



Beautiful MESS

Motherhood for
Every Moment

Sherry Surratt & Tracey Eyster



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Based on the Motion Picture "MOMS' NIGHT OUT"
A Kevin Downes Production of an Erwin Brothers Film

LifeWay Press®
Nashville, Tennessee

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



SHERRY SURRATT

Sherry (**WEEKS 1, 3, AND 5**) is the president and CEO of MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers) International, based in Denver, CO, where she loves encouraging and resourcing moms around the world. Prior to joining MOPS, Sherry served as director of Innovation Labs at Leadership Network and led the children's ministry at Seacoast Church in Mt. Pleasant, SC.

She is the proud mom of two brilliant children, Michael and Brittainy, and beautiful daughter-in-love, Hilary. She's also ridiculously in love with her two beautiful granddaughters, Maggie Claire and Mollie Rose. She resides in Parker, CO, with her husband, Geoff, who serves as a pastor at Southeast Christian and church consultant. Sherry is the co-author of *Just Lead! A No Whining, No Complaining, No Nonsense Practical Guide for Women Leaders in the Church*. Her next book, *Brave Mom: Facing and Overcoming Your Real Mom Fears*, releases in fall 2014.

A special thanks to the MOPS International staff and to my editing partners, Mikkee Hall and Liz Sagaser. Thanks for passionately believing in the power and influence of a mom.



TRACEY LANTER EYSTER

Tracey (**WEEKS 2, 4, AND 6**) is the happily-in-love wife of Bill and the fun-filled mom of 21-year-old, Samara, and teen son, Westley. She is devoted to her family and is happiest when making memories with them. In 2008, Tracey took her passion for speaking into the lives of moms and created the ministry of *MomLifeToday.com* and thereafter, the live event for moms known as *MomLifeBootCamp.com*. You can find Tracey’s voice on Christian radio, as a guest contributor on blogs, in various print magazines, as well as in her first book *Be The Mom*.

Tracey would much rather “be” than “do.” On a great day, you will find her taking a hike, writing, or whipping up some home cookin’ for family and friends. She lives with her family, and lots of animals, on a horse farm in central Kentucky. An encourager at heart, Tracey enjoys connecting with moms through her personal blog at *BeTheMom.com*, on Facebook *@BeTheMom* and on Twitter *@momblog*.

I’m humbled that God would stir in me a passion for moms that He uses for His purposes and His glory—only He could bring my involvement in this project to fruition. I’m most grateful for Katie Clemens, Linda Treadway, Mitch Temple, and my prayer warriors, who faithfully prayed over the entire *Beautiful Mess* team. Thanks to Evangeline and Marcus Carroll, Kristin and Dan Gaffney, Shannon and Roosevelt Simmons, Kimberly and Steven Sprout, and Mary and John Winkleman. Finally to my husband Bill, daughter, Samara, and son, Westley—thank you for always encouraging me, making memories with me, and making my beautiful mess the greatest joy in my life!

INTRODUCTION

Wherever you are in your parenting journey, being a mother is hard work. It's something none of us fully understood until we were under the pressure of actually raising and guiding another person. Yet motherhood doesn't have to be so overwhelming, and you don't have to feel like everything rests on your shoulders—because God has a plan for you and your children.

Through the next six weeks (or at your own pace) of study, we'll discuss the common struggles of motherhood: *Am I enough? How do I keep from losing myself in this all-consuming role? How can I keep everything in balance?* and *What does God have to say to me about raising kids?* We'll share some of our own parenting fails, lessons we learned along the way, and even precious memories we made.

Six weeks of home study allows you time to consider personal applications and to immerse yourself in Scripture. Journaling—whether in this book or separately—can help you see how God is at work in your life as a mom. Make notes in this book so that you may look back to see how your faith and family are changing for the better.

Each week is broken into five days of reading. Within each day, you'll find Take Action and Dig Deeper sections. We've designed this study with levels of involvement and commitment. Read the days at your own pace. Then, as you're able, apply each day's lesson using Take Action. And if you want or need more depth, work through the Dig Deeper section, too.

We hope this Bible study will encourage you to keep your focus on God as you navigate the joys and pitfalls of motherhood. We want you to feel empowered with the knowledge that God designed you specifically for your children. With His guidance and grace, you can well prepare your children for the future God has planned for them—and maintain your sanity along the way.

ABOUT THE GROUP STUDY

Group discussion plans written by Michelle Hicks

This study is developed around six group sessions with supplemental clips to use from the movie *Moms' Night Out*. You can complete the study on your own or with other women in a home, office setting, coffee shop, or in a church classroom. Invite a friend or neighbor to join you as you gain insights that will help in your role as a mother.

Ideally, your group will meet for 60-90 minutes each week (or every other week). A church leader, a mom, or a group member can facilitate a group using the suggestions below. Customize them for the needs of your group.

- Pray about your role and participation in this study. Make a commitment to see what God has in store for you. Pray for the other participants and for where God will take all of you during this six-week journey together.
- Plan a group time for everyone to see the movie *Moms' Night Out* (see below).
- Arrange for childcare if needed.
- Promote the study through your church. Make sure information is on the church's website, social media sites, and newsletter. Include details about location, times, and childcare, plus who to call for further information. Go to www.lifeway.com/beautifulmess to find additional helps.
- Gather basic supplies for each session: name tags, markers, pens, enough books for each group member, and extra Bibles.
- Enlist a volunteer to provide healthy snacks if desired.
- Plan to use name tags for the first two meetings; don't assume everyone knows each other.
- Start each session promptly and honor everyone's time.

ABOUT THE MOVIE: MOMS' NIGHT OUT

All Allyson and her friends want is a peaceful, grown-up evening of dinner and conversation . . . a long-needed moms' night out. But in order to enjoy high heels, adult conversation, and food not served in a paper bag, they need their husbands to watch the kids for three hours—what could go wrong? *Moms' Night Out* is an endearing true-to-life family comedy that celebrates the beautiful mess called parenting.

Moms' Night Out is directed by The Erwin Brothers and produced by Kevin Downes, Jon Erwin, Andrew Erwin, and Daryl Lefever. Executive producers are Patricia Heaton and David Hunt.

WEEK 1

GROUP TIME: AM I ENOUGH?

If you're using this study as a follow-up to the movie *Moms' Night Out*, show "Clip 1: Mother's Day" from www.lifeway.com/beautifulmess (password: beautiful) and discuss this question:

- *Can you relate to Allyson's situation? Share a story from your life if a similar event comes to mind.*

BEAUTIFUL MESS MOMENT

My daughters were 3 and 5 years old at the time, and we had a very busy Saturday planned. They wanted to take a trip. They wanted a pool. And my answer was no, I had things to do at home, and they could be happy playing at home. I don't really recall what I was doing that day, but most likely my head was in a closet, a cabinet, or the dryer. Then it happened—silence. As a mom, you know something is wrong—really wrong—when it gets quiet.

I called for the girls. No answer. I looked in all the rooms and all the hiding places. Nothing. On the brink of panic, I looked in the backyard and then the front. *Surely I would have heard them if they went outside, wouldn't I?* Then my crazy mom mind went to, *Who came in and took them?!*

As I walked into the front yard, I could see them walking down the street. They were only about four houses away, but the fear was overwhelming to think they would go that far that fast ... and without me. The girls were fully dressed in boas, sparkly dresses, hats, and plastic bejeweled shoes. Both carried oversized bags and were dragging suitcases on wheels. They were chatting away like it was a normal day.

Holding in my frustration and fear, I started walking their way and called to them, "Where are you going?" The 5-year-old quickly responded, "To a hotel with a pool. Mommy, we told you we wanted to go on a trip and go swimming." When we were finally back in the house and my fear subsided, my first thoughts were: *How did that just happen? Your kids leave the house and you don't even hear them!* And then the thoughts shifted: *How will I ever take care of these girls and protect them in the long run? Can I really do this job? Can I really be the mom they need? Am I enough?*

DISCUSS

Introduce yourself to your group by sharing your name and a beautiful mess moment when you were afraid for your kids or wondered if you were enough as a mom.

- *What parts of being a mom are overwhelming or scary for you?*
- *Have you been honest with others about your feelings about yourself and what you can't handle on your own? What holds you back from sharing the most embarrassing blunders of motherhood?*
- *Many moms feel the need to appear like they are the "perfect mom." Why do you think we put that pressure on ourselves?*
- *Read Psalm 23. What are the darkest valleys for moms? What are our greatest fears and insecurities?*

Psalm 23 basically says God has you covered even when you walk through the valley as a mom and you don't know what is coming. He is all you need. He is ready to refresh your weary mom heart. God says we are to bring Him our worries. He knows what moms face and He has enough blessings for this day and the next. We need not fear.

- *How are you encouraged by Psalm 23? What word or phrase resonates with you most at this point in life?*

God has you covered. He wants you to look to Him for your strategy for being a mom. And He is there to help you stand firm in the midst of the challenges of motherhood.

- *Who are some other people He has placed in your life whom you might lean on for support and help when facing the valleys of motherhood?*
- *What are some ways you might build a support system (if you don't have one already) or let supporters know that you appreciate them?*

Take time to dive deeper into the question "Am I enough?" this week. Let God speak to the feelings that are overwhelming and frightening. He is bigger than anything you may face. And He wants to remind you that you are enough in the beautiful mess of motherhood.



WEEK 1
AM I ENOUGH?

Sometimes being a mom can make you feel a bit in over your head. I once heard a comedian quip, “Do you know what it’s like to add a third child? It’s like being in the swimming pool, holding your two children, and someone throws you another.” Exactly. One day you have enough arms, enough patience, enough money, and enough laundry detergent, and then you have children.

Children are an incredible gift from God. Their sweet-smelling baby heads and squishy, chubby thighs can melt your heart in a skinny minute. They can also make you want to run screaming from the room, wondering when was the exact moment that you lost all sense of control. All of a sudden there are a million things to worry about. *Will I know what to do when my baby’s fever spikes in the middle of the night? What’s the best method to use for potty training? What if they can’t make friends in school? How will we ever have enough money for college?* Having children can cause you to question everything about yourself, from your competence to your intelligence and everything in between.

As you dive into this week, I hope there will be moments when you’ll say, “Me too.” Every mom faces moments when she seriously questions herself. You are not alone with worry, fear, and that nagging question, *Am I enough to handle this?* But I’ve got great news: God understands this question, and He has some great answers. Together we’ll look at the story of King Jehoshaphat, who knew what it felt like to not know his next move, feeling woefully inadequate for the task. His kingdom was to be attacked by several armies, and when he received the report, he quickly realized this situation was bigger than he was. His cry to God—“We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you”—has the work of moms written all over it. Let’s dive in.



DAY 1

THIS FEELS OVERWHELMING.

Michael was my (Sherry's) first adventure into mommyhood. As he lay sleeping soundly in my arms, I remember sitting in the dark quiet of the hospital room, listening to the soft sound of his baby breath. He was perfect. He was mine. And now it was time to take him home.

The thought flicked through my brain, *I wonder if they know I don't know what I'm doing?* ("They" being the nurses who zipped in and out of my room with confident efficiency.) I watched amazed as they swaddled him securely in his little blankets like a little baby burrito with a sweet face. I laid him gently on my bed and tried to copy their movements. We ended up with a baby wad, the blankets knotted up, and Mike's little arms flailing. The list of what I didn't know that I should know was piling up fast.

Then I heard a sound that we would hear again and again over the next few weeks. The sound was part gasp, part gulp and was coming from my tiny son. The noise sounded like a baby bird frantically gasping for his last breath. *What did it mean? Was he choking on something?* My husband's eyes met mine and we shared a silent thought: *What in the world are we supposed to do?*

We rang for the nurse, who reassured us Mike was fine. Being a newborn, his lungs were still immature. While lying down, he might swallow and take in a breath at the same time, causing him to have a gasping reaction. "Perfectly normal" were the words the nurse used. She smiled at me as she said, "He's fine. You'll get used to all the little noises."

I swallowed down the first rumblings of doubt as I was loaded in the wheelchair. *Oh my, they are actually going to let me take this baby home!* Holding my tiny, perfect son in my arms, I pasted a smile on my face, but I could feel my lips trembling. *Surely they will stop me before I make it out the door. They'll figure out I'm a know-nothing mommy who first thought the nasal syringe was something you squeeze to cool the baby off with blasts of air, like a fireplace damper. Any minute now they will discover I'm a mommy impostor who pretends not to gag when changing a poopy diaper, who wants to run the other way screaming at the sight of spit-up.*

I looked around as we came out of the elevator, expecting the baby police to stop me cold: "Ma'am, hand over the baby. You don't know what you're doing!"

And so it began.

I asked myself the questions that I would repeat in my tired mommy brain many times throughout the years to come. *Will I be a good enough mom? Do I have what it takes?*

If you've ever wondered this, you are not alone. Perhaps having a child has caused you to question more than your parenting skills. *Am I smart enough? Do I have the emotional strength and wisdom to raise a healthy, productive adult? Can I provide enough money, enough time, enough of everything my child will need for what life will require?*

Of course you won't, and that's a scary thought.

What are your expectations about being a mom? How have those expectations changed as your child has gotten older?

When you see your child struggling or making bad decisions, how does it make you feel as a mom? Where do you think these feelings come from?

My son is now 27 and the father of two little girls of his own. There were moments when we didn't have the answers, the money, or the wisdom we thought we needed. Over the years my heart has resonated with the words of Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, as he cried out to God for help, knowing there were enemy armies ready to overtake them. He felt inadequate and overwhelmed, and he was honest about it. Take comfort in his words:

For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.

2 CHRONICLES 20:12

Have you had a mommy moment when you felt like Jehoshaphat, inadequate and overwhelmed? What were the circumstances that made you feel this way?

Were you surprised by your feelings or did you take them in stride? How did you respond to them?

I can so relate! Many times as parents to Mike and Brittainy, Geoff and I didn't know what our next move was, and we felt out of control. At different times our kids faced discouragement, looking to us for answers and direction. Some of the situations were easy. *Which math class should I take? How will I learn multiplication?*

But other times their situations were far more complex, with scary friendship choices and silences that shut us out. So we prayed. We called on friends and family to pray with us, and we leaned on other parent friends who were a little further down the road. There were times when we didn't feel like we had the strength to pray, so we asked them to pray for us. Though we still faced moments of uncertainty, we felt God's presence just when we needed it. We turned our eyes to a God who was and is bigger than we are.

How about you? Are there areas of your life where you worry you're not enough? Do you sometimes wonder if God knew what He was doing when He made you a mom and gave you the children you have? Mom, you do not have to have all the answers. In fact, you won't always have the answers.

*What mom fear, large or small, have you not given over to God?
Do you ever worry that maybe even He can't handle it?*

God understands these fears. And yes, God knew exactly what He was doing when He proclaimed you a mom. But there will be moments when you'll realize you can't do it all by yourself.

What's your first reaction when you face a situation where you don't know what to do?

As a mom, would you describe yourself as a sharer (you openly share your mom fears with others) or a stuffer (you keep your fears to yourself)? How does this resonate with your personality and how you were raised?

TAKE ACTION

Do you know how completely loved you are—even on the days everything is a mess? I often struggle with this. I know it in my head, but feeling it in my heart is another issue. I've come to realize that my self-worth is never going to come from how well I do things, like keeping the house spotless or having perfectly-behaved kids. Our craving for approval can be devastating to our souls, making us feel like we're not enough for today or tomorrow. And all the while, **God calls us gently to come and know how truly cherished we are.** Not because we're enough, Mom, but simply because we're God's beloved daughters.

How can you focus yourself on what you are, instead of what you've failed to do?

DIG DEEPER

Take a moment to read and process the following psalm as it relates to your life.

The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.
Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil, for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

PSALM 23

What's God saying to you from this passage?

Moving forward, how can you apply that to your life?

DAY 2

WHERE DO MY INSECURITIES COME FROM?

The day before we took Mike home from the hospital, I remember the pediatric nurses commenting on his soft cry: “Oh you’ve got a sweet one there. He hardly cries at all.” As newborns do, he slept soundly and I had to work hard to rouse him sufficiently so he would nurse. I listened carefully as the nurses talked to me about the importance of making sure I woke him every few hours so he could get the nutrition he needed. Two days after we brought him home from the hospital, I noticed a strange lump on the side of his head. It was soft and squishy and seemed to rise up out of nowhere. I immediately called the pediatrician, who calmly said to bring him in.

As he examined Mike, the doctor began to ask some questions. “Had Mike bumped his head? Had we dropped him or had he fallen off the changing table? Had he been this lethargic since we had brought him home?” I was horrified. The doctor was asking me if Mike had been abused. *He thinks I’m a horrible parent.*

It was a long night. The doctor was also concerned about Mike’s yellowish skin color and told us to take him straight to the hospital for a blood test and a scan of his head. As I walked miserably down the hospital corridor, I remember feeling panicky and helpless. *What was the cause of the bump on his head? What did the doctor mean when he said he didn’t like the hue of Mike’s skin?* Mike looked so tiny and was so dependent on us. As a brand-new mom, I didn’t have a clue what to do.

As the test results came back, it was determined that the bump on Mike’s head was a normal hematoma from the trauma of birth that went away quickly on its own. The doctor explained that usually these bumps showed up within the initial hours after birth, and while it was unusual that it had taken so long to arise, it was nothing to worry about. The deepened color of his skin was another matter, however. Mike was jaundiced and needed to be put under a light in an incubator to lower his bilirubin. He’d have to stay in the hospital for another couple of days. The doctor remarked that the hematoma, while momentarily concerning, was a blessing. We hadn’t noticed Mike’s deepened color and, had we not brought him in that evening, the jaundice could have turned into a much more serious matter.

I remember sitting next to my brand-new baby, so incredibly small in the incubator, wearing just his diaper and the eye patches to protect him from the warming light.



As I looked around at all the machinery helping my son's blood levels get back to normal, I was overwhelmed. I felt powerless to do anything but sit beside him. Geoff and I were at the complete mercy of the doctors and nurses to do the right thing. I felt so out of control.

Have you ever felt this way as a mom? You may be feeling like this at this very moment. Maybe your child is facing medical conditions that you can't fix and that won't go away on their own. Or maybe your daughter or son is struggling at school, and you feel powerless to help. Maybe at night you sit waiting for your child to come home, but the clock keeps ticking the minutes by as you sit and wait. As a mom, there are many moments that really are out of our control. It can cause us insecurity, anxiety, and even depression.

What situations as a mom are causing you to feel insecure or out of control?

Jehoshaphat knew what it felt like to have no control. When he received the report of the coming attack, I'm sure he had questions. *How many men? How would the armies attack? When would they arrive and from what direction?* But I'm sure the big question that Jehoshaphat wondered was *How will we stop them?* As he listened to the report, it became evident that he couldn't stop them. They were already on their way. The informants told him that the armies were already closing in.

Let's take a look at how Jehoshaphat responded.

Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the LORD, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah. The people of Judah came together to seek help from the LORD; indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek him. Then Jehoshaphat stood up in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem at the temple of the LORD in the front of the new courtyard and said: "LORD, the God of our ancestors, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you."

2 CHRONICLES 20:3-6

Here's the incredible comfort I take from this passage: It's OK to feel afraid and know that by yourself you can't handle what might be coming. Hopefully, your insecurities cause you to lean further into God for His strength and wisdom.



This passage used the word “alarmed.” As a mom, have you ever felt down-right panicky? Have you ever wondered, *Good grief, now what should I do? I don’t have a clue!* For those of us who feel like we need to control everything, this is misery! We want answers, we want solutions, and we want them now! Jehoshaphat probably felt incredible pressure to provide the answers to a kingdom that was surely looking to him for direction. After all, he was the king!

As a mom, how do you handle the pressure of knowing the people in your house are depending on you 24/7?

As your kids get older, their needs change from diapers and nose-wiping to more serious issues with friends, choices, and attitudes. They will bring their broken hearts and bruised emotions to you, and you will want so badly to provide that instant solution and quick fix. But sometimes there isn’t one.

Jehoshaphat realized this as well. The armies were coming. He knew they couldn’t defend themselves on their own, and running away wasn’t going to help. But instead of pretending to have it all under control or becoming paralyzed, he got real. In front of everyone, Jehoshaphat admitted the answers weren’t going to come from him, but from the God who rules over all the nations. Jehoshaphat knew he wasn’t in control, so he went to the One who was.

TAKE ACTION

It sometimes feels impossible to turn the ultimate control of my life, my marriage, and my children over to a God who sometimes seems so far away. I want the situation solved today, on my terms and my timing. I don’t want to wait. Waiting is infuriating, and I want to control all the details—the when, the what, the where—right now.

I can’t help but think that God understands my need for control. He reminds me again and again in verses like this one:

So do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold
you with my righteous right hand.

ISAIAH 41:10

*As a mom, what do you think the words “for I am with you” mean?
How can that knowledge change your attitude as a mom?*

*How does it make you feel when you read that God knows you will
be afraid and dismayed? What encouragement does that provide?*

God knows we will sometimes be insecure or afraid of what comes at us, and He also knows we will be dismayed at our own inability to handle it. **Instead of shaming or condemning, God reminds us that He will strengthen and hold us.**

*How do you see a need to control playing out in your life as a mom?
What can you trust God with today?*

DIG DEEPER

Jehoshaphat got ready for battle by calling out to God, assembling the people, and stating God’s power out loud. We can call on God in the same way by arming ourselves with some great go-to verses. Here are some of my favorites that remind me of God’s power and the fact that He truly is in control.

Look up each verse below. Then write a few sentences of what each means to you. Consider keeping them written in a spot where you’ll see them regularly for just the moments you need them.

Isaiah 41:10

Isaiah 58:9a

Proverbs 3:5-6

DAY 3

WHAT'S MY STRATEGY?

Can you recall a moment when being a mom was more messy than beautiful? I remember a story a friend told me of when her twin boys were 3, and she had had one of “those days.” All morning long the twins had bickered and fought. They had spread their snack of crackers and jelly all over the carpet, enhanced the living room wallpaper with crayon swirls, and decided the dog would look more handsome with jelly smeared all over his white fur. She tried reasoning and consequences. Everything she tried seemed to do nothing but escalate the behavior.

Exhausted, she sent the boys to their room for some contained playtime, firmly closing the door behind her. At the sound of banging on the wall, she returned to their room to find they had stacked their plastic chairs on top of their toy box and were using their plastic toolset to try to take the door off of its hinges. She said the amazing thing was that they were making progress and had already removed a hinge!

She called me from the garage to relay the story, where she had taken refuge with a bag of Oreos for a much-needed mommy time-out. When I answered the phone, I heard the whispered words, “It’s only 10:00 in the morning and I’m already done.”

Can your mom heart resonate? Have you had those days when you’ve tried everything and nothing seems to work—when the frustration keeps coming and coming, and it seems there’s no end in sight? Reaching the point where you come to the end of yourself, standing in the garage, barefoot, and clutching a bag of Oreos as you call a friend isn’t always such a bad thing. Our weaknesses and struggles nudge us to reach out to others and ultimately show us how much we need God in every detail of our lives.

Who is the support system you call when you face overwhelming circumstances or just need encouragement? What are the things they do that support you best?

King Jehoshaphat knew what it felt like to come to the end of his own might and wisdom. We know the story begins with an intelligence report informing him that numerous armies were on their way to attack them. Verse 3 says that Jehoshaphat was alarmed. He instinctively knew that he couldn’t handle what was coming. But instead of becoming paralyzed, he sprang into action. Continuing in 2 Chronicles, we can see Jehoshaphat’s strategy and direction.

Take a moment to read 2 Chronicles 20:1-12.

I love the way Jehoshaphat gathered a team of support and help. He called upon his whole kingdom to join him in fasting and prayer, which gave room for God to send special encouragement. Moving forward, Jehoshaphat gets supporting words from a buddy.

All the men of Judah, with their wives and children and little ones, stood there before the LORD.

Then the Spirit of the LORD came on Jahaziel son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite and descendant of Asaph, as he stood in the assembly.

He said: "Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the LORD says to you: 'Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's.'"

2 CHRONICLES 20:13-15

Mom, you're not alone, and God has your back. Even when we don't think or feel like we have a strategy to do this motherhood thing, God does. But many times it takes our acknowledgment that we need help for these words to come. Investing effort into forming a support team of those who will encourage you in the most desperate moments is so worth it!

What is, or could be, your go-to strategy for when being a mom seems overwhelming or scary?

I remind myself again and again of the way that Jehoshaphat got his eyes off himself and put them on God. He did this through a gigantic worship service.

Jehoshaphat bowed down with his face to the ground, and all the people of Judah and Jerusalem fell down in worship before the LORD. ... After consulting the people, Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the LORD and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying: "Give thanks to the LORD, for his love endures forever."

2 CHRONICLES 20:18,21

In other words, Jehoshaphat had a gigantic worship party, loud and strong! It sounds like there was singing, dancing, and shouting. They didn't hold back. There's nothing like bold and courageous worship to remind us of our total dependence on God, and this is exactly what Jehoshaphat did. He proclaimed, "We can't do this on our own, God. We are counting on You! Bring it on!"

The passage ends with a surprising triumph for Jehoshaphat. Not only were they victorious, but God arranged it so they didn't even have to fight. The enemy armies had turned on each other.

When the men of Judah came to the place that overlooks the desert and looked toward the vast army, they saw only dead bodies lying on the ground; no one had escaped.

2 CHRONICLES 20:24

Isn't it just like God to take care of the situation in ways they couldn't even have dreamed of?

Jehoshaphat was wise to not freeze or throw up his hands when faced with attacking armies. He formed a strategy of declaring, sharing, and worshipping. He shouted out loud that he knew they couldn't do this on their own but that he knew the God who could. He shared his fear and invited others to join him in beseeching God. He called everyone to come and worship.

As you consider the actions of Jehoshaphat, think about how it could apply to your life. Jehoshaphat declared God's power, he shared the situation and need with his kingdom, and then he led the people in worship.

What does worship mean to you?

How does your heart resonate with God in worship? The Bible says that when we worship God, we draw close to Him and He not only hears us, but He responds. James 4 tells us to "draw near to God, and he will draw near to you" (v. 8, ESV). Worship connects us to God in a way nothing else does. **Worship can happen anywhere at any time, opening the door for God to speak intimately to our hearts.**



Consider some ways your heart connects to God. Is it memorizing Scripture and thanking Him for the guidance of His Word? Is it being outdoors and enjoying the beauty of nature, acknowledging that God is the Author of it? Is it watching your children and appreciating how wonderful and beautiful God made them? Is it listening to a worship song or even singing it out to God in praise? Take some time to think about how your heart responds best to God and spend some concentrated time this week devoted to those things.

TAKE ACTION

One of the first steps in Jehoshaphat's strategy was to call on others to cry out to God with him. It can be an incredible gift when another mom puts her arms around you and says, "It's going to be all right." She can join you in prayer for the things you're facing. Imagine having an entire group of moms you can lean into for encouragement and prayer. Consider these possibilities:

- If you're a mom of preschoolers, think about joining a MOPS group or starting a gathering of moms at your church. This is a friendship circle of moms who gather regularly to grow together as moms, wives, leaders, and friends. Go to www.mops.org and www.momlifetoday.com for more information.
- Join a small group at your church. If your church doesn't have any available, consider starting a moms group of your own. There are numerous Bible studies at www.lifeway.com/women that you could work through together.

DIG DEEPER

We can easily get so distracted with our never-ending to-do list that we forget to stop and take in the moment. We become so overwhelmed at the thought of tomorrow that we forget to focus on today. Take time to breathe in your kids. Notice their little hands and toes. Pay attention to their sweet smiles and desire to spend time with you. Enjoy the gift you have today.

Yet, go one further. The second step in Jehoshaphat's strategy was worship. Take time right now to thank the One who gave you your children. Spend some energy worshipping Him for His goodness, mercy, love, and provision for you and your kids. Do you have a regular rhythm of worshipping God that connects you directly to His power and spirit? Worshipping God can include singing, but it can also include journaling, reciting verses aloud, enjoying the beauty of nature, and others ways that your heart can resonate with His. Consider trying a new rhythm of worship this week, and then share it with a friend.



DAY 4

I WILL STAND FIRM.

Several years ago, I led a collaborative leadership cohort of women who led at high levels in their churches. One of the women shared a story of a difficulty she was having with another woman in her church. She kept hearing from others that this woman was talking behind her back and spreading stories about her. She said it was incredibly discouraging. She had tried on numerous occasions to sit down with the woman to work through the situation, but nothing seemed to help. She had apologized for whatever had caused the hard feelings, had tried to befriend the woman, and had covered their relationship with prayer, but still it continued. She said it was a wakeup call when her husband said, “Have you ever considered that there may be more going on here than just that this woman is upset with you? Maybe Satan is trying to discourage you.”

This leader shared the story with us to enlist our help. She said she felt like she needed a wide circle of prayer support, a team of women who would commit to praying for her on a regular basis, especially during the moments when discouragement hit. She called us her S.W.A.T. team, copying the Army acronym for “Special Weapons and Tactics.” She asked us to use all of the weapons of spiritual warfare that we knew—praying for her, declaring Scriptures over her, speaking godly encouragements on her behalf, and so forth. I felt honored to be a part of this team. Though we didn’t live near each other, this leader would occasionally send out an email to us all that simply said, “Today, I’m facing some discouragement. Would you stand with me?” And we would. It was incredible to be a part of the email chain as these women, who knew what it was like to face discouragement, all piled in with their prayers and encouragements. We would respond with verses, a written prayer, or other form of encouragement. Sometimes one of us would just pick up the phone and call to lift her spirits.

Satan often comes after us in an area in which he knows we’re easily discouraged. Have you noticed a particular pattern that Satan uses?

Moms, if you’re facing a deep sense of doubt in being a mom—if you feel fear and a deep sense of inadequacy on a regular basis—could there be more going on than simple insecurity? Here’s one thing I know: Satan doesn’t want you to succeed as a mom. He wants you to feel like you can’t, like you aren’t enough, like you’re failing. He is the Enemy of our soul, and he wants the exact opposite of what God wants for you.

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

1 PETER 5:8

God wants you to know you are the exact right mom for your children—that through Him you are enough. He will equip you with everything you need as you call daily on Him. Satan knows that when you connect with the God of the nations, you are a powerful force. As a mom, you're raising the generation of tomorrow, and Satan wants to stop you any way he can. Could some of your discouragement be coming from Satan?

Have you sensed deep times of discouragement as a mom? What do you do to combat them?

I have good news. You don't have to stand for it. When you're a daughter of the King, Satan has no power over you. Jehoshaphat's friend Jahaziel reminded him of this too:

He said: "Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the LORD says to you: 'Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's.'"

2 CHRONICLES 20:15

Moms, the battle of discouragement that Satan will try to engage us in is not ours alone. God proved long ago that He is more powerful than anything Satan might try to throw at us. Satan wants us to get mired in our piles of laundry and the fact that our kids can't keep their rooms clean or keep up with their homework. He wants us to feel overwhelmed at every rebellious choice our kids make and every time they shut down into a silent wall of resentment. We might hear Satan's whisper in our ear, "You are not enough of a mom to handle this." That's when we must remind ourselves Whose battle it really is and Who has already won it.

You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you, Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the LORD will be with you.

2 CHRONICLES 20:17

Jahaziel was reminding Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah that they needn't even worry how God would take care of it. It was His problem, His battle, and all the people had to do was stand firm.

As you consider this passage and Jahaziel's encouragement to Jehoshaphat, think about the applications it could have in your mom life.

Do you have a Jahaziel in your life who speaks truth into you when you need to stand firm? If you do, remember to tell her how important she is in your life. If you don't, start by seeking a prayer partner or mom mentor.

Who else can you call to help you stand firm in your role as a mother? What are the ways they can best help you?

Jahaziel told Jehoshaphat that they would not have to fight the battle but to take up their positions. In what ways can we, as moms, take up our positions?

Every mom needs a friend who understands her and will stand beside her during those discouraging moments. On your S.W.A.T. team, your friends can serve various roles. Do you have a friend you can pray with? How about a special mom friend who is your encourager? Do you have a wise mom friend who can share sage advice? How about a mom friend to recite encouraging Scripture to you? If you don't, start small! Start by choosing one mom friend to do just one of these things.

TAKE ACTION

When you feel overwhelmed and as though you're being attacked by Satan, remember that Scripture reassures us that God fights for us—and He will win. Beside each verse, list how it can encourage you in the midst of the battle. Post the one that speaks most to you where you will see it often.

A thief comes only to steal and to kill and to destroy. I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance.

JOHN 10:10 (HCSB)

The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.
The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

ROMANS 16:20

Do not give the devil a foothold.

EPHESIANS 4:27

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

JAMES 4:7

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him. ... We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true by being in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

1 JOHN 5:14-15,19-20

DIG DEEPER

Ephesians 6 talks about spiritual warfare and putting on the armor of God. Read the entire chapter and make a list of the ways you'll enlist the armor of God in your warfare against discouragement as a mom.

DAY 5

GOD IS BIGGER THAN ANY SITUATION I WILL FACE.

When our daughter, Brittainy, was in middle school, I began to notice that she was becoming increasingly withdrawn. One night while we were at a movie together, she got up and went to the restroom. When she didn't come right back, I went to search for her and was surprised to find her lying on a bench in the lobby, surrounded by the theater staff. Pale and sweaty, she looked up at me and said words that made my blood run cold: "Mom, I think I'm having a heart attack." What? She was 13 years old. How could a young, healthy 13-year-old be having a heart attack? I tried to swallow down a feeling of panic as we rushed her to a nearby emergency room. It wasn't long before the doctor pulled me aside and shared what he thought was going on. He assured me Brittainy's heart was fine, but she was experiencing palpitations, tightness in her chest, and an overwhelming sense of fear. Brittainy was having a panic attack.

I didn't know anything about panic attacks. I thought they were just feelings of nervousness. Over the next few months as my daughter experienced more of these, sometimes more than one a day, I learned that they are debilitating. They make you want to run, but you don't know what you are running from. They are not just feelings of panic, but overwhelming experiences that come out of nowhere, taking you completely by surprise.

As a mom, I wanted to do anything I could to help my beautiful, athletic daughter from experiencing these horrible things. I wanted them to stop—and to stop this instant. We talked with the doctor. We explored medication. We prayed together. We tried to figure out where they were coming from and why they first started. There weren't many answers that brought my mom heart the peace it was looking for.

I noticed my prayer life began to change. My times with God took on a new desperation. *Please God. Please take these away. Please God. I don't understand. Please God, do something.* I felt desperate because it seemed like God wasn't doing anything at all. When I prayed, I got no answer. I watched my daughter struggle week after week.

Jehoshaphat's answer came immediately. He got the report, he prayed, he praised, and he stood firm. The battle was swift and triumphant. Jehoshaphat and his army stood on the hill and looked over all the dead bodies. God was right.

As they began to sing and praise, the LORD set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated. The Ammonites and Moabites rose up against the men from Mount Seir to destroy and annihilate them. After they finished slaughtering the men from Seir, they helped to destroy one another.

2 CHRONICLES 20:22-23

Boom. Done. At times I read that story and wonder why God sometimes moves instantly and other times it seems to take years. Why? And when God does take longer to answer, why doesn't He explain it?

Is there something concerning your family that you've been praying about for a long time? As you read verses about God's faithfulness and love for you, what doubts do you have?

One day several months later Brittainy asked me if I would take a cake decorating class with her. The class was expensive, we'd have to get up early on Saturdays, and we'd have to buy a big list of supplies. No, I really didn't want to spend my Saturdays decorating cakes. This wasn't my thing. But the look in my daughter's eyes was wistful: "Mom, let's do something fun."

We did take that class, and we were the worst two students in the room. My icing roses were lopsided. I never did master how to properly create a petal leaf. More icing went in my mouth than on the cakes. When the instructor would observe the other students, she would exclaim, "Excellent technique!" When she would pass Brittainy and I, she would smile and say, "How about if we keep trying?" While we will never be featured on a cooking show, I am so glad we took that class. Over the course of the weeks, I saw God's hand. Brittainy teased me about my sad attempts at buttercream frosting. We laughed and enjoyed each other. We were able to talk about silly things, which led to more important things—like God's faithfulness, His love for us, and His healing hand that doesn't always work according to our time schedule.

Why might God work quickly in some situations and slowly in others?



Have you seen God move slowly or quickly in your life? What can you learn from this?

One Saturday I sat on the couch, looking back over a journal entry I had written a year earlier. It was full of pain and questions, smack in the middle of the time when Brittainy's panic attacks were at their worst. I felt God whisper to my heart, *You thought I wasn't working, but I was*. Indeed He was. Today, Brittainy is an incredibly compassionate young woman, able to talk to other girls about panic attacks and how they've never completely gone away but how she sees God in them. She tells other girls about God's healing hand and how it moves quickly and slowly. But it always moves.

In my journal, I had written these verses from Ephesians:

I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

EPHESIANS 3:17-19

Mom, this is my prayer for you, that you will know how great God's love is for you. God's bigger than anything you could ever face with your kids. His love is wide and long and high and deep and covers every insecurity you could ever have. By yourself, you can never be enough, but through Him, you're more than a conqueror. May you be filled up in this.

In what ways do you see God's incredible love working in your life?

Who could you share this news with this week?

TAKE ACTION

When I was going through the difficult period with Brittainy, I started a gratitude journal, listing blessings from God. Sometimes I didn't feel like writing anything at all, but as I continued my list, I felt God work in my heart. Consider starting your own gratitude journal. See how many things you can list. Be sure to invest time in reading back over your lists in the days to come. You might be surprised how much God has moved in your life.

DIG DEEPER

Is your mom heart searching for peace? God's Word can help.

I remain confident of this:
I will see the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living.
Wait for the LORD;
be strong and take heart
and wait for the LORD.

PSALM 27:13-14

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

2 CORINTHIANS 12:9

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

COLOSSIANS 3:15-17

Let your heart sink into these passages. Ask God to transform you through it.

What could God be saying to you about His timing and work?



Being a mom is hard.

As much as women desire to be mothers, sometimes the challenges and circumstances are not what they ever expected.

Parenting leaves many moms wondering: *How can I love today when my child is deliberately disobeying me? Why can't I get it together? Am I getting anything right?* This 6-session study helps each mom discover (or remember) that she is the mom God chose for her children, God is working through her life, and she is a beautiful mom.

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