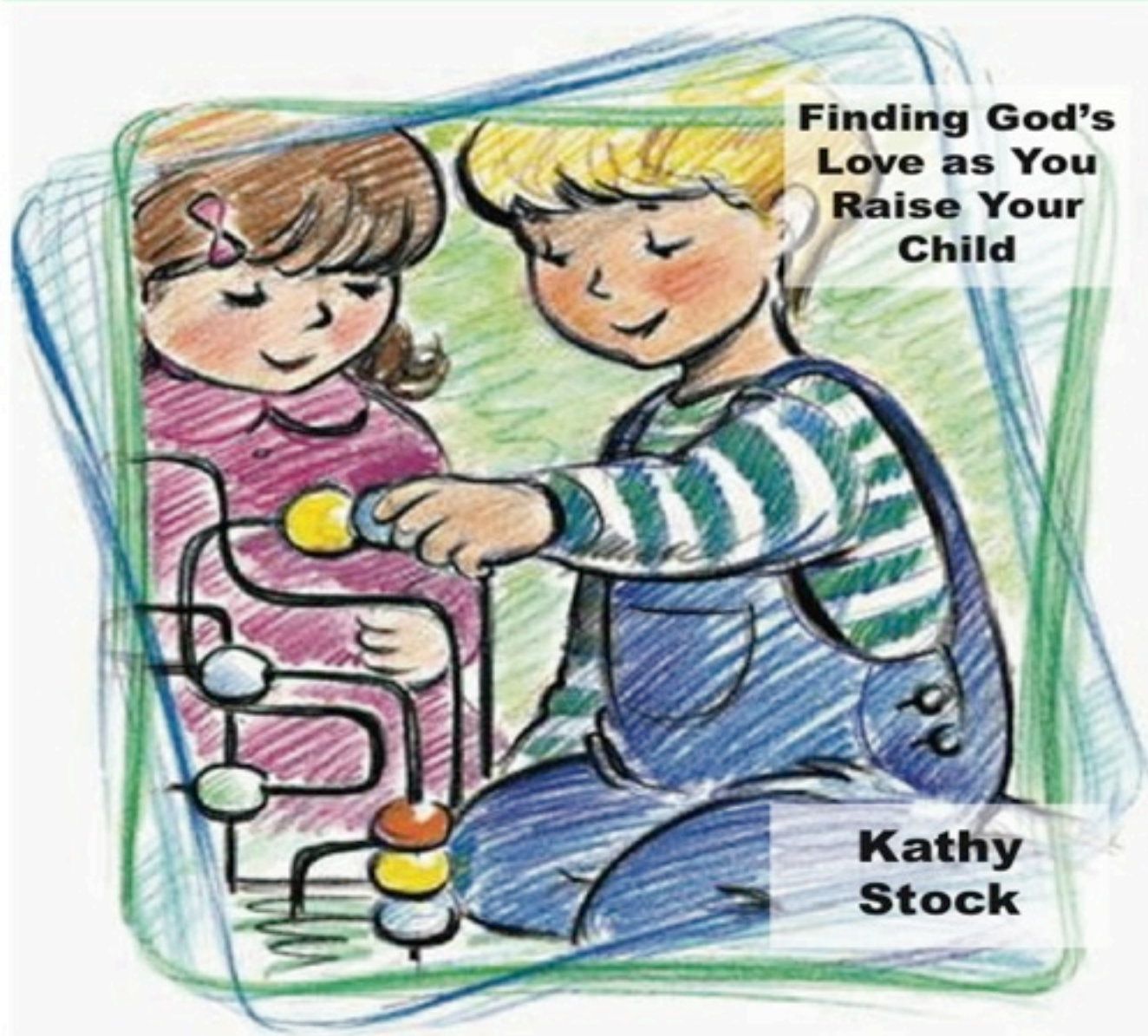


# Moms of Toddlers Devotions to Go



**Finding God's  
Love as You  
Raise Your  
Child**

**Kathy  
Stock**

Moms' Devotions to Go Series

# Moms of Toddlers Devotions To Go

Finding God's Love as You  
Raise Your Child

**Kathy Stock**

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## I Am Weak But He Is Strong

*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me –  
Philippians 4:13*

It happened on a Thursday evening. I was frazzled, emotional, over tired, over worked and I hadn't even left my house yet. In fact, I was still in my pajamas. Engaged in an hour long battle (one of many that day) with my 2 year old little monster...um, I mean my precious little boy, Caden, I broke down in tears and came to an abrupt and painful realization: I was the mother of a toddler and I had no idea what I was doing.

I looked into his icy, blue eyes and adorable face, flushed with frustration from the tantrum he was having and I stroked his wispy, blonde hair. This little boy could melt my heart with love and joy one minute and boil my blood with anger and rage the next.

I fell to my knees on the hard bathroom tile in pure exhaustion and said, "He deserves better than me. I can't do this."

To be frankly honest, my husband and I had never planned on having children but are thankful beyond measure that we received the 'surprise' of our son, Caden. I had no experience with kids and was worried that I wouldn't know what to do with a new baby but after reading many books and seeking a lot of advice, I found that it came somewhat naturally to me. Feed, burp, change, bathe and repeat. Aside from midnight feeding induced sleep deprivation, I had the baby thing under control. Caden was a great infant. He was a pleasant and happy baby. I was blessed to stay at home with him for the first few years of his life and it was amazing watching him grow so quickly. He started laughing, eating solid foods, sitting up on his own, crawling, walking, talking and so on.

Suddenly, toddlerhood was upon me. I don't remember when it happened but my baby morphed into something that looked like a baby, smelled like a baby and at times acted like a baby yet wasn't a baby at all. This person

now had a strong will and a stubborn streak a mile long. He was pleasant one minute and inconsolable the next, all because of a cup falling on the floor or a leaf falling the wrong way off a tree out the window. He was independence and dependence all rolled into one. He needed direction and boundaries but also freedom and room to explore. It was my job to decipher at what times he needed what things and I was getting exhausted and burned out from the whole experience. The crying, the tantrums, the whining, the refusing to eat, the potty training accidents...it was overwhelming. How is one woman supposed to handle all of this?

On that particular Thursday evening, with the cold bathroom tile beneath my knees, I came to the realization that no one woman is built to handle motherhood all alone. I looked at my boy and knew that I was no longer the mother of a baby. I was the mother of a two year old child and I didn't have the strength to handle that by myself.

Admitting my inability was my first step to becoming a better mother. I realized that night that I can't do anything in my own strength, including being Caden's mom. The calling of motherhood is a great one and it requires divine intervention to endure the emotional ups and downs that it brings. My intense love for Caden revealed in me a deeper need for God and to this day I take comfort in knowing that through His strength, I can raise the child that He has entrusted to me.

*Prayer: Dear God, Thank you for being my strength when mine is gone. Through you, I can face anything. Help me to be the mother you have called me to be. I can't do this by myself. Be with me, every step of the way. Amen*

## Journal Time

Writing is an excellent way to decompress and fully express yourself. I encourage you to find a journal and take part in the daily journal time activities. Today, describe what it's like to be the mother of a toddler. What areas of motherhood come naturally to you and where do you struggle? What are your favorite moments and when do you need super human strength to get through the day? Know that you are not alone when you struggle. Every mom has been there at one time or another.



## Tantrums

*If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!*

*Luke 11:13*

I remember ‘pre-mother’ Kathy would see tantruming toddlers in the mall and self-righteously say, “My child will never act like that.”

Sometimes I want to go back and punch ‘pre-mother’ Kathy in the face for being so ignorant and judgmental. Having had no experience with children, I couldn’t have known that my child would indeed act just like that. He would scream, arch his back, kick his feet, throw his food and perform countless other highly erratic acts to portray his frustrations and escalate mine.

I remember having Caden in a shopping cart one day when he began frantically motioning that he wanted something. He pointed to a shiny, blue men’s razor hanging on the aisle shelf, hoping that I would grab it for him and let him play with it. I, of course, told him, “No.”

That was not the response he wanted to hear. He began screaming. I did what any inexperienced parent would do. I panicked! After all, there were people around! What would they think of me if I couldn’t make him stop screaming? I sprinted with my half filled cart to the end of a deserted aisle and I tried to reason with him. I tried explaining that his behavior was not acceptable. I explained that a razor was not a toy. I did everything short of lecture him on how screaming can cause damaging, long-term effects to his vocal chords, all the while sounding to him like the undecipherable teacher from Charlie Brown and making him more and more upset.

A similar occurrence happened every Wednesday morning during story time at the local library. Caden would grow tired and frustrated after being there for only twenty minutes. At the end of story time, we would sing

songs and I knew that if I could just get him to last until the end, he would really enjoy the music but a two year old mind cannot process timelines. He had no idea that a fun filled time of dancing and singing was just around the corner. All he knew was that right now he was hungry, tired and not in the mood for reading. Needless to say, we often left the library prematurely, missing the music all together.

Caden had no idea that the pretty razor he was crying for in the store could hurt him. He couldn't predict that after story time he would get to groove to the music. His tantrums and frustrations came from his inability to see the bigger picture and his misunderstanding of me, as a mean, old mom who was out to ruin his fun. In Caden's eyes, I was withholding blessing from him, when in reality I was protecting him from danger and sustaining him for good things to come.

So often our prayer lives can be like that. We ask for things and when God doesn't answer the way we want Him to, we grow angry and bitter. We need to remember that as God's children, we have an inability to see the whole picture. When God says, 'No' and 'Wait' instead of 'Yes,' it is not because He isn't listening. It is because He is protecting us from evil that could hurt us and He's preparing us for the dance that is to come.

*Prayer Time: Heavenly Father, I find peace in knowing that you hold the world in your hands. Thank you for supplying all of my needs. Help me to relax and remember that you hear me when I pray and you always do what's best for me. Amen*

## Journal Time

God is faithful to do immeasurably more than we could ever ask or imagine. Write a prayer to God, thanking Him for His love, telling Him about what's going on in your life and being honest about what you need from Him. Remember that God is always listening and His timing is perfect.

## Little 'Helper'

*Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them.*

*Psalm 127:3-5a*

I was blessed to be a stay at home mom for the first few years of my son's life. We lived thousands of miles away from family and my husband worked long hours, leaving me and Caden to spend the majority of our days alone together. During the baby days, this was pretty easy going and relaxing. I would go shopping and he would sleep peacefully in his stroller as I pushed him around the store. I would go out to lunch with friends and he would pleasantly coo, making every woman around us who didn't have a baby want one. When he got a bit older, things changed dramatically. I had to be strategic about getting things done. If I was brave enough to take him out for lunch, we had to go somewhere fast and noisy. Fast was good so that we could get in and out as quickly as possible. Noisy was good to muffle his little voice if he decided to yell the word, "POOP!" over and over and over again.

When Caden became a toddler, shopping (if tackled) had to be done in the early morning. If we were out too long, it would always end in drama and if he fell asleep in the car on the way home from the store it would completely ruin his nap for the day.

Getting things done around the house was also becoming more and more difficult. I couldn't focus on anything for more than thirty seconds at a time. When I really needed to focus on something, he was at his worst. If I had to make a phone call, he would yell as loud as he could until I was done. If I had to make dinner, he would open and close the fridge asking for yogurt and ice cream and cheese and mayo and pickles and anything else he knew how to say. It was a constant cycle of distraction and frustration until one day, it hit me. He wants my attention.

I always knew that was the case but my goal was to get him to focus on something else besides me. Finally, I realized that refocusing his attention wasn't the issue. He wanted me and what a compliment that was! He wasn't interested in his shiny toys or his videos. They paled in comparison to playing with Mama. He fought sleep and battled naps because he wanted to stay up with me. Suddenly, I began to feel honored instead of annoyed.

I began including Caden in the things that I needed to get done. He would 'help' me in the store by holding the grocery list. He would 'help' me put the laundry in the washing machine. He would 'help' me clean up the living room by holding the vacuum handle with me. He would stand on a kitchen chair and 'help' me make dinner or bake cookies (far from the stove top).

In actuality, it took me three times longer to get anything accomplished with Caden's 'help' but it didn't matter. The tone within my home had begun to change.

It is good to remember in the midst of toddler-induced frustration that our children have been placed in our lives by God for us to nurture, shape, teach, love and enjoy. The more we begin including them in everyday tasks, the more we live in harmony. Try this and I promise there will be fewer battles, less tears and not as many timeouts. There may even be more laughter, more hugs, more tickle fights and more peace.

*Prayer: Father, Thank you for placing my little helper in my life. Give me the creativity I need to keep up with the enormous energy and active mind of my toddler. Bring peace to my home and let it begin with me. Amen*

## Journal Time

Begin to list some ways you can creatively include your child in household chores and errands. What are some ways you can entertain and educate your child while still getting your work done and your errands accomplished? Having a plan makes the day flow much easier.

## The Lone Toddler

*...God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"*

*Hebrews 13:5-6*

When Caden turned two, he started attending daycare a few times a week. We enrolled him because he was noticeably apprehensive around other kids. He had been spending about an hour a week in the church nursery but aside from that he hung out with Mommy and Mommy's friends all the time. Caden had no stranger anxiety when it came to adults but babies and toddlers were another story. He greatly feared kids his own age or younger because he didn't have any exposure to them. When they cried, he cried harder. You could literally see the anxiety on his face when submersed into a group of other toddlers.

The very first day of daycare, I brought him as soon as it opened, not because I was excited to get rid of him but because I wanted to get it over with. They served breakfast, so I sat with him on a chair made for someone one tenth my size and watched him eat his fruit and cereal. The teachers were very kind about letting me stay as long as I needed to but after about thirty minutes I knew it was now or never. I explained to him that he was going to stay with new friends for the day and I gave him a kiss. Immediately, a look of sheer panic came across his face, as if to say, "Don't leave me! You're abandoning me!"

He began crying hysterically when I turned to walk away and the cries became harder and harder as I got closer to the exit door. Once I got outside, I knew it was safe for me to cry too and cry I did. I cried the whole way back to the house, periodically throughout the morning and right up until that afternoon when I picked him up. I knew that he was safe and that I was doing this for his own good but I couldn't shake the image of his sad little face as I walked away. He didn't know it but I was leaving him there to help him and make him better.

Sometimes, we cannot feel or see God. It is as if He has removed himself completely. We feel as though our prayers are not being answered and that somehow the God we once felt so close, is so far away from us and our situations.

The truth is, God never abandons us but there are moments in our lives when His presence is purposefully distant and His still, small voice is silent, to strengthen us and define our maturity in Him.

Caden cried his entire first day at daycare. Each drop off got easier until he started asking to go to school! No one could have predicted how great it was going to be for him. Eventually, he transformed from a timid child who was slow to speak and was terrified of his peers into a social butterfly and a chatterbox who was always the life of the party. Giving him space was not abandonment at all. I took a step back so that he could take a step forward into becoming the person God has created him to be.

If you are feeling space between yourself and God, keep believing, keep praying and keep reading His Word. He is never far from you. He's probably just taking a step back so that you can take a step forward to become the child He has created you to be.

*Prayer: Father, thank you for never leaving me. Help me to recognize that you are always there even if you have taken a step back. Renew my faith in those times when I feel completely alone and strengthen my character to overcome those lonely times. Amen*



## Journal Time

Write openly and honestly about a time when you wondered if God even existed. Maybe you're going through that right now. Remember that everything He does is on purpose, to usher you into His perfect plan. Know that you are not alone even when you feel like you are all by yourself.

## "Dat's Heavy"

*Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint. Cast but a glance at riches and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle.*

*Proverbs 23:4-5*

Caden and I were driving through a very ritzy community one day where mansion-like homes lined the streets. You could fit ten houses like mine in the foyers of these monstrous structures. I didn't know that Caden was paying attention to the surroundings because I wasn't even sure if his two and a half year old body was tall enough to see out the window but all of a sudden he pointed to one of the homes and said with wonderment, "Dat house is heavy!"

"You're right!" I said laughing. "It IS heavy!"

I've never forgotten that statement from my little man. We live in a 'rich' nation but most of us over spend and live far beyond our means. As a society, we are up to our eyeballs in debt, giving us huge amounts of stress, family trouble, addictions, health issues and more 'heavy' problems.

Parents are easily ushered into the realm of 'must haves'. After all, we love and want the best for our children but we sometimes fail to see what we're doing to ourselves and our families while trying to keep up with the Jones and the Jones kids. We enroll them into every activity possible, ensuring that they don't miss out on what Jack and Susie down the street are doing. We go crazy on their birthday and at Christmas time, showering them with presents when at two years old, they are happiest playing in the empty boxes and wrapping paper after the gift is open.

We do this for many reasons. We like to see the look of happiness and surprise on our child's face. Sometimes, over-worked mothers feel guilty for not always being around so they buy for their children as a means of

making up for lost time. Sometimes we go overboard because it's what everyone else is doing. I remember investing a lot of money into an extravagant first birthday party because I felt like that's what I was 'suppose' to do. Everyone else was doing it so I assumed I had to as well, even if I was flat broke by the end of it.

What your child needs more than ballet, t-ball and the latest toy on the market is you. Don't under estimate the power of your presence in your child's life. It is you he wants acceptance from. It is you she wants to spend time with. Some mother's have to work outside of the home and that's ok. Don't feel guilty about providing for your family but make the most of your moments with them. Quality time for a moment is better than a large quantity of time wasted.

As moms, we need to teach our kids by example how to live. If we teach them how to overindulge eventually they bear a heavy burden of stress. Instead, let's teach them about storing up treasures in heaven, about being responsible while on earth, about tithing and giving. Let's teach them about the importance of family by making each day special and when they're grown, they remember those moments and praise God for their loving mother.

*Prayer: Dear God, forgive me for when I feel like the blessings you have given me aren't enough. Thank you for all of the wonderful things in my life. Keep my eyes focused on what is important instead of material things that fade away. Amen*

## Journal Time

Make three lists: a list of wants, a list of needs and a list of all that you have. Notice how more than likely, you have everything you need, which is more than most people on the planet can say. I encourage you to use what you have to help others, whether you begin sponsoring a child from a third world country or donating funds, goods or your time to a local organization. God has given you so much more than you probably even realize. Thank Him by helping someone else in need.

## The Best Medicine

*A joyful heart is good medicine...*

*Proverbs 17:22*

I had gotten quite a bit accomplished. Caden and I stayed home all day because I was determined to organize and clean the house from top to bottom. It wasn't an unusually hard day, just one filled with hard work. I didn't realize how tired I had gotten until I sat in the car at four thirty in the afternoon. A sudden wave of fatigue came over my entire body but I powered through. We were headed to the grocery store so I promised myself it would be a quick trip. Caden was being a relatively well behaved boy and it was close to dinner so I bought him a little snack to eat while we perused the aisles. I picked up some produce, a jug of water and a little treat for myself (since I had accomplished so much around the house) and we quickly checked out and headed home.

We were about 4 miles from home when suddenly Caden began coughing. He had been drinking some milk from his sippy cup and it sounded like some of it had gone down the wrong way. Alarmed, I kept checking the rear view mirror to make sure he was ok. He was turning a little red from all the coughing but he was breathing. I knew once the tickle in his throat was gone, he would be just fine. All of sudden the coughing triggered his little gag reflex and before I could pull over, he started throwing up. This wasn't one of those little spit ups. This was the mother of all vomits and it just kept coming. All of his lunch, all of the milk he had been drinking, all of the snacks he had eaten at the store...the back seat was filling up with the most putrid of sights and smells. Mortified, I kept reassuring him, all the while overwhelmed with shock by the clean up that lay before me. When he finally stopped puking, he went back to being his jolly, little self. Soaked with vomit, he laughed and clapped his hands and acted like it was no big deal. I, however, felt quite the contrary.

I pulled over to the side of the road and pulled him out of the car. I stripped him down to a diaper and let him 'drive' while I figured out a way to clean up the atrocious mess. I turned on a children's CD so that he would be entertained and grabbed all of the bottled water I had purchased, proceeding to hose down the car as best I

could. I used a plastic shopping bag to hold his soiled clothes but it appeared that the only way I was going to be able to remove the chunks from the backseat was to use my hands. In disbelief at myself, I began scraping my son's puke off the floor of the car with my bare hands and throwing it to the side of the street. Those who drove by stopped for only a moment to point, stare and laugh. Caden, who was enjoying his pretend driving experience, found the volume button on the radio and cranked it up as far as it could go. Covered in puke, on the side of the street with 'The Cat Came Back' blaring in my ears like a nightmare I said out loud, "This must be what Hell is like."

Within seconds, the hilarity of the situation hit me. My naked toddler was joyfully dancing behind the wheel of the car to obnoxiously loud children's music while I was elbow deep in vomit on the side the road, at rush hour. I started laughing. I laughed until tears started coming out my eyes and my ribs started to hurt. I felt like I was the star of my own sitcom and found myself excited to relay the story to other people and hear them laugh too.

Joy doesn't disappear at the sight of unfortunate situations. Joy is an everlasting condition that is given to us as a gift from God. We can find it anywhere that God is which happens to be at all times and in all places! When we take a second to find the humor in our 'unfortunate' situations, we remember how blessed we are, regardless of our stinky surroundings.

*Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for creating children, smiles and laughter. Please give me a sense of humor in the midst of just about anything. Remind me to always smile and show me the silver lining to every cloud. Amen*

## Journal Time

Write about a time when you laughed so hard that your face started to hurt and your sides started to split. It doesn't have to be a moment with your toddler, just the first memory that comes to mind when you think of laughing really hard. On your toughest days, remember this story. Laughter truly is the best medicine.

## Be Careful What You Pray For

*Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, patient in prayer.*

*Romans 12:12*

Believing and experiencing the power of prayer has gotten me through many tough moments as a new mom. Knowing that someone bigger than me holds the Universe in His hands, gives me a sense of calm. I often pray over my family. For their protection and happiness, that they are blessed and bless others. As a parent, I pray for strength and endurance. I pray for my home to be filled with joy and that God gives me the wisdom to raise my children the way He intended.

One day, I made the mistake of praying for patience. Caden was being particularly troublesome. He was having angry fits of rage about everything and anything, continuously voicing his frustrations with me and desperately trying to assert his independence. I paused and said under my breath, “Lord, give me patience.” Big mistake! All hell broke loose. From that moment of prayer onward, my child was on a mission to disobey me and wear me down. The screaming got louder, the tantrums became longer. Insanity broke loose all because of those four little words.

That same day I was walking across a busy parking lot, holding Caden’s hand. When we got to our car, I let go of his hand for just a moment to open the car door. He looked at me and with a goofy grin he shouted, “I RUNNING!”

Within a millisecond, he bolted! He took off running with a look of sheer delight on his face, having no fear of the moving vehicles around him. I shouted, “Stop Caden! Right NOW! Caden, you stop right this minute! Stop running! Come back here!!”



For some crazy reason, I was wearing high heels that day (an accessory I won't choose again when out and about with a toddler) and it seemed impossible for me to catch him. It was as though he sensed my weakness. He darted and weaved with the speed and agility of a jungle cat and everyone around us was staring while this crazy woman tried desperately to catch her naughty toddler. Some were amused, others were shaking their heads in disapproval, noticeably thinking, "That woman is crazy and her son is a brat." In that moment, I couldn't argue with them!

Finally, I cornered him by a building and grabbed his little arms. I don't know if I can express exactly what was going through my head in that moment for fear of the authorities showing up on my door step but I was madder than a hornet.

I grit my teeth, locking eyes with him, using the visual intensity of a laser beam and said in a quiet yet terrifying voice, "You never, EVER run away from Mommy again, do you understand me!?"

I dragged him back to the car, put him in his car seat and closed the car door with authority. Then, a divinely inspired thought flashed in my mind: "If you pray for patience, God gives you opportunities to use it."

It makes sense. God answered my prayer for patience with a big, fat 'yes'. Then, He put me in a scenario (many scenarios!) where I could use my new found gift.

When we pray, God hears and is faithful to answer. It is important that we understand what it is we are praying for. If you need patience, by all means ask your Heavenly Father for it but prepare yourself for what is to come. Having patience doesn't mean frustrating moments no longer occur. In fact, quite the contrary. The wonderful news is, when we pray for patience, we receive it in a God-sized portion. This means we, via Him, can take on anything and everything that life (or more specifically, our toddler!) throws our way.

*Prayer: God, thank you for hearing and answering prayer. I ask you for divine patience in dealing with my child. Help me to recognize, in the midst of frustration and anger, that your gift of patience helps me regain control and be at peace. Amen*

## Journal Time

Ninety five percent of mom's lose their cool with their kids and the other five percent are lying about it. Write about a moment when you lacked patience with your toddler. It might be uncomfortable to remember now that you're calm but write it down and then write about ways to keep yourself from reaching that point again. This is a good reference the next time you're overwhelmed so you won't have to feel the regret that comes with losing your patience.

## Conquering the Wall

*I lift up my eyes to the hills, where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip he who watches over you will not slumber.*

*Psalm 121:1-3*

When Caden was about one year old, we bought a house in a rural community in North Florida. We had a forty-five minute commute into the city where we did most of our living but that didn't seem so bad while in the process of buying our first house. After about three months in our new home, we realized that we didn't like living in the country at all. A big, fat Oops. After a year, we put the house on the market with the hope of selling it and moving back into the city where we wanted to be. Unfortunately for us, we bought right before a housing market crash and the home we had bought just twelve months before was now worth much less than what we paid for it. The house stayed on the market for a long time with no one showing interest. Three months turned into one and a half years and there we were, still waiting.

An overwhelming sense of being trapped came over us. We felt very small in a very big housing crisis and the light was not visible at the end of the tunnel. With every drive into the city, the commute felt longer and longer. As a stay at home mom, I felt very isolated, living in a small town with not much to do and no one to visit. This alone would have been manageable until we received a dramatic hit to our finances. Suddenly we were struggling to make payments on a home we didn't even want to be in anymore. It was very difficult.

One day while driving around our teeny, tiny town with Caden, I found a playground! In a town with nothing to do, this was a goldmine. Free entertainment! I immediately pulled over and we had a great afternoon of play. The playground was beautiful. Brand new and well kept, it was like an oasis in the desert.

The next day, the whole family went to the new playground, even the dog. Caden was having a blast on the swings and the giant slides and eventually he found a mini-rock wall. It was meant for kids a lot older than him

but regardless, he was determined to climb that wall. It was about six feet in height but to him it looked massive, like scaling a toddler Mount Everest. I, being a typical, worrisome mom, said, “I don’t think he should do that. It’s too big for him.”

“Relax, he’s fine!” said my husband, always calm as a cucumber.

Caden got in position and started to ascend. He found places for his hands and feet and began scaling at a pretty good speed. When he got half way to the top he made the mistake of looking down and then yelled, “MAMA! HELP!”

I was about to come to the rescue and pluck him down when my husband shot me a look that said, ‘not yet’ and assured him, “Caden, you can do it. I’m right behind you.”

With that, Daddy placed his hand on Caden’s back, letting him know that he would catch him should he fall. Caden immediately found the courage he needed to finish the task. In no time he was at the top screaming, “I MADE IT!”

Daddy smiled an ‘I-told-you-so’ smile at me and said, “Good job buddy, I’m proud of you.”

Life is a series of mountains, mole hills and walks in the park. Selling our home in a crashing economy seemed like a giant task. An insurmountable mountain. Sometimes we have enough courage to tackle the problem and start climbing but half way to the top our arms get tired. Exhausted, we look around and think to ourselves, “This is impossible. I’m scared. I can’t do this.”

It is in that moment that God places His hand gently on your back and whispers, “You can do it, I’ll catch you if you fall.”

God’s miracle working hands are strong enough to overtake any obstacle. When you trust your Heavenly Father, you are no longer paralyzed by fear. Before you know it, you are at the end of your tiring journey to the top of your mountain yelling, “I made it! Thank you, Lord!”

At which time God smiles and says, “I’m so proud of you.”

*Prayer: Father, thank you for having my back. Thank you for always being there to catch me if I fall and for giving me the strength to face the mountains in my life. Help me to trust you, no matter how long or hard the climb. Amen*

## Journal Time

Write about your mountains. We all face them. Write about the obstacles in your life's path that seem impossible to overcome. Afterward, lay your hand on the page and say today's prayer. God is in you, with you and for you.

## "Be Gentle!"

*Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.*

*Colossians 3:12*

I don't know about you but I have a little boy. When I say boy, I mean capital B-O-Y. He's rough and tough, dirty and smelly, too curious for his own good. I won't lie; he can be a handful, especially for me.

My mother had two girls, my sister, Melissa and me. We would fight like mad dogs from time to time but generally we liked quiet play. We played with dolls and toy ponies and we imaginatively played house and school. I know that little girls can be rough and tough too but I had no idea what kind of havoc a little boy would wreak on myself, my home and my domestic house pets until Caden embraced the toddler years with open arms. His favorite pass time was pinching, hitting and riding the cat. Another enjoyable activity was running full force into our sixty-five pound husky and yelling, "MOVE DAKOTA!" My husband and I joked, calling it 'The Chain of Command.' We were the boss of him and he felt the need to be the boss of the animals.

I felt like we were always saying, "Caden! Be gentle!" He would always insincerely apologize and within minutes would be grabbing another fist full of fur.

The animals were not the only victims of Caden's curiosity and energy combination. He would often pick up random objects and throw them just to see what would happen. He would kick the glass door with his sneakers on, jump on the coffee table and run into me without warning, giggling, "I PUSH MAMA!" I personally think having a toddler should come with coupons to the local chiropractor.

Caden also liked to test the waters in other, more literal ways. One day, fully potty trained, he decided to pee with the toilet seat cover down, making a huge puddle for me to clean up. One night, he tried to stand up and



pee in the potty while wearing his underwear. When we found him standing on the bathroom stool in his wet underwear, we asked in disbelief, “Why did you do that?”

He grinned, knowing full-well what he had done and announced proudly, “I make a mess!”

The truth is my toddler’s lack of self-control is not unlike my own. There are many times when I evaluate a decision, predict the negative outcome and make the wrong choice anyway. My decisions don’t leave me drenched in urine or holding a fist full of dog fur but they can cause problems.

For instance; I have a sweet tooth. I know what happens if I bake and then proceed to eat an entire pan of brownies. My pants won’t fit and I’ll regret my moment of weakness shortly after I lick the pan. I also know what happens if I speak before thinking in the heat of the moment. I have said unkind things to my husband in moments of frustration when I know full well that venomous words hurt. Even though I love him with all my heart, when I lack self-control, I don’t think before I speak.

It is in those moments that the Spirit of God is not evident in my life and I lack gentleness with myself and others. God wants to make Himself known through His people by making us different. He does this by giving us gifts of the Spirit like love, joy, peace, gentleness and self-control. These attributes stand out in a world that has become very hateful, mean and chaotic. When we have these gifts of the Spirit, we can respond to situations and choices appropriately instead of reacting to them, inappropriately. No one is perfect and we all make choices or act in ways that we later regret. That’s where God’s unlimited forgiveness comes in. He is there to remind us to be gentle, not only with our family and the people around us but also with ourselves.

If you find yourself in the aftermath of lacking gentleness and self-control ask forgiveness from God and anyone you may have hurt, dust the fur off of your hands, wipe the mess off the floor and start fresh.

*Prayer: Father, thank you for the gifts of the spirit. I ask for Your self-control and gentleness to be evident in my life so that I can make good choices and live without regret. Amen*

## Journal Time

Are there specific areas in your life where you lack self-control? Do you have any addictions or bad habits or people that you are not gentle with? Write about the areas where you wish you had more control and write about how you feel when you make the same wrong choice over and over. Refer to this when you feel tempted so you can be reminded of what it feels like to regret. Accurately predicting an outcome before acting on impulse helps you make the right decision.

## All Better

*He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.*

*Psalm 147:3*

Isn't it amazing how dramatic our toddlers can be? I wouldn't be surprised if my son stepped right off the theatre stage of heaven and into my womb. When Caden would need some attention, he would sometimes pretend to cry. If I failed to notice or acknowledge the crocodile tears, he would turn off his fake crying and abruptly say, matter-of-factly, "Mama, I'm crying!"

Other times the tears would be real. He would hit his head, scratch his arm or suffer one of the many bumps or bruises endured in his toddler years and he would run to me for kisses. He would whine or cry, "Boo boo. Kiss it, Mama." After I kissed it, he would exclaim, "All better!" and run away as if nothing had ever happened.

As he got a little older, he began to experience other kinds of pain. If a friend wouldn't share with him, his feelings would be very hurt. He would shy away sadly, climb into my lap and sit with me quietly, uncertain as to why some little friends had to be so mean. After a few moments in my arms, he would feel better and run off to play again.

Whether injured, sad or even faking tears for attention, Caden wanted me to make it all better. When reality became too painful, he escaped to the arms of his Mama.

The reality for us is that life is painful emotionally, physically and spiritually. Sometimes you may feel as though you're being hit from every angle and it can be confusing as to why a God who claims to love you would allow you to endure so much pain. Perhaps you or someone in your family is battling an illness like cancer. Perhaps you have lost someone you love and the sting of depression and loss has crushed your heart, causing unspeakable pain. Perhaps someone has hurt you and you're so bitter and angry that you don't

recognize yourself anymore. Perhaps you have been through a series of difficult situations and you feel like God is nowhere to be found.

Pain occurs, illness happens, heart break is inevitable but the presence of these things doesn't disprove the presence of God. Instead, they prove the need for Him. The Almighty God of the universe is more than able to heal the sick, raise the dead, fix any situation and solve any problem. When pain and death and sorrow occur in spite of the many hours you've spent on your knees praying for God to deliver you and those you love, do not lose heart. God doesn't promise a life without pain but He does promise a life filled with purpose in Him and through purpose, comes joy unspeakable. If you are going through a hard time, know that it is for a greater good even if it's impossible to see what good could come from it. If it wasn't for a purpose, it wouldn't be happening to you. Through it, turn to Him. He is your Heavenly Father who wants to hold you and gently kiss your pain away.

*Prayer: Father, I don't understand why bad things happen to good people but I trust that you are faithful and just. Thank you for your comfort. Hold me when I do not have the strength to stand and make something beautiful from the pain in my life and the lives of people around me who are hurting. Amen*

## Journal Time

Make two lists. The first is a list of the people you know who are dealing with pain in their lives, physical and emotional. If you know their needs, write them down next to their name. The second list is all about you. Write about any pain you may be feeling in your body or soul. This is your prayer list. When you feel overwhelmed by the pain of this world, refer to this list and lift your family, friends and self up to God by asking Him for healing and comfort. Prepare for miracles to happen. Some you may see, others you may never see but believe and know that God is a healer.

## The Little Drummer Boy

*All these are the work of one and the same Spirit and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.*

*1 Corinthians 12:11*

From the time Caden was born, he has been in love with music. He's been drumming ever since the day he gained control over his arms. As a small baby, he responded excitedly to any kind of music. Anyone who knows Caden knows he loves to drum. He got a small drum and shakers for his first Christmas and then a similar set for his second birthday. He would drum for hours, hitting everything he could reach with his drum sticks, amazed at the various sounds he could make. The oven sounded different than the carpet. The wall sounded different than the couch. These were miraculous findings to a little boy with an ear for music.

On Caden's third Christmas, my parents bought him a real, child-sized drum set. It had a bass pedal, a symbol, a snare drum and a shiny, red coating. The look on his face that Christmas morning was priceless. He ran towards the drum set and began playing, immediately. He played so hard that I thought he was going to break them. Eventually we had to set them up in the play room where he could only play with the door closed.

Although he was very loud, we didn't mind listening to him because he was actually really good! Even at such a young age, Caden could sing a song and play the drums while keeping a decent beat. He was a toddler with natural rhythm and a passion for music. I know I'm biased but he almost seemed gifted. He was a great, little musician but the truth is he didn't excel at everything. He could manipulate a drum set with his hands and feet but he was the last in his daycare class to pedal a tricycle. He could recognize and remember a song after hearing it only one time but when playing catch, he would often forget to close his hands and the ball would hit him in the face. He wasn't good at everything but it was plain to see that he was good with music.

Being a musical person myself, I was able to recognize and cultivate Caden's talent very early. I believe he will be a very successful musician someday but then again, every mother believes her child will be a super star.

Music is not something we force on Caden. He started to show interest in music as a baby and as he got older his interest gave birth to natural talent and ability. He's not only good at it but he loves it too. When we tell him to practice his drums, he can't run to the sticks fast enough. He was literally born to rock and roll.

God made Caden and every facet of his being. He made his personality and his temperament. He made his face to look just like his father's and gave him the musical ability of his mother. Every human on earth was created very specifically by God for a purpose. He formed our physical appearance, our brains and our souls to be unique. He has given every single one of us gifts and abilities. You may not believe that you have any talent but the fact is you do! God created you and your child, equipping you with gifts that may be similar or completely different than one another but they are there.

The old saying, "You can be anything you want to be" is not necessarily true. I can't be a line backer. I am terrible at sports and I truly believe that no amount of practice would make me the next great American athlete. You can however be whatever God has called you to be because no one knows the creation (you) better than the Creator (God).

You may have had skills and dreams as a child that weren't recognized or supported by your parents. Don't make that same mistake with your child. Carefully observe your toddler objectively, without any kind of personal agenda and you can begin to see the natural attributes and traits that he or she possesses. You may want your son to be an athlete when really math and science are his God-given passions and abilities. You may long for your daughter to play the piano when she's really a naturally gifted soccer player.

We are all gifted to do something. The key is recognizing those gifts within our children, cultivating them and supporting them. Some of these gifts are easy to see while others take more time and observation. Your toddler may be an incredible leader someday. Watch how he interacts with other kids. Does he lead or follow? You may have a future CEO or politician in your family. Maybe your daughter has a nurturing heart and loves to help people. You may be raising a doctor, pastor or social worker.



God has placed a human being in your care that may be a toddler today but will be an adult soon. Tap into your child's God-given talents, foster those gifts and usher your toddler into the man or woman that God has created him or her to be.

*Prayer: God, thank you for creating me and every member of my family, exactly as we are. Help us to recognize our natural gifts and abilities and give us the means to use them every day for Your glory. Amen*

## Journal Time

Write about what makes you tick. What do you enjoy doing, what have people told you that you're good at? You'll begin to see a pattern taking shape and you'll gain more clarity about the person God has created you to be. Maybe you can make money doing what you're good at. If not, maybe you can use your gifts to be an amazing volunteer. Make the same type of list for your toddler. Observe your child and write down what makes him or her unique. Once you can see a pattern, find activities that exercise those gifts within him or her.

## "MAMA ANGEE"

*But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.*

*Psalm 86:15*

Caden was like a wild monkey to dress when he was two and a half years old. He kicked and ran and did every movement short of climbing the walls. He didn't like the idea of having to stay in one place for too long so getting dressed was boring for him and ultra frustrating for me. One day I was trying to dress him but he was impossible to control. I finally took his little face in my hands and said sternly,

"Caden, you are making Mama very angry."

"Mama Angee?" he questioned, as if to see if I really meant it.

"Yes. Mama angee, now sit still!"

Later that evening, my friend Amber and I took Caden out for dinner. I sat Caden in a restaurant style, wooden high chair and gave him some French fries on a small, yellow napkin. Amber and I were chatting and Caden was being relatively well behaved, that is until he realized that the legs on his high chair were not level. Excitedly, he began violently rocking back and forth, almost tipping himself over. I put my hand on the back of the chair and in a gentle voice I whispered in his ear, "Careful Caden, you might fall."

He looked at me and without warning shouted very loudly, "MAMA ANGEE!"

What? I wasn't angry at all just concerned that he might throw himself to the floor accidentally and get a concussion.

"Mama's not angry," I said quietly, trying to urge him to speak quietly too.

Again he shouted even louder, “MAMA ANGEE!” This time he said it in a growling voice, as if he were impersonating a mother grizzly bear. The people sitting around us were smirking and laughing. Amber was beginning to giggle as well. I was less than amused.

“Caden, Mama is happy. Mama is not angry,” I said through my teeth. I wanted him to change his false perception so badly and mostly, to stop saying that over and over.

He repeated louder still, this time sounding like a pack of wild mother bears, “MAMA ANGEE!”

Finally, I couldn’t help but laugh and note to myself that I need to be more careful about what I say to my son in the future.

So often we can misunderstand God in this same way. God’s subtle and gentle voice of correction and protection can be interpreted as Him being angry or unfair. A lot of people perceive God as being a cranky old man with a stick, ready to strike us when we sin, always dissatisfied with our disgusting humanity. The opposite is true. God is on our side. He is proud of us when we do right by Him and sad for us when we are hurting. He loves, protects, corrects, listens and is slow to grow angry.

Many people are afraid to face God because they are ashamed of their past and fear that He is angry or disappointed with them. Instead of picturing God as a grumpy old man with a long grey beard and a disapproving expression, picture him as the loving Father He actually is, with His arms wide open, waiting to give you a Heaven-size hug whenever you need it.

*Prayer: Father, thank you for loving me. Forgive me for my misconceptions of you. Show me who You really are so that I can teach my children the truth about Your love and mercy. Amen*

## Journal Time

Remember that another person's perception of you does not define who you are. It is the same with God. The way you see Him may not be close to the way He truly is. Write about how you view God and what you think He is like. Discuss the same question with other people and see how vastly different people can view the one God.

## "Battle of the Carrot"

*...do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.*

*Colossians 3:21*

Dinner time can be the equivalent of world war III when a toddler is involved. I know this was true for my little man. Caden went from being a big fan of all foods to only wanting toast and chicken nuggets. This, of course, was concerning to me. I feared he would come down with scurvy or some other vitamin deficiency problem.

One evening, my family sat around the dinner table as we always did, prayed over our food and began eating. I had prepared some chicken nuggets for Caden to ensure that he wouldn't wake up starving in the middle of the night and next to the chicken I placed a spoon full of mixed vegetables which consisted of carrots, corn, peas and green beans.

He didn't like that at all. Not only was he not going to eat that colorful mess, he didn't want it anywhere near his beloved chicken nuggets.

"No, Mama. Mama eat it." He began picking up the veggies one by one and placing them on my plate.

"No, thank you. Those are for Caden. Mmm, yummy vegetables!" I said in an animated tone, hoping that he would be convinced of the deliciousness.

Immediately, his feet began kicking and his little face began to turn red.

"NO MAMA! MAMA EAT IT."

When I failed to comply with his commands the second time, he had a massive fit from the tips of his toes to the top of his little, blonde head. He started screaming, pushed his plate, flailed his body and nearly lost his mind over the thought of having those foreign objects near him.

There were probably many things I could have done that evening. I could have taken the vegetables away and ended the battle. I could have sent him to bed without any dinner for being such a brat but I had passed the point of no return and the battle of wills was on. I would not rest until I was crowned champion.

Once calm, we disciplined him for screaming at us and officially issued the following decree:

“Caden cannot get down from the table until he eats one slice of carrot.”

I thought he would go for that. After all, out of all the veggies, he only had to eat one, measly, little slice of carrot. In my mind, that was a fair compromise. I win because he eats something healthy and he wins because he doesn't have to eat the entire lot of vegetables.

If only a three year old were rational like that. What actually happened was the ultimate carrot battle of the millennium.

In this corner, three year old Caden with a plate full of veggies and a mission not to eat any of them. In this corner, Big Mama determined to make her toddler eat a carrot by any means necessary.

My son is incredibly stubborn and he comes by it naturally. The more he protested, the more I insisted. The harder I tried, the harder he tried not to.

After an exhausting hour and a half in the ring, I cut the teeny, tiny carrot slice in half and said, “You have some and Mama have some.”

He looked me up and down, weighing whether or not I could be trusted. I put the half of a tenth of a carrot in my mouth and he, slowly but surely, did the same. Exhausted, I hugged him. I didn't know what else to do. I was so tired of fighting with him and the carrot battle had finally come to an end.

Honestly, in hindsight, I wish I would have handled things differently. I later read that sometimes toddlers can actually develop food phobias where they literally begin to fear color and textures of new food. At the end of the day, the old cliché is true: They eat when they are hungry.

Even so, once a 'battle' starts between you and your toddler, you need to be the one to finish it. Even if you regret ever saying, "You have to eat this in order to get down from the table," you said it, it's out there and you have to follow through. Going back on what you say to your toddler means big trouble for you both in the future. They need to know that when we say something, we mean it. That's why it's important for us to really think before speaking.

What I learned after that evening was not to back down from a fight but to choose my battles much more carefully. Was it really that important for him to eat a tiny, sliver of carrot? It really wasn't. Those were tears that didn't have to be shed and more than an hour of conflict in my home that didn't have to happen. In ten years I'll be complaining about my teenage boy eating me out of house and home. The precious, little, finicky eater in the booster seat will be a distant memory.

By all means, follow through with everything you say and discipline your child when he or she disobeys. This is practical love because you are teaching them how to be good people but observe each battle and frustration with caution and ask yourself the question, "Is this worth fighting for?" If it is, stay strong. Be gentle but firm. If it's not, let it go. You'll all be better for it.

*Prayer: God, forgive me for my stubborn streak. Give me the gentleness and firmness to lovingly correct my child and the wisdom to recognize when I've gone too far. Amen*



## Journal Time

After the carrot episode, I was able to look back and see where I went wrong and what I could have done differently. Write about a battle of wills between your toddler and yourself. Was it a battle worth fighting? Did you handle it the right way and if not, what would you have done differently? This helps you on the battlefield in the future.

## Why Me?

*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with a promise that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.*

*Ephesians 6:1-3*

I love date nights. I particularly loved date nights when Caden was two years old because there was no greater era in history when I needed a break more than during that time. When Caden had just entered the toddler realm, he was incredibly demanding of me. He didn't have a lot of words right away, so he would simply point to whatever he wanted and yell, "GA!"

I always quickly responded to the "GA!" That sound drove me, absolutely insane because for many months he said nothing else. Making the "GA!" stop meant getting him whatever he was pointing to and I would (within reason), every time without thinking twice. Once Caden learned some more words, I noticed how incredibly rude and bossy he was with me. When I would wake up in the morning and go into his room, the first thing he would say was, "JUICE!" in a very demanding tone. For some reason I told myself that it was my job to cater to him and I proceeded to fill up his sippy cup as fast as possible.

Date night was my escape from the maid service of mommy-hood. I often felt guilty about getting a babysitter because Caden could be quite difficult. However, I didn't feel bad enough to stay home and jumped at the opportunity to get out of the house without a diaper bag in tow.

One evening after a date night, I came home and said, "How was he?" expecting a long-winded story about his crazy antics and his fits of rage.

"Great! He is SUCH a good boy!" our teenage baby sitter replied.

I would get the same response from other baby sitters, the ladies in the church nursery where he went every Sunday, even my husband said he was really well behaved for him when they spent time together alone.

What the heck!?! Why was everyone so impressed with my little boy when he was downright bad? It turns out, he was a perfect angel for anyone who wasn't me and when he was with me, he demanded to be served, freaking out if not accommodated within thirty seconds of his requests. It wasn't fair. Why me?

Finally, I reached my breaking point. I confided in my friend about how I was feeling and explained how Caden treated me so much worse than he treated his father and everyone else. I wondered if he even loved me. My friend looked me in the eye and said, "He loves you. You're just teaching him how to treat you."

I realized it was true. My little boy was no longer a baby that needed attention after the first whimper. He was growing up and with that he needed to learn patience and how to be polite, attributes I was not expecting from him as I ran around frantically trying to accommodate his needs. He wasn't a bad kid, I was teaching him to act the way he was acting.

After that moment I tackled the job of fixing the monster that I had created. It was a rough transition. Caden could barely speak but I expected him to say something that sounded like 'please' or 'thank you' whenever he wanted anything. He didn't like that at all at first but he quickly became the kid who was known for having great manners. He began to tantrum less frequently because he learned that being demanding got him nothing but trouble. I started to enjoy my days with him again, still loving date night but cherishing Mommy-time as well.

It is not God's will for us to be walked on, taken advantage of or enslaved by our children. Our relationship with our child is defined by us. Do we react aggressively or respond thoughtfully? Are we noticeably frustrated or evidently in control? Are we consistent with our discipline?

If change is needed, expect that you will most certainly stir the waters in your home. Your new parenting style will become harder before it becomes easier but that's the price you have to pay in order to get things back on track. Eventually, life becomes much sweeter and peace replaces the chaos. You are a strong, beautiful and courageous person who deserves to be treated as such. Teach your toddler how to treat you so that he or she learns to treat everyone with love and respect.

*Prayer: Dear God, Remind me daily that I am a precious gift. Make me strong and confident in the eyes of my child, consistent and thorough. Help me to teach them how to treat me and all people with respect. Amen*

## Journal Time

Write about how your toddler treats you. Is he/she respectful and kind or demanding and rude? Are there rules and boundaries in your home or is it utter chaos? Do you have a disciplinary method that is consistent or do you react in the moment to disobedience? If changes need to be made, write about them. If you need ideas, ask other moms or go online. Find some parenting books and determine the best parenting technique for you. Make a plan of action and follow through, regardless of how tough it feels in the beginning. I promise your entire family becomes better for it down the road.

## Time Out

*Be still and know that I am God...*

*Psalm 46:10*

The ever popular ‘time out’ is a method once developed by a very smart individual who believed placing a child in isolation after an act of defiance would teach that child a lesson about how to behave. The solitude is meant to make the child uncomfortable so that he or she chooses not to act out in such a way again. There is much advice on how to properly administer time out.

For us, as a disciplinary action, time out didn’t work well with Caden when he was a toddler. Solitary confinement meant more time to imagine, more time to sing and more time to play alone without being interrupted by his annoying parents. After not listening or doing something he wasn’t suppose to do, he would be sent to his time out seat and told to wait there until Mommy came and got him. No sweat off his back. He rather enjoyed his moments in the time out chair and would sometimes put himself there after having committed no crime at all.

Time outs proved to be more helpful in our house during those ever popular toddler moments of rage. The out-of-control moments of anger that erupted inside of our toddler over the tiniest thing. I remember trying to undress Caden one evening by pulling his sweater up over his head. He demanded that I unzip the sweater instead. The problem was that this particular sweater had no zipper. I tried to explain the lack of zipper and even had him touch the article of clothing to prove that there was indeed no zipper to be found but to Caden, this was an unacceptable excuse. The fit of rage began. The screaming, the frantic swinging of the arms, the violent kicking of the tiny feet, in these moments where rationality did not exist, I would pick him up by the arm pits and place him in ‘time out’ until he calmed down. Sometimes this would take one or two minutes. Other times it would take much longer.

When the shrieking would subside, I would return to him and ask, “Are you all done screaming?” Sometimes he was, so I would explain how the screaming was not nice, dry his eyes and move on. Other times, he wasn’t close to finished but was only taking a little break with the intention of starting all over again. In these moments he would firmly say, “NO!” and continue with the protest. I suppose Caden recognized that some events required more ventilation than others so only he could decide how much time he would spend alone in the time out seat. When he finally found peace, he would surrender to whatever it was that made him angry and let it go, that is if he even remembered it.

Personally, I feel the one who could benefit most from a time out in a parent-child relationship is the mom. Whether you’re too mad to function, too exhausted to stand up, too tired to care anymore, too depressed to know how to move forward or just plain sick of having to be ‘on’ all the time, a mommy time out may be just what you need.

Caden needed time out to re-center and refocus when he felt out of control and we need the exact same thing. Quiet time in prayer and reflection is re-energizing and revitalizing to a soul that is weighed down and confused with chaos. We’re women and things upset us. Life doesn’t always unfold the way we would have hoped and even the best plans fail from time to time. In other words, if there’s no zipper on the sweater, no amount of worry or anger is going to make one magically appear. Time out of your situation clears your head and gives you a renewed sense of self so that you can face life with the serenity of God inside of your heart. It is in those quiet moments of time out with God that He speaks to you and you hear His voice.

*Prayer: Dear God, thank you for this time out to be with you. Calm the craziness inside of me. Give me peace in these quiet moments and help me to carry that peace with me throughout the day. Amen*

## Journal Time

Take a time out. Find a quiet and peaceful place to write and write about whatever you want. This is your moment. This is your time out. Have something on your mind? Write about it! Get it off your chest and onto your paper. Enjoy your time out.



## Life is Messy

*Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. –*

*Psalm 51:2*

Caden and I spent a lot of time around the house when he was a toddler. My husband and I shared a vehicle so most days Caden and I were home without a car while my husband went to work. In an effort to keep Caden from becoming a couch potato, I would think of activities for us to do to pass the time and give The Wiggles DVD a break.

Sometimes we would color. Caden always wanted me to trace his hands on to paper and then make little turkey drawings out of them. If I turned my back for even a second, I would return to find a little boy who had colored every piece of visible skin. Thank goodness he used washable markers.

Sometimes we would go for walks. If there was a mud puddle within ten feet of Caden, he would find it and take an enormous leap into it before I could even try to stop him. He'd often come in from outside with dirty feet and a happy face.

Sometimes we would bake. Caden loved baking cookies. We would roll the dough and cut out the shapes. We would watch the dough rise through the small oven window and decorate the cookies after they had time to cool. Since he was two and a half, the easiest way to decorate cookies was by using those little shakers with the sprinkles inside. I was in charge of the icing and Caden was responsible for shaking on the sprinkles.

One evening while decorating cookies, I left the project for a minute to answer the phone. I returned to find my little boy, dancing like a fool around the kitchen, shaking red and green sprinkles all over the kitchen floor. It was a sea of colorful sugar crystals, measuring about an inch deep. He looked up with his adorable face as if to say, "Oops. Sorry Mama."

Life gets messy. Sometimes we get so excited about what we're doing that we don't see the mess until it's too late. Sometimes the mess just happens to us and we find ourselves in the midst of a sticky situation we never thought we'd be in. Lucky for us, God is there to clean things up. Like soap and water cleans messy little hands, God's love and forgiveness washes away all of our dirt. Like a broom and a dust pan can make a sprinkle-filled floor sprinkle free, God's mercy allows Him to not only forgive but to forget the mess ever existed.

You may feel ashamed of the mess in your life but know that you are not alone. We all have mess in our lives and that is nothing to be embarrassed about. Our past is a part of us but it shouldn't define us. Your story is one of ups and downs, wins and losses, messy moments and times of cleanliness. God can not only use our mess to help others, He can take our dirt and make us cleaner than ever before.

*Prayer: Dear Lord, Thank you for your love and forgiveness that washes away the dirtiest messes. Help me to accept your mercy and grace and to always remember how much you love me, no matter what. Amen*

## Journal Time

Write about the mess in your life. Maybe it is a toxic relationship or something from your past that you need to deal with. Writing about your mess can help you focus on praying about it and get you closer to wiping it clean out of your life.

## Six Months of Christmas

*But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.*

*Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.*

*Luke 2:10-11*

Caden's third Christmas was probably the most magical I had ever witnessed. His first Christmas was a bit anticlimatic, given that he had no idea what was going on. His second Christmas was frustrating for him because he couldn't understand why we concealed fun toys in paper. Disgruntled, he handed everything to me so that I could remove the inconvenient wrapping that kept him from playing with his new things. His third Christmas was when the magic of the season grabbed a hold of Caden and he was old enough to sense the Christmas spirit while being young enough to fully believe all of the magic and wonder.

He began requesting Christmas music in early November and by the time December was upon us he knew all of the words to his favorite carols. He sang them passionately from sun up to sun down, asking about Santa, wanting to read the 'Baby Jesus book' over and over and over again. When we drove around the city he exclaimed at every turn, "CHRISTMAS LIGHTS, MAMA!" as though he were seeing them for the first time, every time we left the house. Candy canes and short bread cookies quickly became his treat of choice and although it doesn't snow in Florida, he would look to the sky daily in hopes of seeing a few fluffy, white flakes, falling from the sky.

As most Christmases do, that one came and went quickly. Soon the tree came down and the lights were removed from the outside railing but to Caden, Christmas wasn't going anywhere. He still asked daily to watch his favorite Christmas movies and listen to his Christmas CD in the car. He paraded around the house singing, 'Jingle Bells' and, 'Frosty the Snowman' at the top of his lungs, with no care for the calendar. My husband and I assumed he would lose interest in Christmas shortly after the New Year but in March and April we still found ourselves watching *Once upon a Christmas* and listening to 'The Little Drummer Boy'. It was spring, the

flowers were blooming, the birds were chirping and Easter was around the corner but Caden wasn't concerned with the changes of season. To him, it was Christmas every day. When June, July and August approached, things were no different. He still felt the joy of the Christmas season.

That's how I want to live. Not necessarily singing Christmas music in July but living with that kind of joy all the time. Peace on earth and good will towards men should not be reserved for a specific two week period. Instead, it should be the mindset of everyone, always, to believe in miracles, see wonder in everything and face each day with child-like faith. I'll admit, watching the same Christmas DVD for eight months in a row was a bit monotonous but hearing my child ask to be read the story of Jesus every night was an enormous blessing to my heart.

Let's try to capture that magical look that our children have in their eyes at Christmas and filter it through our own lives, every day of the year.

*Prayer: Dear God, Thank you for sending Jesus as a baby to live on the earth as both God and man. Thank you for the miracle of His life and the joy that His story brings to my heart and the heart of my child. Let us live with that joy, everyday. Amen*

## Journal Time

Write about your most magical Christmas. It can be with your child or when you were a child. Capture a wonderful Christmas memory so that you can be reminded of the joy you felt at that time.

## Pretend Cookies

*Do not lie to each other...*

*Colossians 3:9*

It was a Monday morning and my husband had taken our only car to work for the day, leaving Caden and me at home. We were playing in the living room when Caden's head shot up and he said, "I go potty!" He ran to the bathroom and peed into the toilet bowl, just in time.

"Good job, Caden!" I said, praising him for his accomplishments.

He smiled proudly at me, pulled up his pants and exclaimed, "Cookie now!"

I had gotten into the habit of potty training with small, vanilla wafer cookies. Whenever he used the bathroom successfully, he got a cookie. The problem was that on this particular day, we had no cookies and we also had no car with which to get some. Anticipating a meltdown I thought for a moment and said, "I'm sorry baby, the cookies are all gone but here's a high five!"

I stuck my hand up in the air enthusiastically, knowing that a hand slap paled in comparison to a cookie but hoping his little mind would perceive the high five as being a big deal. Instead he looked at my open hand, grabbed a pretend cookie, put it in his mouth and said, "Mmmm, cookie. Thanks Mama!"

This started a trend of pretend treats in our house. When we read a book with any kind of food in it, he would pretend to pluck the entire off of the page and pop it into his mouth saying, "Mmmm, Mama want some?"

Anytime he asked for something that I didn't have, I would extend my empty hand and say, "Here you go." Caden would smile, delighted by our silly game and grab the pretend article, happier than if I had given him the real thing.

Pretty soon, Caden started pretending all kinds of things. Some days he was a tyradactel, flying through the living room. Other days he was a skateboarder, sliding with his socks on the kitchen tile. Some days he pretended to be sad or sick which was not my favorite version of pretend. Regardless of what the circumstances, Caden could alter his reality by pretending whatever he wanted.

I realize now that the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. I am a master pretender myself. I pretend that everything is ok when it's not. I pretend not to be affected by situations for fear of conflict when in fact I am overwhelmed on the inside. I pretend not to care when my feelings are hurt and like most moms, I pretend to have it all together when I really have no idea what I'm doing most of the time. Pretending is a wonderful way for a child to play and experience the unexperientable but when we pretend to be something we're not, it keeps us from experiencing the fullness of our real lives and the depth of our relationships. When we aren't honest with people, we can't have real, authentic friendships with them. Friendship is having someone in your life that knows you completely and loves you anyway. If you mask the real you, you may never know the depth of connecting with another person or the joy of accepting yourself as the woman that God made you.

Use your ability to pretend and imagine as a means of playing with your child or being creative in other areas but don't cover up who you are. It is incredibly freeing to know that you have nothing to hide and that you don't have to pretend anymore.

*Prayer Time: Dear God, thank you for my child's creative spirit. Help me to embrace the person you've created me to be. Give me the courage to not pretend anymore so that I can experience life as you intended. Thank you for knowing me completely and loving me anyway. Amen*



## Journal Time

Picture your closest friend and write about some areas of your life where you feel vulnerable, areas that you would normally keep hidden. Write as if you are talking to that friend. Writing your thoughts is great practice for eventually speaking them aloud.

## Poop

*He will yet fill your mouth with laughter and your lips with shouts of joy.*

*Job 8:21*

I feel I must warn you that today's reading is not for the faint of heart. As a mom, I know you've seen/heard/smelled it all, so this really shouldn't affect you too much. Even so, I felt it necessary to issue the warning before proceeding to speak openly about my toddler's bodily functions. Now that you know what's coming, onto the story:

I was very lucky to have a little boy who potty trained quickly. Once he got the hang of the potty, he never looked back. Caden was mostly fascinated by his, you guessed it, poop. Lucky for him but not so lucky for me, he had a healthy set of bowels. When in diapers, he pooped an average of six times a day. That is not an over exaggeration. The boy was like a poop factory. Once potty trained, that number decreased to about two-three times a day, which was much more manageable. Caden's bowel movements were always a cause for celebration, at least in his mind. When the sensation would come upon him, he would proclaim to anyone and everyone within ear shot, "I HAVE TO POOP!"

After all parties involved had been adequately informed, he would make his way to the bathroom, climb onto the toilet seat and do his business. Afterward, he would holler loudly, "MAMA! WIPEY BOTTOM!"

Oh, the gloriously humbling occupation of motherhood.

Caden had a very funny habit of visually examining his poop and then saying what he thought it resembled. The first time this happened, he looked into the toilet and said, "Look, banana poop!"

Puzzled, I looked into the porcelain bowl to see what he was talking about. Indeed, it was shaped just like a banana. I laughed hysterically, realizing what had just happened.

After that moment came a series of moments similar to it. Banana poop was followed up by snake poop, stick poop, two poop (Yes, the poop actually resembled the number two) and my personal favorite, Christmas tree poop. Each poop naming got funnier and funnier. Crazy as it sounds, this bathroom giggle actually became something I looked forward to.

Poop is a part of life, both literal poop and figurative poop. Things do not smell like roses all of the time. As a mom, most days don't go exactly as you planned them. In fact, they can sometimes take a dramatic turn in one way or another. Whether it's a sick kid, a flat tire, a broken heel or a burned dinner, life can throw a curve ball when we least expect it and honestly, it just plain stinks.

As God's children, we don't always treat Him in a way that is pleasing to the nostrils. Lucky for us, he shows us grace, mercy and love in spite of our stink. Our job is to brace ourselves with the knowledge that sometimes bad things happen but we can show the same grace, mercy and love that God shows to us in the midst of trying times.

You know the old saying, 'when life hands you lemons, make lemonade!' In this case, when life stinks, plug your nose and laugh at it. It's better than wallowing in the stench.

*Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for your grace, mercy and love. Prepare me for those moments when life isn't so sweet and help me to be gracious, merciful and loving to others in spite of my circumstances. Help me to smile, regardless of the situation. Amen*

## Journal Time

Write about one of those days when little inconveniences ruined your plans and nothing seemed to go your way. These kinds of days are inevitable but sometimes, in hindsight, they are actually a little funny. Remember to smile in spite of the irritations because ‘this too shall pass.’

## Picture Perfect

*Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it.*

*Proverbs 22:6*

I made an appointment for Caden to have his picture taken professionally about a month after he turned three years old. The last professional picture he had taken was at the age of six months, where as a rambunctious baby he nearly flipped off of the studio table. Given the fact that he was now older and much better at both flipping over and flipping out, I was worried that he would drive the photographer into early retirement.

For days before the shoot, I prepped him for the event. We practiced smiling on command and I explained over and over about where we were going and what would be happening once we got there. As any good mother would do, I bribed him with ice cream, telling him that if he was good for his big boy picture, I would take him out for an ice cream cone with colorful sprinkles. That seemed to be the only part of the conversation that he heard and I became increasingly more anxious as picture day drew closer.

Finally, the day had arrived and I started getting him ready. Dressing Caden was like an aerobic exercise class and after four outfits I eventually found one that I deemed picture worthy. Sweating and worn out from the wardrobe changes, I got my handsome little man into the car and we headed for the studio.

When we arrived, the photographer met us in the lobby and asked Caden if it would be alright to take his picture. He agreed and walked confidently into the studio, ready for his moment in the spotlight.

To say he behaved perfectly would be an understatement. Perhaps it was the promise of an ice cream cone or maybe he enjoyed being the center of attention but whatever the reason, Caden behaved like a perfect angel during his photo shoot. He did everything he was asked, he smiled big, he calmly and patiently waited for direction, he said, “Cheese” with every flash of the camera’s bulb.

I leaned against the back wall, watching that precious little man who was brilliantly behaved and I thought, “Who’s child is that?!”

Surely enough he was mine and I breathed in a breath of pride and let out a sigh of relief. Needless to say, he got the biggest ice cream cone imaginable that day.

Even when you feel like your parenting efforts are pointless, or that talking to a wall may be more productive than talking to your toddler, they are listening. What you are pouring into them matters and although it’s hard to see the fruits of your labor in the midst of the everyday routine, it’s easy to see the product of your hard work when they go out into the world and interact with others.

We mom’s have a tendency to beat ourselves up about all of the things we are doing wrong. We focus on that time when we lost our cool and screamed at our son or let our daughter watch five hours of television in order to get some house work done. None of us are perfect (thank goodness) but if you’re a mom who loves your child and aims to do your best each day, your child becomes a better person for having you as a parent and you have every right to feel good about yourself.

After Caden went to sleep that night, I thanked God for my family and took a moment to do something I rarely did as a mom of a toddler. I patted myself on the back.

Thankfully, I always have those three year old photos to remind me of that picture perfect day.

*Prayer: Dear Lord, Thank you for my child and those moments when he/she makes me very proud. Help me to be a good teacher and guide and make my child receptive to my words. Help us both to be better people. Amen*

## Journal Time

Write about a moment when your toddler pleasantly surprised you by being very well behaved. Reflect on that memory and take pride in yourself as a parent because what you are doing in your child's life matters more than you could even imagine.

## Bruised Ego

*For all sin and fall short of the glory of God,*

*Romans 3:23*

Caden was a filthy mess from top to bottom. All I could do was laugh when I saw his crunchy face and sand filled hair when I picked him up from daycare one afternoon. He reeked of fun and he looked as happy as a dirty, little clam. After we got home, I began stripping him of his sweaty, blackened clothes and I noticed a small, finger-tip sized bruise in the middle of his back. Alarmed, I called my husband into the bathroom.

“Look at this!” I said, shocked and appalled.

“What?” He said squinting, trying to see what I was pointing to.

“It’s a bruise! He didn’t have that this morning before he went to school. I don’t think they watch him as closely as I do.” I shook my head disapprovingly, convinced that no one on planet earth was capable of taking proper care of my son other than myself.

My husband chuckled softly and exited the room, still not able to see the wound I was trying to show him. I bathed Caden and tucked him into bed, excited that the following day he would be safe and sound, home with me.

The following morning began like any other. Caden woke before sunrise and began singing and playing loudly in his room until everyone was awake. We got up, had breakfast and Daddy kissed us both and left for work. I decided it was a good day to do laundry and wash the bed sheets so I began stripping the beds and making piles of blankets and pillows on the floor. Caden saw the enormous pile of bedding and a huge smile flashed across his face. He began an intense dash towards the mountain of softness with the intention of jumping in at full



speed. After a running start, he dove towards the pile of bedding but overshot his target and his forehead made direct contact with the outside corner of the bedroom wall.

Following the crash was a bitter scream from an injured two and half year old, stunned by his literal face to face encounter with the house. Guilt ridden and shocked by the train wreck I had witnessed, I rushed to him, picked him up and was mortified to see the goose egg that was forming right in the middle of his forehead. It had already begun to turn purple, red and blue, like an Easter egg of pain throbbing just above my baby's nose. After what seemed like forty days and forty nights, he calmed down. I gave him an icepack to play with (because he wouldn't let it anywhere near his head) and I called the doctor, who told me to keep a close eye on him, ice the bump as much as possible but assured me he should be fine.

And fine he was. He resumed to being a happy-go-lucky toddler, playing with toys and dancing around but the enormous lump on his forehead remained. That evening when my husband came home he was greeted at the front door by his unicorn son.

“Whoa! That's HUGE!” he exclaimed, having no difficulty in spotting Caden's injury this time around. As guilty as I felt, I couldn't fault him for stating the obvious. It was the biggest ‘boo boo’ our son had received to date and it happened while he was with none other than me. It was a swift kick to my ego and now the teeny tiny bruise in the middle of his back seemed quite insignificant as compared to the horn on his face and near concussion he suffered while being at home with me.

Mothers are not perfect. We do our best to provide for and protect our children but sometimes we mess up and they get hurt. More often than not these injuries are emotional. The relationship of mother and child is unlike any other and with a deep relationship comes a deep set of emotions. When you hurt your child's feelings, an icepack is not going to do the trick. You need to be parent enough to say, “I'm sorry.”

Our children look up to us in many ways and they learn much about life by watching us living ours. Saying you're sorry is not a sign of weakness, it is an indication of strength.

*Prayer: Father, thank you for the relationship I have with my child. Make it stronger and deeper with each passing day. Strengthen my character so that when I fall short as a parent I have the humility to recognize the pain I've caused and say, "I'm sorry." Amen*

## Journal Time

Take a moment to think about your relationship with your toddler and recognize any areas where you haven't been the mother you could be. Write your toddler's name at the top of the page and then the words, 'I'm sorry for' followed by the moments where you have fallen short of your best with your child. When you have finished, take a moment to read it to your child. They may not completely understand it now but it shows them love and respect, making your relationship stronger and deeper.

## Pancakes

*How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!*

*1 John 3:1*

Sunday mornings always came early at our house. I had to be up and out the door before sunrise to volunteer with our church's worship team and since our family had only one car, my husband (Jason) and our little boy Caden had to join me at the crack of dawn. Caden was the type of toddler who enjoyed waking with the birds so it wasn't much of a sacrifice for him to leave the house early but I'm sure my husband would have preferred to stay in bed on the day of rest. Still, he was always willing to join us so we could all be together. I had to be at church about two hours before church actually began, to do sound check and rehearse with the worship band. This left Jason and Caden with a lot of time to kill.

One Sunday morning, Jason decided to take Caden out for breakfast. They found a hole-in-the-wall breakfast place close to the church called The Canopy Road Café and proceeded to order some pancakes. I would like to think that church was the highlight that particular Sunday for the men in my family but I would be lying if I said the pancakes didn't have an overwhelming effect on both of them. Jason raved about these pancakes, as though they were the most delectable thing he had ever eaten. Caden was barely two so he lacked the words to express himself but there was a certain satisfaction on his face that said, "I just ate the best pancakes, ever."

That was the day a father-son tradition was born. Pancake Sunday. Like clockwork, the boys would drop me off at church, turn around and head back to their pancake place. Within a few weeks they were recognizable to the staff that worked there. The children's church workers would often laugh about how Caden always came to church, wreaking of maple syrup. Periodically, when I didn't have to volunteer at church, I would join them but with or without me, come hell or high water, those two stopped at nothing on the pursuit of the Sunday morning pancake. It was dependable and could be counted on.

This is the type of relationship your Heavenly Father wants with you. Perhaps not the pancake part (although I hope heaven has an all you can eat pancake bar) but the dependability part. No one is more dependable than God, our Father. Nothing is more consistent than His love and no one enjoys spending time with you like He does. He looks forward to it. He is always available for those precious moments when you take the time to bond with him. Time with your Heavenly Father is a tradition worth starting and people are able to smell the sweet aroma of Heaven when you're around. Even my husband can admit: God's presence is better than pancakes.

*Prayer: Father, thank you for always being there. Thank you for your dependability and your consistency in my life. I am humbled by Your love and Your desire to be with me. Remind me that You are there so that we can spend time together and become closer. Amen*

## Journal Time

Start a tradition with your child. Something that is consistent, either each week or each month. Make it something that they can depend on and look forward to. Write some ideas in your journal and go over them with your family. Chose one of the ideas and implement it into your family's schedule. It can be something as simple as breakfast! I can smell the syrup now...

## "No Touch!"

*Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.*

*Matthew 6:11-13*

When Caden was two, he loved to explore. Sometimes his explorations led to grand discoveries like snack food or stuffed animals. Sometimes his explorations taught him lessons the hard way like gravity. I had read so many books about giving toddlers the freedom to explore their surroundings while making sure they couldn't get into everything. I was always puzzled by the contradiction.

I'm the first to admit, I did a poor job child proofing my home. We had a small house and since Caden was never far from me, I didn't see the point in locking down everything. Instead, I wanted to teach Caden to obey my words. This, to me, seemed less frustrating than putting child locks on all the cupboards and bolting down the toilet seat. In order to teach him at a level he could grasp, I used the words, "No touch!" This was said whenever Caden touched something he wasn't suppose to or when he got that malicious gleam in his eye that meant he was about to touch something he shouldn't. Initially it was accompanied with a light hand tap that just stung enough for him to get the point. Eventually, the words were enough and he would quickly snatch his hand back towards his body when he heard them.

What always amazed me was how focused he was on touching the things he knew he wasn't supposed to touch. As an only child, he had a room filled with toys that he didn't have to share with anybody. He had every baby DVD known to man and he had my full and complete attention. Yet, he longed to stick everything and anything into the electrical socket. The car keys, a baby spoon or his finger, whatever he had in the moment. You could see the little thought flash across his mind, "I wonder what will happen if I put that in there!"

Before he could know the answer, the dreaded words, “No touch!” would boom in his ears and his plans would be foiled once again. As he got older, sneakier and faster, I bought the plastic electrical socket caps, just in case I missed an attempt or two.

In spite of having plenty of toys, entertainment and attention, Caden still had an attraction towards what he could not have. I find myself here from time to time. I have a roof over my head but it’s not as big or as modern as someone else’s. I have a closet filled with clothes but I always talk about how I have nothing to wear and I covet other women’s wardrobes. No matter how much I weigh, I don’t look as good as the woman standing next to me at the super market. It is not only toddlers that are oblivious to what they have, always longing for what they don’t.

Dissatisfaction is a terrible feeling. Always longing for what someone else has is a crippling thing because you are forever focusing on what you can’t have at the expense of what you have already. True contentment lies in appreciating your life and all that comes with it, even if it isn’t as big or as shiny as someone else’s. If I had allowed Caden to have access to the electrical socket, he would have gotten severely injured. Sometimes what we want is not good for us. The grass is not always greener on the other side.

Appreciate all that you’ve been given, work for what you want and accept what you can’t change. When you find yourself longing for something you cannot have, slap yourself on the hand and tell yourself, “No touch!”

Well, I guess you don’t have to do that but it worked for Caden.

*Prayer: God, Thank you for all you’ve given me. I am blessed to have so much. Thank you for all you’ve done, are doing and are about to do. Help me to always be grateful for what I have and to not long for the things in someone else’s life. Amen*



## Journal Time

On a disposable piece of paper, write about the things that you covet, the things that make you jealous and the life you wish you had. Once this list is made, rip it up and throw it away. On a page in your journal, write about all of the things you have that are blessings in your life. Pray that God helps you to focus on what you have instead of the things on the list you destroyed.

## A Sinking Feeling

*The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.*

*Proverbs 18:10*

Summer had arrived and Florida could not have felt hotter. Everyday brought with it a more intense and scorching heat than the one before it and suddenly going to the playground and riding bike with my toddler was no longer a comfortable option. Knowing that my outside options were limited and that nothing good ever came from being trapped inside with my three and a half year old son, I headed to the store on a mission. I filled my shopping basket with sunscreen, arm floats, beach balls and over-sized towels, everything we needed to hit the pool and have a great time doing it. The next day I sprayed Caden down with an aerosol SPF 50, dressed the both of us in our swim wear, almost passed out while blowing up too many inflatable pool toys and together we headed for the pool.

I expected Caden would have the time of his life, splashing in the refreshing water and taking to it like a fish but the opposite happened. He wanted nothing to do with it. He submerged one toe into the chilly water and with a disgruntled look on his face said one of his favorite Donald Duck quotes, “Hey, what’s the big idea!”

I tried coaxing him in gently but he refused to budge. I tried bribing him with a post-swim lollipop but he wasn’t taking the bait. I got into the water and tried to demonstrate how fun and refreshing it was but he was less than impressed. Finally, I assured him it was fun, picked him up and began slowly submersing him. He whimpered and protested and clung to me tightly saying over and over again in a panic-stricken voice, “Hold me, Mama! Hold me!”

I explained to him that his arm floats would keep him from going under the water but he didn’t care. His extremities were wrapped so tightly around me that not even the water could come between us. When I tried to loosen his grip he became more and more upset. He couldn’t see that I would protect him, he couldn’t see that

his floats would keep his head above the water and he couldn't see how fun and freeing the experience of swimming could be. All he could see and feel and know in that moment was fear and it paralyzed him.

Fear is something we don't grow out of. The things that we are afraid of may change but that sickening feeling of utter panic is very real in the lives of every person, regardless of age, gender or life experience. We are all afraid of something and to be honest, fear is healthy. God created fear as a way to protect us. Our fears of danger and injury keep us from acting recklessly. Our fears of negative consequences keep us from breaking laws and being selfish. The problem arises when fear cripples us or keeps us from enjoying our lives. When a fear becomes so big and so irrational that it literally holds us back from becoming the people that God has intended for us to be, it is not a healthy fear. In these moments, God wants us to rest in knowing that He is good.

Throughout scripture, God and His angels repeat the same phrases over and over and over again to his children, "Do not be afraid", "Fear not." God is trying to tell us that He's keeping us afloat. He is keeping our heads above water. He is bigger than our worst case scenario and through His strength, we can conquer our fears. When we tap into God's strength and face our paralyzing fear head on, it can give birth to a new and rejuvenating thrill of life.

Everyday that summer Caden and I went to the pool. Slowly but surely I watched as he went from a little boy who was terrified of the water to a miniature merman who couldn't get enough of it. Swimming is now one of our favorite things to do. Hopefully he will soon conquer his fear of broccoli.

*Prayer: Father God, Thank you for being my protector and my strength. Make me brave so that I can face my fears and become the woman that you've called me to be. Help me to demonstrate courage for my child. Amen*

## Journal Time

Write about your three greatest fears. Describe them in detail and imagine having to face them. What would the outcome be? What would the worst case scenario look like? Imagine God's mighty hand being with you through the entire experience. A lot of times, we think our fear is greater than our ability to face it. Your fears may never come to pass but if they do, this helps you to see how much power you have through God to face anything.

## Race Car Bed

*Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!*

*Isaiah 43:18-21*

For Caden's second birthday, his grandparents gave him a toddler race car bed. It was made of a dark blue, thick plastic with black, plastic wheels. The center of the bed was hollow, just big enough for a crib mattress to fit. It was certainly adorable but when I saw it I had an overall bad feeling in my stomach. I was terribly apprehensive about the transition from crib to big-boy bed. After all, he was doing just fine in his little crib. Aside from randomly getting his arms or legs stuck in between the wooden bars, he was comfortable in there and (best of all) he couldn't get out. He had not yet attempted to climb out of his crib and I didn't have to worry about keeping him in his room until a decent hour of the morning. The big boy bed was a scary and foreign object to me that gave him too much freedom and I wasn't so sure it was a good idea. I liked things the way they were.

A few weeks after his birthday, I went to the closet where I had stowed the race car bed box and I stared at it for a long time. It stared back, as if it was eerily whispering, "build me....build me..."

Caden ran into the room before I had a chance to shut the closet door and he made eye contact with the bed in a box. "Car!" he exclaimed excitedly. I looked at his happy little face, I looked at the box and I decided against my better judgment to build the race car bed.

I took it out of the box, piece by piece, found a screw driver and began constructing the automobile. After a few frustrating hours, it was finished and Caden was beyond excited. I took the mattress out of his crib and set it into the center of the race car. Caden then climbed into the bed and to my dismay, fit perfectly inside of it. There lay a child who no longer needed to be in a crib.

I immediately began to stress out. I envisioned weeks and weeks of sleepless nights, Caden waking before the sun and wandering around the house unsupervised. I pictured him falling out of bed and somehow breaking his arm from the one foot drop to the floor. My mind exploded with all of the terrible things a toddler bed would bring to my life and I, very anxiously, began taking the crib apart to make room for the new, evil structure that would bring so much trouble to my household.

Once the crib was stored away and the new bed was made up, it was naptime. At two years old, Caden had very few words so I knew that the concept of staying in bed would be a difficult one to explain. Still, I attempted it and after tucking him in, I exited his room and expected the worst. What I got instead was silence. Dead silence. I waited a few minutes then peeked into his little room only to find a sleeping toddler, nestled into a cozy race car. He had fallen fast asleep.

A few hours later he woke up and came out of his room. I was still nervous about what the night time would bring and assumed that nap time only went well because of how new the bed was. Once the novelty wore off, surely he would escape and embark on night after night of mayhem now that he could get out of bed and freely move about the house.

That evening after Daddy and Caden said their prayers together, he tucked him into his little, blue car and shut the door. I crawled into bed, muttering about how awful the night was going to be, fearing the worst and expecting to hear the little escapee any minute but something amazing happened. I fell asleep and when the morning came, I woke up. A full night of sleep! Surely he didn't break out of his room and I didn't hear him! I ran out to his bedroom, peeked in and there he was, still comfy-cozy in his little, blue race car. I expected the worst but what I ended up receiving was something great. He was sleeping better in that car bed than he had in his crib!

Change is always hard. We become comfortable and set in our ways and the thought of changing, even upgrading, can be unappealing. We walk around with a, 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it' mentality, ignorant to the idea that maybe there is a better way of doing things. God has created us to evolve and change. Every day brings with it something new and exciting. We grow, age, mature and develop. We make choices based on what

we experience, what we feel, what we know and what we perceive. Everything changes. The only constant is God Himself.

Our agenda should not be to stop change from happening but to recognize and encourage positive change when it is necessary and to not be afraid of it. God created a world where night changes into day, winter changes into spring, babies change into toddlers. Instead of fearing the worst we should anticipate the greatness that change can bring. In Caden's case, change brought with it a really good night sleep.

*Prayer: Dear God, Thank you for creating a beautiful and ever changing world. Thank you for giving me the privilege of watching my child grow and transform every day. Help me to embrace the changes that life brings with an open mind and a willing heart. Amen*

## Journal Time

Write about a time when you feared a change or transition. What was the outcome? Was it good or bad? Perhaps a large change is coming. Write about it and the fears/excitement you have. Know that the changes you've gone through and the ones you are about to face are opportunities to grow and become better.



## Sweet Tooth

*Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.*

*Romans 6:13*

I won't lie. I like sugar. I didn't realize how much I liked sugar until I had a child. Chocolate, ice cream, cakes, cookies, anything made with a pound of sugar became my comforter on days when being a mom wasn't exactly my favorite thing to be. The great thing about desserts is that they are good for any occasion. If I was sad, nothing cheered me up like a warm, delectable brownie, fresh out of the oven. When I was happy, nothing made celebrating more perfect than a heaping piece of German chocolate cake. When I was hurt, nothing soothed my heart better than a big bowl of ice cream. Sugar: The friend that's always there for you. Being the mother of a toddler, my emotions often changed like the channels on the television when my husband is holding the remote: Constantly. I became an emotional eater and it wasn't healthy on so many levels.

When Caden transitioned from baby to toddler, I began to notice that he too had quite the sweet tooth. He was always a tiny child but when given the opportunity, he could down any size of dessert placed in front of him and still ask for more. At birthday parties or church events, my son was the one running around to people, whether he recognized them or not, flashing adorable smiles in an attempt to earn their slice of cake. It was hilarious and somewhat embarrassing all at the same time.

One particular evening, a friend of ours was having a graduation party. When we arrived, there was table after table of delicious finger foods. At the end of the smorgasbord lay a gargantuan cake with icing several inches thick. I watched Caden's face as his eyes locked onto the dessert. I'm sure that in his peripheral vision, everything was moving in slow motion and some type of heavenly toddler music was playing in his ears as he walked straight towards his pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. I stopped him and explained that he had to eat

some dinner first. He wasn't impressed but surrendered to his dinner plate as a means to a delicious end. Finally, it was time for cake.

I cut him a small piece of cake and asked my husband, Jason, if he could watch him while I mingled and socialized for a little while. Unbeknownst to me, Jason and his close friend, Jerad, decided that it would be funny to see just how much cake Caden could eat. To this day I am not sure how much cake and icing my little boy ingested that evening but I shudder at the thought. When I made my way back to him, I saw Caden with icing all over his face with cheeks similar to that of a blow fish, chewing on a mound of cake while Jason and Jerad laughed hysterically. I shook my head and smiled, until I got in the car and began to drive home. Jason had a motorcycle at that time and he and I had driven separately to the party. Caden and I were alone in the car while Jason followed behind on his bike. About fifteen minutes into the forty five minute commute home, I heard a gurgling from the back seat, followed by some noises I need not describe, followed by the most wretched smell I have ever smelled in my life. I turn around to see a green-faced little boy whose expression was filled with feelings of dietary regret. The noises and smells continued until the inevitable happened. He threw up cake everywhere. The colorful icing that had once been so appealing was now the most horrid sight and smell I could imagine. I made that forty five minute drive home into a twenty five minute one, praying for God to keep the police at bay, holding my breath and consoling a very dirty, smelly and sick little boy.

When we arrived home, Jason (who had been frantically trying to keep up with me) exclaimed, "Geez, where's the fire?"

After telling him to stick his head in the car and take a whiff, he understood exactly why the scenic commute home turned into the Indy 500. Regretful, Jason cleaned out the car while I cleaned up Caden, who was leaking partially digested cake from every angle.

I don't think I could have ever experience a more literal object lesson about over indulgence. We've all had those moments when our eyes were bigger than our bellies or our desires were bigger than our bank accounts only to learn that too much of anything is a bad thing, anything but God that is. The great thing about Our

Father in Heaven is that He is so vast, so eternal, so intricate and so amazing, that we can go our whole lives digging deeper and deeper into His word and still barely scratch the surface. We are meant to feast upon God's word, bask in his mercy and over indulge in his never-ending love. Turning to food, things, even people to fill the needs that only God can fill leaves us regretful, unsatisfied and sick to our stomachs.

I learned three key things that evening. One, too much of anything but God is a bad thing. Two, prayer is a better way to deal with my feelings than brownies. Three, never leave Caden alone with his Daddy in a room with a giant cake.

*Prayer Time: Dear God, thank you for allowing me to feast on Your word and submerge myself in Your love. In those moments when life is too much and I need to escape, remind me to escape in You. Be my one, true obsession. Amen*

## Journal Time

What are some obsessions, over indulgences, addictions or unhealthy attachments that you have in your life? How do you feel about them? What triggers your need for them? Take this time to write in detail about the questions above. When you can recognize unhealthy habits in your life, you are better able to approach them head on. Make a plan to replace unhealthy habits with healthy ones like exercising, reading, writing, scrapbooking, a new hobby or catching up with old friends. Make a plan and then make a choice to execute that plan. You'll be healthier for it.

# 'MINE!

*Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

*2 Corinthians 9:7*

Caden was an only child which suited everyone just fine when he was in toddler mode. My husband and I were not ready to have another baby while Caden was a toddler and Caden enjoyed being the object of everyone's attention and affection. He had his own room, his own space, his own toys, his own parents and he didn't have to share anything with anyone. My husband and I were very conscious of the fact that sharing might be difficult for him to grasp so we made a practice of having him share with us. When we colored, Caden would have to wait until I was finished with the blue crayon before he could have it. When he had a snack, Daddy would ask for some of it so that Caden would become use to giving his things to others. When he was in public settings with other children, he did very well with sharing. He wasn't possessive and he didn't snatch or cry when other children had toys that he wanted. He waited quietly until they were finished and took turns like a big kid. We were very impressed and wiped our hands, patted ourselves on the back and gave ourselves a successful, "Well done!"

One day, Caden was playing with a new friend at her house. They were getting along well, laughing and chasing each other around. She had a black and white, stuffed Dalmatian dog and Caden's face lit up when he saw it. He ran towards it and picked it up, giving it a giant hug. Suddenly, his little friend's face was filled with horror. She barreled towards him, grabbing the stuffed dog out of his embrace and shouted, "MINE!"

Caden must have really liked that dog because the once passive little boy who would have normally shrugged and found another toy to play with, snatched the doggy back and shouted louder than his friend, "MINE!"

The doggy tug of war continued until myself and the other parent had to break up the fight. Both children cried insistently, both feeling like the victim and both ending up with no doggy to play with. Within seconds they had forgotten about their feud about began playing like best buds again, just like toddlers do. When we left the play date and began to drive home Caden said aggressively from the back seat, “Mama, this is MY car!”

‘Excuse me?’ I said, looking at him through the rear view mirror.

“This is Caden’s car! This car is MINE!”

He then proceeded to brand everything as his for the remainder of the day. “This house is MINE! This T.V is MINE! This book is MINE!” Everything he saw was declared as his with a big, fat ‘MINE!’

All of our hard work seemed to have gone out the window after one play date. He had become a ‘Mine’ monster, an entitled little man who didn’t have to work for anything. All he had to do was claim it and it was his.

Selfishness is an ugly thing, whether you’re two or too old to be childish. How many of us have seen or experienced firsthand a painfully selfish person? Everyone has been a victim of selfishness. Everyone has been selfish. God has been kind and gracious enough to give us all that we have. We have been able to work hard for our money and our possessions because he has given us the health and ability to do so. We have been able to gain knowledge and education because he created our minds to be sharp and receptive to information. We are able to exercise our talents in music, sports, the arts and countless other areas because He has given us those gifts. All of these things have been given to us by God our Father not only for our benefit but for the benefit of others. What we have graciously been given should be humbly and joyfully shared with others.

Part of being a toddler is discovering self and pushing boundaries. Toddlers do not have the capability to be empathetic and to put other human beings’ feelings ahead of their own. That part of their brain has literally not developed yet. Combine that with their few years of life experience and you can understand where their

selfishness stems from. If your child is a ‘mine’ monster like mine was, don’t worry. With proper guidance and time the monster disappears and the more we demonstrate selflessness for our children, the more likely they are to be selfless when they grow up.

*Prayer Time: Father God, Thank you for being completely selfless and giving me the most precious gift of all, Your Son, Jesus. I ask that you would make me a selfless woman and give me opportunities to bless others with the things you have given me. Amen*

## Journal Time

God has given something to all of us. Some of us are blessed with excess money, some have a lot of things stored up in the garage that we'll never need or use again. All of us have intangible gifts. Some are great teachers, speakers, musicians and leaders while others are hospitable, creative, organized and hard working. Think of ways that you can use what you have (either tangible or intangible) to help someone and make a plan of action. Write specifically about your plan and set a date for when you aim to accomplish it.



## Mr. Independent

*As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.*

*Proverbs 27:17*

We were already running late. I was starting to panic as I paced the floor and looked at the clock incessantly. I pleaded, “Come on, Caden, let Mama help you.”

“NO! I have to do it all by myself!” he retorted, sitting on the floor of his bedroom trying desperately to put on his pants. It wasn’t going well. Both of his feet were sticking through the bottom of his left pant leg, giving him the appearance of a miniature merman. Perplexed, he sat there knowing something wasn’t quite right but he could not fully grasp where the problem was. Under any other circumstances I would have inserted myself into the situation and made things right but he was on a mission, trying so hard to dress himself like a big boy and most importantly, I told him that he could do it, ‘all by himself’. I felt that if I was to interject in that moment, after he had been working so tirelessly to get it right, that I might crush his little spirit and squelch his enthusiasm. What if he would never try to dress himself again? What if he would never try to do anything again? On top of that, I had learned one very important lesson from my almost three year old son: Pick your battles.

I can say honestly that in that moment I was more concerned with a tantrum than I was with being late for an appointment. Truthfully, I just didn’t want to have to deal with a melt down and I knew that if I was to take over, I would be in for an ear full of fussing.

I called the person that I was meeting to let them know that I was running behind and I sat there, on the floor of Caden’s room, watching him as he wriggled out of his merman tale and once again, tried to get those pants on correctly. He put his right leg in the left leg hole, pulled it back out, did it again and pulled it back out again. This pattern continued for quite some time. He put both feet in the same pant leg more times than I care to

remember. He got angry, frustrated, bewildered by the task in front of him. I kindly offered my assistance every so often only to be shot down with a passionate, “NO! I have to do it ALL BY MYSELF!”

The minutes passed, slowly. His cheeks became flushed with anger and had he been a few years older I think his little arm pits would have been stained with perspiration. It was like trying to watch a magician free himself from a straight jacket. I drummed my fingers on his wooden toy box and thought to myself, “He’s not the sharpest tool in the shed...” Oh come on, you know you’ve thought the same thing about your little angel in their not-so-brilliant moments.

I admired his determination, his work ethic and his try, try again attitude. I understood that as an almost three year old, he had to assert his independence and he had to, at some point, learn how to dress himself. I was proud of him for attempting the difficult skill of pants and I wasn’t about to interrupt him. Still, I wished that he would ask me for help. I wished that he would humble his little self. I wished that he would recognize that sometimes asking for help is that best way to solve a problem.

Eventually, he got it right. We both cheered, I gave him a hug and we rushed to the car in an effort to salvage the time we had wasted. In the end, we were relieved but also exhausted, still a little irritated with one another and very, very late for our appointment. Once we were on our way, I realized that my boy was stubborn and he came by it naturally. I remembered the previous night when I was overwhelmed and frustrated by the mess in the house and passive aggressively attacked the sink full of dirty dishes while my husband sat on the couch watching TV. I was angry because I was cleaning alone and when he finally asked, “Do you want me to do anything?” I smugly answered, “No, I’ve got it.”

I know I’m not alone in my experience here. Some of you are remembering the exact same situation happening in your own home. Maybe you vented to a friend or family member about having too much on your plate and when they offered to help you politely refused even though you could really use their assistance. Perhaps you’re spread too thin with your responsibilities as a wife, mother, employee and volunteer and instead of delegating some of your tasks to others, you burn out trying to do it all yourself. Women, mothers, I ask you this: Why do

we do this to ourselves? Where does this need come from to be super woman? Where did we learn that asking for help was a sign of weakness? Asking for help when you need it doesn't indicate that you are weak or unable. A woman who asks for help when she needs it is a smart woman, she is an assertive woman, she is a good leader, a good organizer and an overall better person because she's not angry, bitter and overwhelmed about what she has before her. A woman who can ask for help is a happier woman and the people around her are happier as well.

By all means, set out to do extraordinary things, work hard, 'follow your dreams,' and all of those other heartwarming clichés. Don't look at any mountain as though it's too big to tackle but if your rope begins to fray half way up the summit, be smart and ask another climber for assistance. At the end of the day, we're all climbing this mountain together so we might as well help each other along the way.

*Prayer time: Heavenly Father, thank you for always being there for me. There are times in my life when I am handed more than I can bear on my own. Place amazing people in my path and give me the strength to ask for help when I need it. Amen*

## Journal Time

As a mother, you know that there are moments in your life when you feel invisible in the midst of overwhelming responsibilities. Write about the times where you need help, where you feel over worked and under appreciated. Begin to think of people that you trust who can help you with these things, even if all you need them to do is listen. If you are lacking these kinds of relationships, make today's prayer a daily one and I promise God is going to bless you with some amazing new friends. I know from experience.

## Grumpy Pants

*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.*

*Philippians 2:5*

Mornings with Caden were always a pleasure. He was a happy little toddler after a good night's sleep and when Caden was happy, the rest of us were pretty happy too. He would wake with the sunshine and we would hear him, singing in his room, joyfully and patiently waiting for us to come and get him. His laughter filled the morning air and made it much easier for a non-morning person like myself to get out of bed. Caden loved breakfast and gobbled it down while watching his favorite morning cartoons. The remainder of our morning together was generally pleasant. Sometimes we would have a play date. Other times we would go to the gym where Caden hung out in the childcare room while I worked out on the elliptical machine. We would sometimes do our grocery shopping or clean up around the house. After lunch it was nap time and, more often than not, Caden would go to sleep easily, tuckered out from a morning of perpetual happiness. Oh how I wished mornings would last all day.

Afternoons were a different story. The same little boy in the same little bed in the same little room, who had woken up chirping with the birds in the AM, woke up screaming, crying, sweating and irritated with everyone and everything in the PM. For some reason, Caden could not shake off the afternoon sleep. My assumption was that he slept too hard during those two, mid-day hours and then his little body couldn't re-acclimate to the harsh afternoon sunlight. Whatever the reason, he generally woke up from his afternoon naps on the wrong side of the race car bed.

I would spend my two hours of downtime relaxing with a good book or watching TV. Sometimes I would do some house work that was difficult to do while he was around. Whatever I was doing I was silently anxious, bracing myself for the angry little bear to summon me from his lair and perhaps, bite my head off. When he would wake screaming like a cat on fire, I would gently open his door, pick him up and hold him in my arms

until he calmed down. Sometimes he would fall back to sleep on my shoulder for a few minutes. Other times he would push me away and demand juice or a movie or whatever else his majesty was in the mood for post-nap. My little angel of the morning transformed mid-sleep into an afternoon demon and from nap time until dinner time he was usually not very pleasant. He'd walk about the house with a scowl on his face, freaking out over every little thing with little patience for my parental involvement. The smallest things could lead to tantrums and if looks could kill I would be long gone by now. I remember bringing him to the doctor, fearing that perhaps he had some kind of a blood sugar problem that was causing his swift mood changes from morning to afternoon but the doctor simply giggled and said, "I think he's just being a grumpy pants."

It was amazing how Caden's mood affected me. His pleasant demeanor in the morning made for a peaceful and joyful start to my day. His anger and grumpiness in the afternoon led me to be anxious and impatient. When Caden had a bad attitude, he took it out on me. He disobeyed me and pushed my buttons just to see me react. He threw fits at the most inconvenient times, embarrassing me and exhausting me. His afternoon irritability caused me to become irritable too which I unintentionally took out on my poor husband, Jason. My mother once told me, "Kathy, unfortunately we take out our frustrations on the ones we love the most."

She was right. Not only is it true but it is unfortunate. We think that our husbands, parents, siblings and closest friends can handle our bad moods and we take out our frustrations on them because we feel comfortable in our relationships with them. What we fail to recognize is the effect that our negativity is having on them. When we use our loved one as a punching bag, we are bringing them down instead of building them up and we are breathing negative energy into their lives instead of the positive energy that they really need from us.

The rule in our home quickly became this: If you're going to be a grumpy pants, you need to go sit in your room by yourself. Soon enough, Caden's afternoons became much more enjoyable for everyone around him. He learned that it's more fun to be happy and kind than to sit in his room all alone with his grumpy pants on.

*Prayer Time: Father, thank you for loving me and never leaving me, no matter what. Give me a gentle and kind spirit. Thank you for the people in my life who love me. Help me to build them up instead of tearing them down.*

*Amen*

## Journal Time

At the top of the page, write the name of a person in your life that you love. Beneath their name, begin to describe them. Write what it is about them that you love. Think about whether or not they breathe positive or negative energy into your life. Then, describe ways that you can build them up. Commit to loving this person in a practical way, regardless of what kind of mood you find yourself in.



## Blessed

*And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.*

*Mark 10:16*

As all children do, my little Caden grew far too quickly. One minute he was born and the next he was wearing spider man underwear and going down the big slide at the playground all by himself. With each passing day, he was becoming taller, faster, smarter and more and more independent. I remember when he was three and a half, we were sitting on the couch watching a cartoon together and I began to take notice of how big he had gotten. I began to picture the days in the not so distant future when he wouldn't want to watch cartoons with his mama anymore, when he wouldn't ask me over and over for kisses and hugs. I was painfully aware of how time was flying by and how pretty soon, my adorable little toddler would be a cool kid who probably would not want to hang out with his mother. I wondered when he would become too big for his play kitchen where he always made me pretend cookies and chicken soup. I wondered when he would start picking out his own clothes and taking his own baths. I wondered when he would stop believing in Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny. I wondered when he would stop saying, "Mama."

As he sat there watching whatever cartoon he was watching, a huge lump was forming in my throat and I was tearing up at the thought of my little boy not being so little anymore. I wanted to freeze time. Sure, toddlerhood had its share of frustrations with tantrums, whining, loudness, way-too-early mornings and bum wiping but all of those cons didn't compare to the joy of having a beautifully innocent toddler in my life. The wonderment in his eyes when he discovered new things, the love and trust he had for people, the undamaged heart that beat inside of his little chest. I realized that even though it was hard, I absolutely loved having a toddler and the years were quickly passing me by.

I interrupted my own pity party and realized I needed to get to the store before dinner. I turned to my big kid and asked, "Do you want to go to the store with Mama?"

He turned excitedly and said, “Oh yeah, I’ll be right back!”

He ran up the stairs and into his room, quickly returning with a small, black stuffed dog. “Doggy wants to come too.”

There is no way for me to describe how I felt in that moment. The gesture was so simple and something that had occurred time and time again in our house but I was simply overwhelmed by the joy and love that I had for my little boy and small tears began running down my cheeks. I’m sure Caden thought I was a crazy person. After all, Doggy’s presence had never brought on such a reaction but I couldn’t control it. I just loved him so much for being him.

I once heard motherhood describe as having your heart walking around on the outside of your body. It’s painful and exhilarating all at once. There could be no truer definition than that. Every emotion is intensified once you have a little one and although many think it is the hormones that cause such a reaction, I believe it’s something more. I believe it is a normal reaction to being abundantly blessed. When they succeed, we rejoice with them. When they fail, we uplift them. When they disobey, we discipline them. When they are sick, we comfort them. Motherhood brings with it a giant sized portion of selflessness that didn’t exist before and it’s because the blessing is so great we don’t know how else to react.

God physically and supernaturally knit your child together. He decided early on that human beings would start out as babies who would then develop into toddlers and so on and so forth. He makes it possible for our children to grow, develop and change. His God-sized hand is over them and His God-sized heart loves them even more than we do. It’s impossible to imagine anyone loving our kids more than we do but God does. God did not intend for people to stay in one place for very long which is why children grow so quickly. What He does want is for us to cherish every moment as it comes and embrace the blessings that each day brings.

Your child is a toddler now but not for long. Soak up these days. Enjoy the innocence, passion, realness, openness and imagination that your toddler is bringing into your home. When they are challenging, remember that they only have a few years of life experience and they are just trying to figure everything out as they go along, just like you. Love every moment. Don't be afraid to get messy with finger paint, sing silly songs and dress up like a dinosaur. Live each day with your toddler so that you won't have to look back and say, "I wish I would have appreciated them more when they were little."

As a mother, you are blessed and chosen by God to raise one of His precious children. What a calling! Take your calling seriously, work hard, stay strong and know that your job certainly isn't easy but it's certainly worth it. God bless you and your beautiful toddler.

*Prayer: Father, thank you for blessing me with a child. Thank you for this miraculous age of wonderment and beauty. Help me to live each day to the fullest with my little one and never let me lose sight of the blessings that surround me. Amen*

## Journal Time

Write about the joy of being a toddler's mom. Write about the funny things that happened today, what you love about your child, how being a mom has changed your life for the better. Write until your hand hurts about the wonderful gift of motherhood. Once you are finished, write the words, "Dear God," at the top of the page and write the word, "Amen," at the bottom. This is your prayer of thanksgiving.



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