or milk—it’s all free! Why spend your money on food that does not give you strength? Why pay for food that does you no good? Listen, and I will tell you where to get food that is good for the soul.

Isaiah 55: 1-2 (NLT)

“When are you going to clean out this car?” my husband asked me one day. Granola bar wrappers, half empty bottles of water, depleted fruit snack packages, and cracker crumbs blanketed the seats and floor of my red mini-van.

My face flushed. “I cleaned it last weekend.”

“And it’s this bad already?” he asked, sounding exasperated.

In my house, this conversation occurs at regular intervals. My husband has good reason to complain. Ninety-nine percent of the time my car looks like a garbage heap on wheels. Perhaps this is because my car is not just a vehicle for transportation, but also a mobile restaurant.

The problem stems from being constantly on the go. When I’m hauling the kids around, running errands, and hustling to work, I usually either grab a quick meal on the run or I don’t eat at all. I neglect my short term health for the sake of schedule.

It seems to me that our spiritual lives operate in a similar fashion. Sometimes we are so caught up in activity we don’t feed our souls at all. We neglect our long term spiritual health for the sake of schedule.

God knows our tendencies to stray. In Isaiah 55, he asks why we waste our money (and, by implication, our time) pursuing worthless things when he has laid out before each of us a magnificent feast.

Consider the contrast. At great cost, we fill our lives with activity, and our hearts with grumpola wrappers, bottles of half empty promises, depleted fruit-of-the-spirit snack packages, and backslider crumbs. For no cost, God fills our lives with purpose and fills our souls with wine and milk, symbols of abundance and enjoyment.

How can we find the time to attend this spiritual feast when we're overwhelmed with attending physical commitments? God provides a clue when he says, "Listen, and I will tell you where to get food that is good for the soul."

Did you catch it? Listen. Stop and listen. Maybe He'll speak to your spirit during that song on the Christian radio station. A passage of Scripture might whisper comfort or wisdom to your heart. The words of a prayer might spark a moment of quiet reflection. But you won't hear it if you don't listen. And you'll miss out on all that good food.

Here's an idea: let's take advantage of God's free offer!

Prayer: Father, give me a hunger to spend time reading your word, singing your praise, and resting in prayer. Nourish my soul today. Amen.

Take a Breath

When you absolutely must eat on the run, here is a healthy, easy to prepare, and easy to carry meal. Follow the recipe, or use any ingredients you have on hand.

Take Along Wraps

Ingredients:

Large soft flour tortilla shells

Ham and/or chicken, sliced

Cooked bacon

Pepperoni

Your favorite cheese, sliced

Italian or ranch salad dressing

Tomato, sliced

Lettuce, spinach leaves, or sprouts

Salsa (optional)

Cellophane

Lay the tortilla flat. Layer the ingredients of your choice to cover one third of the tortilla.

Fold and roll the tortilla tightly.

Seal the tortilla wrap in the cellophane in a manner that allows you to peel back the cellophane like a banana peel. That way you can eat it as you drive without worrying about ingredients falling out the bottom. In addition, the cellophane will catch any liquid (dressing or salsa) that may drip out.

#15

Where are the Hubcaps?

From there you will search again for the Lord your God. And if you search for him with all your heart and soul, you will find him.

Deuteronomy 4:29 (NLT)

My poor minivan. Besides the messy interior, the outside looks less than desirable. Blame my lack of driving skills. The mud spots came from my inability to avoid potholes. The white racing stripe down the right side is a direct result of a close encounter with an automatic banking machine.

And then there are the hubcaps. I've lost and recovered them half a dozen times. They've popped off after too many run-ins with street curbs, speed bumps, and back roads. Once, I lost two at a drive-thru window at the same bank that gave me the pinstripe. Made the deposit, pulled out, and watched the right side hubcaps roll across the lot like synchronized swimmers. I could see the tellers laughing behind the safety of their glass windows.

But now I've outdone myself. Last time I lost my hubcaps, I couldn't find them. At first, I looked for them along the roadside every time I drove somewhere. Twice I braved traffic to claim a hubcap only to discover it wasn't actually mine. (They all look alike to me.) Finally I gave up looking for them. I didn't really put all that much effort into it in the first place because I don't place much value on my car. And anyway, I'm half convinced those hubcaps grew legs, fled in self defense, and have claimed asylum in some European country.

My hubcap caper brings to mind an important thought: we seek after what we value, and will continue to search until we find it. How long we search depends on the degree of our commitment to the object of the search. Therefore, it makes sense that we might spend a great deal of time searching for a misplaced wedding ring or ideal vacation spot. We might throw our

effort into pursuing a career goal. One thing for certain demands our diligent dedication: knowing God.

Deuteronomy 4:29 encourages us to search for God with all our hearts and souls. We will not be disappointed if we do this on a daily basis. Reminders of His love, compassion, faithfulness, and greatness surround us. If we seek, we will find Him in even the simplest corners of our lives. He is found in the joy shining on our children's faces. He is seen in the glory of a setting sun. He gives fragrance to a spring morning. He is heard in the deep quiet of a warm summer night. And He is Lord over all the details of our lives, including the missing hubcaps of our cars.

Prayer: Father, help me seek and find your love every day. Amen.

Take a Breath

Load up the kids and take your car to an automated car wash. As you go through, discuss how if we seek forgiveness, God provides a clean heart.

#16
Car Wreck

I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. As you make your requests, plead for God's mercy upon them, and give thanks.

1 Timothy 2:1 (NLT)

One sunny afternoon, the kids and I loaded up the car and headed out to a local park. As we left, we saw a news media helicopter circling low overhead.

“Cool!” my son said. “What’s going on?”

He didn’t wonder for long. We passed under an interstate exchange crowded with flashing police car and ambulance lights, smoke, and wreckage. Slowing to maneuver through congested traffic, we saw a shocking sight. A semi-truck had plowed into a pickup truck. You couldn’t even see the entire back end of the pickup, and the front cab was crumpled around the semi’s engine like tinfoil. A camper trying to avoid the collision had flipped and exploded. Several other cars piled up like broken toys behind that, and debris covered the highway. People sat by the roadside crying and comforting each other.

My daughter Meghan’s eyes grew wide. “Mommy, what happened?”

My pulse raced. I swallowed against a knot in my throat. “There was an accident. Someone died today. We should pray for the people involved and their families.”

That’s just what we did all the way to the park. We prayed for these people we had never met. For their comfort. Their loved ones. Their life, should it hang in the balance.

I wondered if that event impacted my children. A few months later, I found out. Another highway accident near our home blocked an intersection. This time Mary Kate, one of my daughter's friends, rode in the car with us. All three children craned their necks to see what was going on.

After a moment, my daughter spoke up. "Mom, there's an accident. We should pray for those people."

Smiling, I looked in the rear view mirror. "Go ahead."

I experienced a proud mom-moment when Meghan led in prayer, and Mary Kate followed suit. They seemed like a vision of angels with bowed heads.

As busy moms, sometimes it's difficult to find time to pray, much less teach our children about the importance of prayer. But they learn when we put prayer in action.

1 Timothy 2:1 tells us to "pray for all people. As you make your requests, plead for God's mercy upon them, and give thanks." We can seize opportunities each day. Besides praying with our children for friends and strangers God brings across our path, we can pray at odd points during the day. Pray for the person ahead of you in the grocery line. Pray for the teacher before school starts. Pray before each meal. Pray during a thunderstorm. If your children see you pray they may view prayer as a valuable and helpful way of dealing with everyday situations. Even more, they might understand the importance of talking to God on a daily basis.

Prayer: Father, thank you for hearing our prayers. Amen.

Take a Breath

Pray with your children for someone God brings across your path today.

#17
Yes, Ma'am

And all of us have had that veil removed so that we can be mirrors that brightly reflect the glory of the Lord. And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him and reflect his glory even more.

2 Corinthians 3:18 (NLT)

At a department store one day I purchased some clothes and headed for the door. Behind me, I heard the salesman call out, “Ma’am!” Pausing, I looked around for the older woman he was hailing. With a shock, I realized he was addressing me.

I don’t even remember what he wanted. I couldn’t get past the “Ma’am.”

The next morning I scrutinized my face in the bathroom mirror. My husband, Jim, stumbled past. He grunted at me, disinterested, beginning his morning routine.

Glaring, I said, “I have crow’s feet around my eyes.”

Instead of contradicting me, Jim nodded. “You do.” Pausing, he studied me more intently. He then started laughing. “I think I see gray hairs too. You’re getting old!”

I was not amused. “You know,” I said loudly over his snickering, “you’ve got crow’s feet too.”

His laughter stopped short. His head whipped toward the mirror. The whites of his eyes showed as he pushed his face up inches away from the reflective surface. “Those aren’t crow’s feet! I’m just good natured. They’re laugh lines.”

I snorted. “Same difference. Oh, and is that a gray hair I see?”

“Oh, no!” he groaned. “We’re both getting old!”

With a smug look on my face, I patted his stomach. “Some of us are getting old faster than others, dear.”

Like it or not, everyone ages. Years pass, often marked with fond memories, sometimes marked with sorrow. Our children learn and grow. The mirror reflects signs of wear and tear on our bodies, just as it should. For such is the normal cycle of life.

When we examine our lives, we should also see the evidence of spiritual “aging” similar to the physical changes our bodies undergo. Our spiritual “wrinkles” and “gray hairs” take the form of faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, kindness, and love. (2 Peter 1: 5-8) Each choice we make, good or bad, helps shape who we are today. And if we press our hearts up to the mirror of Christ’s example, we’ll see how daily trials and triumphs reveal God’s faithful work to bring us to maturity.

2 Corinthians 3:18 explains this process clearly. It says “we can be mirrors that brightly reflect the glory of the Lord. And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him and reflect his glory even more.”

Now that’s the kind of aging I can handle. Yes, Ma’am!

Prayer: Father, let your glory be reflected in all I say and do. Work within my spirit so that I might become more like you. Amen.

Take a Breath

Reflect for a moment on a treasured moment spent with family or friends. As you savor the memory, take time to give God a prayer of thanks for sending joy into your life, then reflect that joy to all you meet today.

#18

Game Ball

If your gift is to encourage others, do it! If you have money, share it generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.

Romans 12:8 (NLT)

Watching young Little League players is a hoot. Many pull on fancy batting gloves but never swing the bat, own personalized helmets so oversized they threaten to obscure vision, and taunt the catcher by pretending to make a run for home when they're only one foot off the bag. Innings last from a half hour to forty-five minutes long. It seems players get the game ball if they can tie their shoes.

As the players advance, they better imitate their major league counterparts. They grow to love the game, know the rules, and follow each pitch with intensity. At this level, receiving the game ball feels like winning a trophy, for only players making progress or making a key contribution earn it from the coach.

One night, my son's team faced a tough opponent. At the time, Michael was operating somewhere in between that beginning and more advanced stage of baseball.

The rival team's pitcher threw hard fast balls that struck out even our strongest players. Even so, my son got on base in an unusual way. The pitch inadvertently hit Michael's bat when he contorted like a gymnast to avoid a wild delivery. The whole audience and nine opposing players stood frozen in shock as the ball dribbled off his bat into fair territory like a squashed meatball.

His coach reacted first. "RUN!!!!!!!"

Obediently, Michael dropped his bat and ran. He beat the play at first. This charged up his teammates, who lost their feelings of intimidation and started getting hits. Eventually Michael advanced to score. His proudest moment came when the game ended, and the coach awarded him the game ball.

From then on, the fact that he had won the game ball helped him not only feel like an important part of the team, but also encouraged him on days when he had a less than stellar performance. I found it interesting that such a simple act of affirmation could boost his confidence so much.

In Romans 12:8, Paul tells his readers, “If your gift is to encourage others, do it!” Like the giving of a game ball, encouraging others doesn’t have to be time consuming. It can be as simple as sending an e-card to a friend, giving someone a hug, or thanking your child’s teacher for all her hard work. Doing so just might boost the confidence of someone who needs a lift. Plus, encouraging others gives us the opportunity to imitate our “major league” counterpart—God—who offers us words of comfort and encouragement in the Bible.

Prayer: Father, help me be an encouragement to my children, spouse, and friends. Amen.

Take a Breath

Take your kids to a ball game or play a game of catch. Use lots of encouraging words as you play.

#19

Not Listening

You see and understand what is right but refuse to act on it. You hear, but you don't really listen.

Isaiah 42:20 (NLT)

My son sat on the couch with his nose buried in a book. His eyes looked intense under his furrowed brows. I cleared my throat. Again.

“Michael? Did you hear me?”

Glancing up, he said, “Huh? Yes, I heard you.” Then his gaze fell back to the page like a rock sinking in water.

I frowned. “Well then, what’s your answer?”

No response. Tapping my toe, I raised my voice. “Michael!”

“Huh?”

“I asked if you wanted a water bottle or juice in your lunch today.”

“Uh-huh.”

Frustration bubbled to the surface. “Michael!” I snapped, snatching his book away. For a moment, he blinked, staring at the space his book once occupied. He looked like a hospital patient who just got his IVs yanked out. Startled. Confused. And soooooo exposed.

“Michael, you’re not listening to me.”

“I’m listening,” he insisted, still looking a bit dazed.

“No you’re not. This is the fourth time I’ve asked. And it isn’t a yes or no question. Now, what do you want?”

He bit his lip. “What was the question again?”

I sighed and held up the two items. “Water. Or juice. For lunch.”

Our conversation is not unusual. Michael loves reading so much, he often tunes me out when he’s anywhere near a book. Granted, maybe I should know better than to try and talk to him when he’s engaged in this favorite activity, but the kid might forget to eat if I didn’t interrupt him.

How many times are we like that with God? In a sermon or with a song, he might place a message for us on our hearts. But we never follow through because we’re not truly listening. He might prompt us to do things like call a friend or offer to make dinner for someone. We “hear” these prompts because we know we should love our neighbors, do good to others, share the gospel, and so on. Yet for any number of reasons, we don’t act. Maybe we’re too distracted by our favorite activities. Movies. Reality television shows. Email. Sports. Or maybe we just don’t feel like we have the time to reach out to others. Perhaps selective listening is the best phrase to describe our lack of action. We hear when it’s convenient.

In Isaiah 42:20, God addressed the Israelites in a fashion similar to how I spoke to Michael. “You see and understand what is right but refuse to act on it. You hear, but you don’t really listen.”

Is God prompting you to some action today? Will you listen?

Prayer: Father, I am listening. Speak to my heart. Amen.

Take a Breath

Sing hymns or play a favorite Christian music CD. Listen carefully to the lyrics.

#20
Juice

You have armed me with strength for the battle; you have subdued my enemies under my feet.

2 Samuel 22:40 (NLT)

My husband was gone, and my children still slept when I woke up one Saturday feeling strange. Sweat poured off my body. My hands trembled. The room spun. Lurching out of bed, I staggered through the house feeling both faint and disoriented.

I must have a low blood sugar, I thought. Better check. (I'm a type one diabetic, controlled with insulin.) Locating the tester kit, I pricked my fingertip with a sharp needle. The machine calculated the sugar level at 21, well below the acceptable norm. It took me a moment to remember what I needed to do. Go to the kitchen. Drink juice to raise my blood sugar. Instead, I collapsed on the floor with a groan.

A hand touched my shoulder. My son Michael knelt by my side. "Are you okay?"

His voice seemed like an annoying buzz in my ears. Ignoring him, I tried to get up. I was in control, right? But nausea gripped me, and I flopped back down.

I heard Michael drag a chair to the counter, climb up, get a glass, pour something.

"Here, Mom."

How nice. A straw. Where was I?

"Juice, Mom. Drink."

That voice again. When would it leave me alone? But since my tongue went numb, I took the cup.

For over an hour, Michael tended me with patient hands. He read books while he waited, and made breakfast for his younger sister when she woke up. He remained steadfast by my side while my body clawed its way back to normal.

“Are you okay, Mom?”

The question sounded familiar, as if he’d been asking it over and over. With a steady hand, I cradled his face. “I am now. You’re my hero,” I whispered. “Thank you.”

How often do we try to meet daily challenges and responsibilities—cleaning the house, caring for our children, working—in our own strength? We want control over each situation instead of submitting them into God’s hands. That burnout feeling following hectic days reminds us we just can’t do it on our own.

But God offers us a “cup” filled with his wisdom and strength. He not only puts people in our lives to encourage and support us through hard times, just like my son supported me, he also provides his Word and his Spirit to help us live victoriously over any obstacle. 2 Samuel 22:40 says God has armed us with strength for the battle. We just have to accept it.

God tends us with patient hands. And his voice doesn’t leave us alone. It convicts and guides us. What do we need to surrender to him today? Will we let others help us?

Prayer: Father, I submit this life, this day, this moment into your hands. Grant me strength sufficient to meet every challenge and grace to do so in love. Amen.

Take a Breath

Be an encouragement to someone facing a hard time. Collect food and donate it to a local food pantry.

#21 Ought to Love

Godliness leads to love for other Christians, and finally you will grow to have genuine love for everyone.

2 Peter 1:7 (NLT)

Showing teachers support and encouragement is important. But at one parent-teacher conference, my goodwill vanished when my son received a low grade in writing.

The grade shocked me. Neither papers nor reports had come home indicating my son struggled in this area. And Michael is the type of kid who carries blank notebooks around to compose elaborate tales in his free time.

Through gritted teeth, I asked, “May I see his writing grades over the quarter?”

My ire increased when the teacher had no recorded grades to show me. She did, however, produce one crumpled sheet of paper. “The students wrote at least three sentences about our field trip.”

Michael had done just that, meeting the minimal requirement. In horrendous handwriting, he wrote three sub-par sentences. “But Michael won two writing contests. He writes stories all the time at home. What about his other writing assignments?”

Stammering, the teacher explained that there were no other graded assignments. When the conference ended, I stalked out of the classroom. I spent the next few days looking for any weakness the teacher might show. Those faults seemed to justify my anger. I had trouble viewing anything she did in a positive light. While this happened, my conscious bothered me, but I ignored it, harboring my righteous indignation.

Then I read Scripture that convicted me that my critical attitude was wrong. Luke 6:32-33 says, “Do you think you deserve credit merely for loving those who love you? Even the sinners do that! And if you do good only to those who do good to you, is that so wonderful? Even sinners do that much!” In verse 35, God was clear: “Love your enemies! Do good to them!”

Troubled, I prayed about it. This thought came to mind: Love is a choice. Remember to love the way you ought, but most of all, remember you ought to love.

Wow. That hit home. Immediately, I confessed my sin. I started praying not only for Michael’s teacher, but for a change in my heart. Something interesting happened. When I chose to act in love, I found the teacher pleasant to talk to. With reluctance, I also had to admit that she may have been right about Michael’s effort that quarter.

God knows hate wreaks havoc on relationships. Treating others with love first goes a long way toward living a holy and pleasing life. Proverbs 10:12 says, “Hatred stirs up quarrels, but love covers all offenses.” 2 Peter 1: 7 tells us that godliness leads to genuine love for everyone. Is there anyone difficult to love in your life today? You have the opportunity to take the first step toward healing.

Prayer: Father, show me areas in my life where I need to exercise love, then grant me the strength to do it. Amen.

Take a Breath

List people in your life you find difficult to love. Pray for each one. Consider these Scriptures:
John 15:12; Romans 12:9; 1 Corinthians 16:14; Galatians 5:13-14; and 1 Peter 4:8.

#22
Road Kill

...my God is my rock in whom I find protection. He is my shield, the strength of my salvation, and my stronghold, my high tower, my savior, the one who saves me from violence.

2 Samuel 22:4 (NLT)

“You killed it, Mom!” my daughter, Meghan, wailed from the back seat.

I glanced in the rear view mirror and winced. All of the neighborhood children I was transporting home had a horrified look in their wide eyes. A poor, hapless squirrel lay behind me, flattened on the road. Refocusing my gaze ahead, I said, “I’m sorry.”

She frowned. “But you didn’t even try to miss it.”

“No, I didn’t try to miss it, but I had a reason. How many kids are in the car?”

“Five.”

“Plus me makes six people. And we’re driving on a busy stretch of highway. Do you see all the cars?”

She looked around and nodded. A line of cars zipped by to our left. Another line followed us.

“Now, what could have happened if I’d swerved or slowed down to miss that squirrel?”

“You might have hit another car!” someone called out. “That happened to my friend’s mom, and she got rear-ended.”

I nodded. “Exactly. I’m not taking any chances. I’m responsible for your safety. So I’m sorry about hitting the squirrel, but I didn’t want to do anything that might have put you all at risk.”

Meghan made her lip pout like she does when she’s unwilling to admit I may have a point. “Still, you killed it, Mom.”

Resigned to her criticism, I sighed. “I know.”

The incident in the car that day reminded me of how we sometimes overlook God’s great protection. When we see a “dead squirrel” in the road—a tough relationship, a job loss, an unexpected lab result, an angry client—we’re often ready to glare at God and say, “You killed it.” We neglect to see the big picture, the heavenly perspective.

God is responsible for our safety. We can trust Him to have our best interests at heart day in and day out. Knowing that, when we see those “dead squirrels,” we need to think about how God might be leading us in a different direction than what we had envisioned, how God might use a disappointment to teach us, or how He might use the situation for His glory.

I love the confidence of the writer in 2 Samuel 22:4. He says God is his “rock in whom I find protection. He is my shield, the strength of my salvation, and my stronghold, my high tower, my savior, the one who saves me from violence.” We can carry that same confidence with us today.

Prayer: Father, thank you for your seen and unseen protection. Amen.

Take a Breath

Pray for your children when you drop them off for school in the morning. Make a habit of it.

#23

Name of Jesus

*...so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Philippians 2: 10-11 (NLT)

My extended family enjoys getting together. We tell amusing stories, bad jokes, and play a lot of board games. Meal preparation becomes a joint affair with the men cooking the main course, women the side dishes, and children snacking on appetizers.

While waiting for noodles to cook one evening, I ate some spread cheese and crackers my dad had set out for the kids.

“This cheese is wonderful,” I said over a mouthful of crumbs. “What kind is it?”

“It’s from an Israeli dairy farm,” he said.

“No kidding,” I replied, picking up the container for a better look.

“Yeah,” he quipped with a twinkle in his eyes. “It’s called ‘Cheeses of Nazareth.’”

My dad’s silly word play got me thinking about the many names of Jesus found in Scripture. Indeed, names hold meaning, and one person can be known by numerous names. For example, friends call me Lori. Students address me as Mrs. Scott. My husband has dubbed me with a nickname, Zibs. My kids call me Mom. Eventually, their children will call me Grandma. The name used for me by any given person reveals a lot about what kind of role I play in his life. In addition, my name stands as a frame of reference to help others understand that role.

In the same manner, Jesus is known by many names. Each one provides a frame of reference to help understand his character. We picture him with awe when his name is Creator. When filled with gratitude, we might cling to him as Redeemer and Friend.

Even so, there are three wonderful truths we can hold on to when it comes to the name of Jesus. First, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (Joel 2:32). That's a promise we can grasp when facing the death of a loved one or other difficult circumstances.

Second, in the midst of our busy lives, God says when we call on his name, and he will answer us (Zechariah 13:9). He hears our sometimes desperate prayers, and responds to the longing of our hearts.

Third, no matter which name of Jesus is dear to you, the Bible tells us in Philippians 2:10-11 that "...at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Prayer: Father, let praises for your name flow from my mouth today! Amen.

Take a Breath

Like my dad, I appreciate word play. For today's activity, I brainstormed a list of names for Jesus. Try to match an occupation its corresponding name. For example, a farmer might call Jesus the Lord of the Harvest. Answers are at the end.

Occupation	Name
1. Artist	A. King of Kings
2. Attorney	B. Redeemer
3. Baker	C. The Way
4. Chess Master	D. Wonderful Counselor
5. Cobbler	E. Prince of Peace
6. Coupon Collector	F. Holy One
7. Fraternity member	G. The Word
8. GE Electrician	H. Bread of Life
9. Geologist	I. Lover of my Soul
10. Golfer	J. The One Mediator
11. Hostage Negotiator	K. Image of the Invisible God
12. Map makers	L. Alpha and Omega
13. Linguist	M. Rock of my Salvation
14. Stage Magician	N. Creator
15. Vegetable Farmer	O. Light of the World

Answers: 1-N, 2-D, 3-H, 4-A, 5-I, 6-B, 7-L, 8-O, 9-M, 10-F, 11-J, 12-C, 13-G, 14-K, 15-E
(Prince of PEAS).

#24

Remember Whose Kid You Are

Listen to me, all who hope for deliverance— all who seek the Lord! Consider the quarry from which you were mined, the rock from which you were cut!

Isaiah 51:1 (NLT)

My grandfather collected rocks. When I was young, I often accompanied him down the dry riverbed in my backyard on his rock hunting excursions. He used a metal stick shaped like a giant ladle on one end to scoop up various stones. Then he let me feel them, and showed me their interesting colors and patterns.

“This is an igneous rock,” he might say, handing me a sample. “You can tell because of its shiny, smooth surface. Feels like glass, doesn’t it?”

Every trip I’d learn more about how certain telling characteristics of rocks, such as banded stripes or fossil imprints, helped him classify the stone as igneous, metamorphic, or sedimentary. Soon just by examining a rock’s constitution, I could identify its type and how it was formed. That’s because even a chip of rock will carry the essence and structure of the larger parent from which it came.

Speaking of chips, have you ever heard the expression, “Chip off the old block?” It holds the same idea—a child often mimics the mannerisms and attitudes of the parent. My husband and I raised our children to love God, respect authority, use their manners, and tell the truth. I pray that they own these lessons, and act in such a way that if a stranger was to meet them, she would know beyond doubt that they belonged in my family. As they scamper off toward the school, I often tell them the same thing my husband’s mother told him as a child: “Remember whose kid you are!”

In Isaiah 51:1, God says a similar thing. He calls out, “Consider the quarry from which you were mined, the rock from which you were cut.”

Just as one quick look at a stone’s characteristics can reveal which type of rock family to which it belongs, so can a quick look at the characteristics of our lives reveal the family to which we belong. If we are children of God, our actions and words should reflect Christ, the quarry from which we were mined. As Christians, we should exemplify the one Rock, Jesus Christ, who is the underlying support and foundation behind all we hope to accomplish in life.

Today as you go about your busy life, remember whose kid you are. You are a child of the King. When people see your deeds, your kindness, your honesty, your faith, will they know beyond a doubt that you belong to God?

Prayer: Father, today let me today show others the Rock from which I was cut so when people see me, they’ll know I belong to the family of God. Amen.

Take a Breath

Take a snapshot of your family for your scrapbook and give it this caption: “Remember whose kid you are!”

#25
The List

You will toss them in the air, and the wind will blow them all away: a whirlwind will scatter them. And the joy of the Lord will fill you to overflowing. You will glory in the Holy One of Israel.

Isaiah 41:16 (NLT)

I often operate under the assumption that I must meet the needs of every person in the family. That's a tough order. Action filled days leave me feeling drained.

On such a day, my husband Jim noted my sluggish conduct. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing!" I snarled. "I'm just a little tired. No, not tired, just... Oh, I don't know. I feel so listless. I can't seem to get motivated to do anything. I almost feel depressed."

Jim pondered the situation. "So you're listless? No energy, no motivation?"

"Yes."

"Well, snap out of it!" he said. "Take a bubble bath or something."

I protested. Dinner needed cooking, Michael wanted help building with LEGOs, and someone needed to keep an eye on Meghan. But after some weak arguments, I relented. Feeling somewhat guilty, I drew up a tub of hot water.

Two minutes later Meghan climbed into the bath with me, toting a bucket of toys. Luckily, she removed most of her clothing first.

Jim popped his head into the bathroom. "Feeling better?"

I glowered at him. Looking abashed, he fished out Meghan. Carrying her along, he left to answer a ringing phone.

Moments later Jim returned with a slip of paper and handed it to me. I groaned. A phone message? What now? Volunteers needed for a field trip? But after reluctantly reading the note, I laughed. On the paper was a list that read:

Smile

Hug Michael

Laugh

Kiss Meghan

Admire my large muscles

“Feel better now?” Jim asked with an amused grin.

“Yes,” I grinned. “Much.”

“You don’t need to feel listless anymore. There’s your list. For us, that’s all you really need to do each day!”

When stress builds up, we tend to overlook what matters most to us. When we allow pressure to suck out all our energy, we are left with little joy. Feeling depressed, we go listlessly through the motions of being a good mother.

Isaiah says God will blow away our enemies and fill us with his joy. How? It’s helpful to identify tasks that must be done, prioritize the list, and set up a timetable for completing them. Low priorities may need to be turned down or rescheduled. Completing high priorities will fill us with

a sense of accomplishment and joy. Keeping family in a position of high priority will help lend perspective to your chosen tasks.

Prayer: Father, thank you for the joy you put into each day. Help me to see it. Amen.

Take a Breath

Take a bubble bath! And while you're at it, list the most precious things in your life. Post the list in a prominent place to remind yourself daily about what matters most.

#26

Flums for Madison

Lord, don't hold back your tender mercies from me. My only hope is in your unfailing love and faithfulness.

Psalm 40:11(NLT)

The summer Madison died, a friend gave me a chrysanthemum to plant. "Each spring their blossoms will remind you of Madison," she said. "It will help your heart heal."

As my trowel dug down deep into a barren patch of soil in my wildflower garden, I wondered if her words held any truth. What good purpose is found in miscarriage, in watching a precious life bleed away to nothing?

A swirl of anguish washed through me as I lifted Madison's plant from its temporary pot, placed it in its earthen bed, and gently covered its roots with soil. If only filling the hole in my heart were so easy.

My son, Michael, knelt beside me, digging with his hands while my daughter, Meghan, studied the worms he unearthed. "Mom, how did you know the baby was a girl?" he asked.

"I dreamed about her the night before she died. She had transparent skin and a curling umbilical cord. I knew somehow she was a girl, the same way I knew you'd be a boy and Meghan a girl. She seemed so peaceful, so delicate."

My voice cracked. With trembling fingers I reached out and brushed a stray hair back from his saucer-like eyes. "God must have loved her so much that He couldn't wait for her to soar with the angels."

Michael nodded. "I wish I could have met her."

Wiping the earth from our hands, we stood. I pulled him into a tender embrace. "One day in heaven, I'll hold her and say, 'The mums were for you, Madison.'"

"Can I tell her I helped plant them?" asked Michael. I laughed and he rewarded me with a lopsided grin before running off to play.

I remained, silently contemplating my garden. Each blossom rested content, cradled in greenery and basking in buttery sunlight. The mums swayed in the breeze, a silent tribute to an unborn child. I found comfort in that sight, recognizing that both flowers and children flourish according to God's plan while I, the gardener, tend what grows.

It's been said that we cannot understand hope until we experience doubt; cannot understand compassion until we experience pain; cannot understand joy until we experience sorrow. After experiencing the death of one child, I can verify the truth of those words. I treasure my children more. I also realize that God is with us in our sorrows as much as our joys, our loss as much as our gain.

In sorrow, confusion, and doubt, we can pray like the Psalmist, "Lord, don't hold back your tender mercies from me. My only hope is in your unfailing love and faithfulness."

Prayer: Father, help me be an encouragement to those around me suffering from loss, heartache, or illness. Amen.

Take a Breath

Plant a flower or buy a bouquet in memory of a loved one.

#27

Wonderful Things

God showed how much he loved us by sending his only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love. It is not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

1 John 4:9-10 (NLT)

Life gets hectic for me now and then, especially before holidays or at the height of soccer season. Often during those times, pressure builds and takes its toll. The kids start quarreling and acting irritable. I get grumpy, pushing them to hurry up, do this, do that!

After one such frenzied week, I interrupted an argument between my children. "I'm tired of all the complaining and nasty comments. God tells us to love each other."

"Well, it was my day to be first, and he went first."

"She took too long getting ready."

"Well, HE breathed on me with his stinky breath!"

"That's because SHE took my seat!"

"Enough," I said. "I don't want any more unkind words coming out of your mouths. Starting with me." With ferocious intensity, I addressed my son. "Michael, I'm going to tell you five wonderful things I appreciate about you."

They both gave me doubtful looks. I took a big breath. "No arguing with me either. This is MY list. Michael, I think you're smart in math."

He started protesting, but I cut him off. “No arguing, remember? I’m not done. I also think you’re kind to your friends. You’re cute...look at those eyes. You write interesting stories. And you’re funny. You make me smile.”

“And Meghan,” I continued, “you’re clever. You have a beautiful smile. I think the pictures you draw look very artistic. You’re nice to animals. And I love the way you brighten up my day.”

My words worked like magic. Just like that, the downbeat emotions overriding the day evaporated. Frowns transformed into smiles as both children realized they were special and loved.

Since then, my children have often asked for me to tell them “wonderful things.” Once, I even made them do it for each other. That forced them to focus on each other’s best (instead of worst) qualities.

When we feel like we’re carrying a truckload of negative thoughts and feelings, we can remember that God loves and that we are precious to Him. Just like I looked my children in the eye and spoke words of encouragement and affirmation out loud, so God looks us in the eye through the Bible and whispers wonderful things.

Just take a moment to listen! In clear and direct language, God says we are fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139). He calls us his children (1 John 3:1). He loves us with an everlasting love (Jeremiah 31:3). Take some time to read your Bible and let God tell you wonderful things.

Prayer: Father, thank you for loving us and making us special and unique. Amen.

Take a Breath

When you tuck the kids into bed, tell them five wonderful things you appreciate about them. Speaking these words out loud will serve as a strong encouragement to your youngsters. Later, check out more wonderful scripture: Psalm 139; Isaiah 43:1; and John 3: 16.

#28
Mud

With unfailing love you will lead this people whom you have ransomed. You will guide them in your strength to the place where your holiness dwells.

Exodus 15:13 (NLT)

One day, the kids and I headed to a nearby park to hike. The grass felt spongy. The air carried the scent of damp rain. Small plants poked through the ground like tiny green fingers. Robins flitted from branch to branch, gurgling songs. Captivated by the surrounding beauty, we walked toward the entrance to the woods.

After debating about which trail to take, we started down a path that looked easy to navigate. It wound down a broad slope lined with mulch and rock. However, several turns later a small patch of mud covered our passageway. We strayed off the path to skirt the mud, relocated the trail marker, and continued.

Soon we came to a larger muddy area. We couldn't see the trail marker, but we saw the path snaking out the other end of the mess. Using a fallen tree as a bridge, we crossed over to it.

With a little apprehension, we kept walking. Another even larger mud spot loomed ahead. This time, we slogged through it. Our shoes became smothered in goop. Using a twig, we scraped them clean. But dealing with the mud slowed us down, and the kids started feeling hungry and tired.

"Maybe we should go back," Michael said.

I shook my head. "Then we'd have to go back through mud we've already passed. Let's just keep going."

So we kept going, with more tenuous steps, until mud finally obliterated the path. To avoid it we chose a new direction. That way not only took us to a place without trail markers, but forced us through prickly thorn bushes. One cut Meghan, and another snagged my jacket.

Feeling anxious, we retraced our steps until we located a trail marker. It stood like a beacon, leading us back in the right direction, guiding us out of the woods.

Our misadventure reminds me of problems we face as busy mothers. We start with good intentions, surrounded by beauty. We'll work, but allow enough time for family. We'll sign our kids up for some activities, but not too many.

Somehow these small "patches of mud" grow. Tasks pile up. Commitments accumulate. Stress builds. In an effort to continue, we forsake the path and lose sight of the trail marker. We get coated with "mud"-- impatience, fatigue, and frustration.

When that happens, it's time to backtrack. Look for God, our trail marker. Find the path he's laid out before us. The Psalms tell us that if we fill our hearts with God's law, we aren't likely to stray from his path and that his Word is a light to our path. (Psalm 37:31, 119:105.) Exodus says God will guide us in his strength to the place where his holiness dwells.

Prayer: Father, lead me on the right path. Let me know plainly what to do, and show me which way to turn. Amen.

Take a Breath

Take a walk through the woods. Use this opportunity to talk with your children about how God's Word gives us direction and guidance.

#29

Sleepovers

Indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

Psalm 121:4 (NLT)

My kids love sleepovers. Only a few children live in our neighborhood, so some weekends we invite the whole crew over. Six warm bodies. Upstairs. Pajamas, popcorn, movies, and sleeping bags.

When it's time for lights out, I usually sit in the rocking chair just outside the playroom to make sure everyone settles down. The kids can't see me, but they know I'm there, especially if I occasionally growl at them to go to sleep. (Somehow that seems to add to the thrill of the evening.) In this way, I also serve as sentinel. Anyone trying to get in or out of the room must pass by me.

Even though the lights may be out, I know the kids will try to stay awake as long as they possibly can. Rocking gently and waiting with heavy eyelids, I listen to them whispering quietly, giggling, and telling secrets. I don't mind. Eventually sleep will overcome them, and they'll rest snuggled in a nest of friendship and shared memories. Only when the last one finally drifts off to sleep do I release my watch care and embrace blissful slumber.

At the last sleepover, keeping vigil proved difficult. After a busy week working, cleaning the house, entertaining guests, and meeting various deadlines, I felt spent. Struggling to remain alert made me think about and appreciate God. Psalm 121:4 tells us that he never grows weary and never rests. Wherever we go, whatever we do, or even whether or not we acknowledge that he's there, God remains steadfast. That means his watch care over us never ends.

History shows how some rivals carry out successful attacks when they catch their target tired and off guard. In 1 Samuel 26, when King Saul and his tired army slept in the desert of Ziph, David and his men snuck into their camp. The slumbering soldiers were so unaware of his presence that David could have easily taken Saul's life. Instead David took the spear and water jug by Saul's head.

Like King Saul and his army, are we more vulnerable when weakened by fatigue? Could our adversary sneak past our defenses and cause us to act crabby and impatient instead of joyful and loving? Thank goodness God is on our side! Isaiah 33:21 says the Lord will be like a wide river of protection that no enemy can cross. 2 Samuel 22:31 tells us that God is a shield for all who look to him for protection.

Knowing our guardian is ever watchful can reassure us each night, and let us fall asleep snuggled safe and secure in His loving care...no matter what time it is!

Prayer: Father, thank you for watching over me all day and all night. Amen.

Take a Breath

Have a family sleepover. Gather in one room with sleeping bags, snacks, and games. Praise God for his constant watch care over us.

#30
Superglue

But if you keep looking steadily into God's perfect law—the law that sets you free—and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.

James 1:25 (NLT)

“Mommy, look,” my daughter Meghan sobbed. She held the body of a ballerina figurine in one hand and the ballerina’s legs in another. “I dropped it and it broke.”

“We’ll fix it,” I said, trying to cheer her up. “A little superglue and she’ll look as good as new.”

Meghan sniffled. “Can I help?”

Shaking my head, I said, “No. Superglue sticks almost instantly to anything. If you accidentally touch it, you might glue your fingers together.”

Alarmed, she backed up. I pulled the lid off the superglue tube with utmost care. A large blob of sticky substance oozed out. After quickly cleaning that excess off with a napkin, I dabbed a little onto the figurine. Then I pressed the two pieces together.

Impatiently, Meghan shook my arm. “Can I hold it now?”

“It’s not dry yet,” I said. When she continued to pester me, I got frustrated. Setting the figurine down, I read aloud the warning label on the tube to make my point, looking at her steadily while I emphasized the part about avoiding contact with skin. A bit of hair got stuck in my mouth as I lectured, so I grabbed the napkin off the table and wiped off my tongue.

But the napkin wouldn’t come off.

“Why is that napkin stuck to your tongue?” Meghan asked.

Ripping away most of the paper, I tested the adhesive spot. Glue came off and stuck fast to my fingernail. I realized my mistake. “I accidentally superglued my tongue,” I said. Talking made the stuff spread to some of my teeth and the inside of my cheek. In disbelief, I spit and danced around, looking very much like a cat with a hairball.

You’ve heard the expression “glue your mouth shut.” Now I risked doing this literally. With tongue hanging out, I re-read the label under the “what to do if” section. Meghan laughed when I rushed to the sink and started gargling with warm water and lemon-flavored soap. Tiny bubbles spewed out of my mouth. It seemed a fitting punishment, considering that I had warned her to be careful, but didn’t act carefully myself.

Whenever I remember the superglue incident, it reminds me the importance of living a life consistent with the beliefs I proclaim. Mothers in particular need to keep that lesson in mind. If we tell our children to be patient, we should refrain from getting annoyed with a slow sales clerk. If we tell them not to lie, we should try not to exaggerate when we talk to a friend. In all, that old saying makes sense: actions speak louder than words.

Prayer: Father, you know my heart. Though I long to follow your law, sometimes I do things my own way. Help me cultivate godly living. Amen.

Take a Breath

This is fun to do with your children. Mix $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of white school glue with packets of various Kool-Aid® flavors. Mix well and use it to paint pictures on paper. The end result will look glossy, smell great, and serve as a good reminder to ‘stick’ close to God.