

Mom
Set
Free



GOOD NEWS FOR MOMS
WHO ARE TIRED OF TRYING
TO BE GOOD ENOUGH

BIBLE STUDY

JEANNIE CUNNION

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeannie Cunnion is the author of *Parenting the Wholehearted Child* and *Mom Set Free* and a frequent speaker at women's conferences and parenting events around the country. Her passion is encouraging women to live in the freedom for which Christ has set us free—a message her own heart needs to be reminded of daily.

Jeannie holds a Master's degree in Social Work, and her writing has been featured on outlets such as *The Today Show*, *Fox News*, *The 700 Club*, and *Focus on the Family*.

As a self-described grace-clinger, Jeannie's writing is woven with humility, honesty, humor, and a contagious love for the good news.

Jeannie lives in Connecticut with her husband, Mike, and their four boys.

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DEAR FELLOW MOM,

I am so grateful that you have chosen to invest your precious time into this study. While I may not have the privilege of knowing you personally, I bet we have a few things in common. I bet we both desperately love our kids. I bet we both desperately want to get this parenting thing right for them. I bet we also both feel like we are under so much pressure. Every day we feel it. We are daily bombarded with covert and overt messages that challenge us to achieve the unachievable as moms—to “be enough” for our children.

But here’s the thing. We don’t just feel the pressure to “be enough” for our kids. We feel the pressure to “be enough” for God, in and through our parenting. Indeed, the pressure runs both horizontal and vertical, leaving us worried that we are not only letting down our kids, but also fearful that we are disappointing God. And ultimately the pressure steals the joy and the wonder from our parenting.

I speak from experience on this one. I was trying to keep God’s love through my good behavior, and I also raised my three young boys through that lens. I was striving to achieve a goodness of my own, and I was putting that same pressure on my kids. Grace, real grace, was lost on me. I believe that is where most of us get stuck. In all our striving, we will keep failing. I did.

From the outside, it may have looked like I was pulling it off. But on the inside,

I was desperate, overwhelmed, ashamed, and hopeless because I was realizing how incapable I was of being the perfect Christian woman, wife, and mom I’d set out to be.

Oh friend, if you’re a mom who is tired of striving to be “good enough,” lean in. I have such good news for us. Freedom from the pressure that seeks to weigh us down and wipe us out—the freedom that you and I are desperate for—isn’t found in our striving to be better moms tomorrow but in the good news of God’s grace today.

The good news of the gospel changes how we live and therefore how we parent. We can’t live in one truth and parent from another. If we want to raise children who live from the freedom found in being wholeheartedly loved by God, we have to know the freedom for which Christ has set us free (Gal. 5:1).

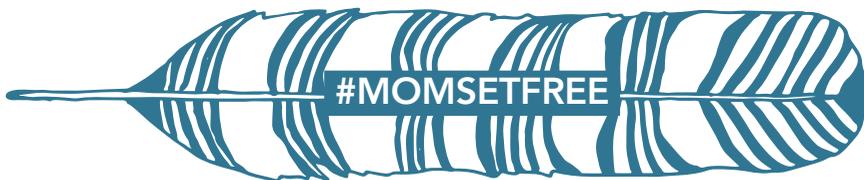
Before we get started I want you to know that I am on this journey alongside you. There is still so much for me to learn. That being said, there are a few heart-changing and freedom-full truths God has been teaching me that I am so excited to share with you.

Are you ready to breathe deeper and walk lighter and enjoy your parenting journey more?

Are you ready to parent as a mom set free? Me too. Let’s dive in.

Jeanie

We can't live
in one truth
and parent
from another.



WEEK 1

FREEDOM FROM THE PRESSURE TO BE ENOUGH

Each week, you'll find group discussion questions here. Use these to kick-start conversation with your Bible study group.

Group Discussion Questions

1. If you could go back to the time when you were preparing for your first child, what advice would you give to the younger you?
2. What are some of the pressures moms face each day?
3. What weaknesses has parenting revealed to you as a mom? What is the hardest part of being a mom for you?
4. What are your biggest worries and concerns when you think you are not enough for your kids or for God?
5. Read Isaiah 26:3. What do you learn from this verse?
6. What does it mean to rely on the peace and power of God? How would that reliance change your parenting?
7. What do you want to gain most from this Bible study and this group? How can the group pray for you?

To hear more from Jeannie,
download the optional video
bundle at lifeway.com/momsetfree



DAY 1

When was the last time you remember saying to another mom something like, “You know, this parenting thing isn’t that hard after all. I mostly feel like I’ve got it mastered, and the pressure to get it all right doesn’t really phase me. I don’t know why everyone else thinks it’s so complicated and exhausting”?

We are
under
so much
pressure.

You can’t remember saying that? OK, good. Because neither can I. In fact, I’ve never said that.

What I can remember saying to another mom is that I am so overwhelmed, I mostly feel like I have no idea what I’m doing, and I often feel like I get it wrong. Don’t let that concern you, as this isn’t a study about how to be like me. If it were, we’d be in big trouble. This is a study about how to parent freely in the assurance of and reliance on the sovereignty and grace of God. And rest assured, I have to go back to the good news every single day in order to live and parent that way. Because I, like you, feel the pressure.

We are under so much pressure.

Our pressure-cooker culture tells us we have to “be enough” for our kids. Or worse, that we actually *can* be enough for our kids, if we just try hard enough. We are told that their hearts are wholly reliant on our performance, and their entire futures are riding on our ability to perfectly orchestrate their lives. In other words, we are told that if we get it all right, our kids will turn out all right. And if we get it all wrong, our kids will turn out all wrong.

Well, if we’re going to get honest (and my hope is that we are going to get really, really honest in our seven weeks together), we will admit that we rarely feel like we’re enough and we often feel like we’re getting it wrong.



Pause here and rank where you land on some of the common pressures we face. Circle where you fall on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “no pressure” and 5 being “immense pressure.”

The pressure to orchestrate a picture-perfect future for your children

1 2 3 4 5

The pressure to be a perfect example for your children to follow

1 2 3 4 5

The pressure to create a saving and vibrant faith in your children’s lives

1 2 3 4 5

The pressure to produce Christlike character in your children’s lives

1 2 3 4 5

The pressure to shield your children from the ungodly influence of culture

1 2 3 4 5

The pressure to protect your children from hardship and/or suffering

1 2 3 4 5

The pressure to ensure your children fulfill their full potential and purpose

1 2 3 4 5

The pressure to prove you have it all together in front of other moms

1 2 3 4 5

The pressure to earn God’s pleasure in the way you parent your children

1 2 3 4 5

Are there any other pressures you experience that aren’t listed above? Describe them.

Is it just me or was even the mere exercise of thinking about these pressures exhausting and overwhelming? If you’ll notice, each one of the pressures we ranked holds an impossible standard or unrealistic expectation, which I underlined. During this week and next, we will dig into each one of these pressures and speak

God's promises over them. But for now, I want us to have a clear picture of just how much pressure we are under, and even more importantly, where this pressure leaves us stuck.

The pressure leaves us stuck bouncing between worry and fear, with clenched fists that are trying to control outcomes. It leaves us stuck feeling guilty about all that we're not, compared to what every other mom seems to be. It leaves us stuck feeling angry—angry that no matter how hard we try, we aren't getting the results the parenting books promised us we'd get if we followed the right steps. It leaves us ashamed—ashamed over our shortcomings and weaknesses that are daily revealed through our mothering. And ultimately, it leaves us hopeless. Why? Well, mostly because all of our hope is in us.

We think that if we just keep trying harder to be better examples and do more for our kids, we will finally become the moms we long to be. But, we're exhausted. This is just no way to live and parent. It's not how our heavenly Father created us to live and parent. But there is a better way.

We are going to start to discover the better way by turning to 2 Corinthians. This book of the Bible was a letter written by the apostle Paul to the church in Corinth. The Corinthian church was comprised of mostly inconsistent believers who had embraced a false gospel and were experiencing affliction. Paul wrote to them as someone who was well acquainted with affliction, and out of his great love for these people, he pleaded with them to embrace the true gospel.

So while Paul was not writing directly to moms in the twenty-first century who are under immense pressure, experiencing affliction, and trying to raise children in the truth of the gospel, I think we will see how his writing and encouragement apply to our daily lives.

We don't want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, of our affliction that took place in Asia. We were completely overwhelmed—beyond our strength—so that we even despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death, so that we would not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a terrible death, and he will deliver us. We have put our hope in him that he will deliver us again.

2 CORINTHIANS 1:8-10

The apostle Paul understood pressure. Note what he said in verse 8. In the NIV translation, Paul writes, *"We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself."*

Maybe it sounds dramatic, but there have been plenty of days when I have felt pushed far beyond my ability to endure in motherhood. No, my life was not at stake like Paul's, and my circumstances were far less severe. But there have been some very hard and dark days when the enemy has flaunted my weaknesses and failures before me, and I have been swallowed up by despair.

Have you ever felt the pressure you are under in your mothering is far beyond your ability to endure? Describe that here in a few words.

In verse 9, Paul showed us what pressure and peril are intended to do. He wrote in the NIV, *"But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead."*

Oh friend, how applicable this is to our parenting. The pressure we are under is intended to make us rely on God.

And here's the thing. So much of the pressure we experience and so many of the emotions in which we get stuck, stem from us getting this backward. The pressure stems from believing that parenting is about God relying on us to be enough for our kids. But that's not it at all.

Parenting is about us relying on God to be enough for our children and for us.

What does relying on God look like for you in your parenting?

God
wants our
hope set
on Him,
not on us.

What causes you to rely on yourself rather than on God? What is typically the result of that?

This passage can teach us to rely on God when we feel overwhelmed. Becoming the mom we long to be doesn't happen by trying harder and being better and doing more to be enough for our kids. It happens by relying more on God, who already is enough.

Now notice how Paul concluded this passage. He essentially said, *Hey, don't forget! God has shown up before, so rest assured He will show up again and again. On Him we must set our hope.*

According to the *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, the definition of *hope* is "to trust in, wait for, look for, or desire something or someone; or to expect something beneficial in the future."¹

What are some things you place your hope in every day?

What has been the result?

Where does Scripture tell us our hope should come from?

If there is anything I've discovered about myself in the last couple of years, it's that my sense of discouragement and sadness means I've put my hope back in my hands. Hopelessness is always my cue to recite **PSALM 42:11**—a verse I had to memorize to get my hope back where it belongs. *"Why am I discouraged? Why is*

my heart so sad? I will put my hope in God. I will praise him again—my Savior and my God” (NLT).

God wants our hope set on Him, not on us. He wants us to rely on Him and trust Him with the children He has entrusted to us.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:24. Who is doing the action in these verses?

What is the promise?

We'll talk more about this tomorrow but before we close out our day, I want to remind you of something us moms are good at forgetting. He who called you to motherhood will be faithful to see you through motherhood. God chose you on purpose to parent the children He has gifted to you. I know it may not always seem like it. Whether you're wrangling toddlers who refuse to cooperate, wiping the tears of your teenager caused by situations you can't fix, or disciplining your children for the hundredth time today and wondering if there will ever come a day when they will listen and obey without a fight, you may think God could have chosen someone better for your kids. Trust me, I get it. But those thoughts are from the enemy whose specialty is feeding us lies. He wants to see us suffocate under the pressure of parenting.

What we have to remember is that God did not choose us to be our children's Savior. He chose us to be our children's parents. And He will equip us to parent the children He has entrusted to us.

CLOSE WITH PRAYER

Father, how freeing it is to know that You are not relying on me to be enough for my kids. But instead You want me to rely on You to be enough for both of us. God, help me remember that You are my hope and help me put my hope in You alone. *“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you believe so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (ROM. 15:13).*



I stumbled from my bed to the medicine cabinet to find something, anything, that would relieve my son's pain. Through squinted, burning eyes, I read the time on the clock as I entered the bathroom. 2 a.m. Only a mere hour after he'd last woken up in pain, and I'd soothed him to sleep with back scratching and prayers for healing. I don't know when we fell back to sleep again, but I do know the sun came up too quickly and greeted me with a to-do list that I'd be lucky to tackle on a good night's sleep.

I don't
want to
treat my
blessings
as burdens.

Before my feet hit the floor I prayed, *I will not treat my blessings as burdens. Lord, help me. I don't want to treat my blessing as burdens.* My heart was centered, but reality still loomed. Our refrigerator was empty. The new puppy needed exercise. I had a meal to cook for my neighbor who was ill, and I had fifty emails to return. But before that, I'd still need to make breakfast and get the other boys out the door with a smile on my face and a prayer on my lips. We wouldn't have time to read our devotion that morning. We'd barely have time to breathe. My insides groaned, "I can't. I must. But I can't."

Maybe you've had a morning like this? The kind where you are painfully aware that the physical and mental demands of parenting are going to push you far beyond your human limitations, and you're once again assured, "I am not enough for this. Definitely not enough."

[Share your most recent experience here.](#)



In the early stages of writing this study—actually at a very crucial point when the enemy was hurling lies at my heart about how I'm the only mom who feels *this* inadequate—I came across a photo on Instagram posted by my friend Heather.



It was a photo of Heather's hand holding a note card with **ROMANS 12:2** written on it. The card read, *"Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out"* (MSG).

Under the photo Heather confessed that "her soul has carried around the 500-pound lie that it's all up to her to control the outcomes" in her life and her parenting, and how God was leading her to surrender the burden to Him. Heather then invited other women to comment about the lies that were creeping into their minds so she could encourage them with God's truth and pray for them.

I was curious to see what other moms had said, so I scrolled down to the comment section. What I discovered was an undeniable theme among the long list of responses.

Mom after mom confessed to feeling like they're not enough. Here, in fact, is what three of the moms shared:

- Any other mom could do it better.
- I'm not good enough.
- I can't do this mothering thing one more day.

These three responses very much represent the others who wrote about feeling defeated and overwhelmed.

How did you feel reading those responses?

How would you answer Heather's question: "What lies are creeping into your mind as you parent?"

From where do you think those lies stem? Are they self-imposed? From society? From specific people in your life?

Now remember with me The Message paraphrase Heather shared of Romans 12:2.

We are urged to do what?

And what is the benefit of that?

Oh friend, what more could we ask for? In these seven weeks together, we are going to fix our attention on God, push back the pressure with the truth of God's Word, and be transformed from the inside out—transformed into moms set free from the pressure to be good-enough—for our children and for God, and moms who live in the assurance that who God is, and what He gives us, *is enough*.

I'm certainly not suggesting that the pressure to be enough and do enough is going away. The pressure you felt when you started your homework today is the same pressure that will be waiting for you when you finish. (I'm sorry about that.) We simply can't make the pressure go away. But we don't have to let it dictate how we live and how we parent. That's the difference—and it's a radical one.

God has a simple but profound message for us regarding our quest to be enough.

READ PSALM 46:10 (NIV):

*Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth.*

Oh, how profound this is for our lives and for our parenting. God is firmly but tenderly wanting us to hear Him assure us, *Enough, my dear daughter, of trying to be enough. Know that I, not you, am God. And I am good at being God.*

Let's personalize this for our parenting. What are your thoughts and emotions as you ponder this verse?

Obviously this isn't a charge to be permanently and physically still. Can we consider the ramifications of that for a moment and get a giggle out of the picture we're getting in our minds? I once heard a story about a woman who read this verse in her morning devotion and then decided to "be still" that day and not do any of the usual things she does every day to care and provide for her family. She let them prepare their breakfast before school. She didn't clean up or care for the home and she didn't make dinner. And when her husband returned home that evening, he asked, "Honey, what in the world happened today?" and she responded, "I read Psalm 46:10 in which God said 'be still' so I obeyed."

So we're clear that is not the kind of "be still" God is talking about, right?

I have actually clung to this verse for years. In fact, I have this verse written on a sticky note just above my desk because, as a girl prone to striving to be enough, I need to be reminded of this truth every day. On the note I wrote the NASB Bible translation, which says, "*Cease striving and know that I am God.*"

Let's not miss this. We can stop striving to be enough, because who God is (sovereign) and what God gives us in the person and work of Jesus Christ (grace) is enough.

Please read that again. This is hugely important to our study. Now fill in the blank below to make sure we've got this.

Who God is, which is _____, and what God gives us, which is _____, is enough.

God for us, and Christ in us, is all the enough we need.

In anchoring our hope in this good news, we will find relief from the pressure that is creeping in and threatening to steal the joy and the adventure from our parenting.

Read Matthew 11:28-30.

What I love most about this passage is that it is a personal invitation from Jesus. These are His words, not mine. It doesn't get any better than that.

What does Jesus invite us to do?

What does Jesus tell us about His heart in these verses?

What does He tell us He will give us?

The word for yoke in this passage is used in other parts of the New Testament as a contrast to grace and freedom (Acts 15:10; Gal. 5:1). Some believe Jesus is comparing His yoke to the yoke of the law in this passage, telling His followers to put down the burden of trying to live up to impossible standards and take on a lighter yoke, the yoke of grace.

In Eugene Peterson's *The Message*, Jesus' invitation is beautifully translated.

Let's read it together, but before we do, please insert your name at the beginning of the verse.

_____, *Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.*

MATTHEW 11:28-30, MSG

The "real rest" Jesus is talking about here isn't simply a good long nap in the middle of the day. (Although, that is always fantastic.) It's not a rest in which you simply clear the kids' calendar and cancel all your plans. (Although, sometimes that is fantastic, too.) The kind of rest Jesus offers is much more profound. This rest is one where our soul is at rest in the midst of motherhood. It's a rest that enables us to live, as Jesus concluded, freely and lightly.

Doesn't just the very idea of living freely and lightly make you take a long, deep breath of relief? Or maybe it makes you skeptical. Maybe you think, *I am under way too much pressure, and falling way too short, to ever live freely and lightly as a mom. There is entirely too much I need to do. There are meals to cook. Bottoms to wipe. College applications to complete. Schedules to coordinate. Carpools to run.*

Hugs to give. Appointments to make. Games to watch. Emails to check. And that's just the easy stuff. Don't even get me started on the hard and complicated stuff.

If that's you, I get it. But friend, Jesus never invites us into anything He can't make good on. He is a promise keeper through and through. And you are not exempt from His promises. He is personally inviting you to live as a mom set free.

Now please read Matthew 11:28-30 again, and note the ways Jesus says we will learn to live freely and lightly.

Are you noticing a theme among your answers? We learn to live freely and lightly by abiding in Him, not by trying to be Him. It happens by coming to know Him better and better (see Col. 1:10). More on that tomorrow.

CLOSE WITH PRAYER

Father, You are so good and so generous. You have invited us to Yourself, just as we are, not as we wish we were. Tired, worn-out, burned out, having made mistakes, and needing rest. Real rest. Rest only You can provide and rest You give without hesitation or expectation.



DAY 3

We left off yesterday with a truth you're going to hear me say often. It is the one God embedded into my heart to be the foundation of this study: who God is and what He gives us is enough.

So today, we are going to pick back up with this truth and continue to explore the game-changing significance this holds for our parenting. This is big picture stuff, but it's foundational to the rest we crave. Then we'll get down into the nitty-gritty of the specific pressures we face.

When praying for my kids, I have always used the words, "my boys" or "my sons." There is, of course, nothing wrong with praying this way. God entrusted these boys to my husband and me to raise to His glory. But on one particular and unforgettable night, while crying out to God about a painful hardship one of my boys was facing and feeling completely incompetent to help him navigate it, I felt the Holy Spirit remind me that these boys are first and foremost sons of God. That as much as I love them and long for them, they were created by Him, they belong to Him, and His love and desire for them is infinitely more profound and pure than even mine. In light of this truth, I began to pray "Your sons," rather than "my sons" to be reminded that He is their all-knowing, all-powerful Father. And because God is sovereign and full of grace, He can be trusted with the children He has entrusted to me.

I truly believe that it is only when we surrender to this truth that we will finally be free and empowered to thrive in our mothering. We have to know what Scripture says and trust the power it holds to free us (Matt. 22:29).

So I want us to look at a few key passages that speak to the sovereignty and goodness of God. Though it would be fair to say the whole Bible speaks to this, we will hone in on just a few passages that we can apply to our parenting.

READ EPHESIANS 1:17-19a (NIV):

¹⁷ I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. ¹⁸ I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe.



Paul prayed that God would give “the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that” we may _____.

What three things did Paul pray for the Ephesians to know in verses 18-19?

I want you to know this is my prayer for us today. In fact, I’d really love for us to start today by praying God would do this for us as we search Scripture on the sovereignty and grace of God. Will you join me in praying this together?

Father, we beg You to give us the spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that we may come to know You better. Lord, how can we trust You and rely on You if we don’t know You? We pray that the eyes of our hearts may be enlightened in order that we may know the hope to which You have called us, the riches of Your grace, and the incomparably great power for us who believe. Amen.

How have you tended to think about God’s sovereignty? How has your understanding of God’s sovereignty impacted the way you parent?

Look up the following verses, and note what they have to say about God’s power.

Psalm 139:16

Proverbs 16:9

Isaiah 55:8

Ephesians 1:11-12

Revelation 1:8

READ MATTHEW 7:9-11:

Who among you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him.

Sometimes we view God as someone who wants to take things away from us. How does this passage refute that lie?

How can we apply this truth to our children?

READ ROMANS 8:32:

He did not even spare his own Son but offered him up for us all. How will he not also with him grant us everything?

What does this verse reveal about God's ability to understand the sadness, grief, and even anguish that we experience as parents?

This is the truth we have to remember when our children are bullied or rejected by their peers, when they are battling sin and temptation, when their feelings get hurt or their hearts get broken, when they struggle with substance abuse or eating disorders, when they make wrong choices, or when they simply don't feel lovable or valuable. When our hearts break for our kids and we long to right every wrong in their lives, we have to remember they have a sovereign and good heavenly Father.

What are some of the battles you are facing alongside your children right now that you desperately wish you could fix or control?

How do these verses encourage you or breathe hope into those situations?

To say that God is sovereign is not to say that our children don't have free will. Indeed, God has given all of us free will. We are all responsible for the choices we make, and our choices matter. However, God is not limited by our choices. He is continually working everything together *"for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them"* (ROM. 8:28, NLT). More on that verse later. But for now, I want us to see something essential to our journey to freedom.

Remembering our good Father's sovereignty relieves so much of the pressure we experience in motherhood. It's not all up to you, and it's not all up to me—and praise Him for that!

I desperately needed to be reminded of this recently on a terrible day at the end of a difficult week. A week that entailed bad grades in school for one of my boys, bad words in the schoolyard for another, and bad dreams at night for another. Throw in bad teething for Baby Finn and you have quite the concoction. I joke, but these things break my mama heart, and they threaten to break my spirit. We give these boys everything we've got, we guide them in truth, we encourage them to use their God-given gifts to the fullest, we try to model godly living, we pray, we pray, and we pray, but ultimately we have to face that we are powerless to control the outcome, so we put our trust in our all-powerful God.

Let's turn to one more passage that demonstrates God's all-sufficient power.

Read 2 Chronicles 20:1-12.

The Moabites, the Ammonites, and some of the Meunites were descending upon Judah to fight. Verse 3 says *"Jehoshaphat was afraid."*

If we're honest, there are days of motherhood that look like this. Instead of all the -ites, our battles look like the things we named earlier, and we are afraid.

How did Jehoshaphat prepare for battle in verse 3?

Now record how Jehoshaphat ended his prayer to the Lord in verse 12.

We do not
know what
to do, but
our eyes
are on You.

If there ever was a prayer for us to pray when we feel powerless and afraid, I think we've just found it: *"we have no power ... we do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you"* (NIV).

How would this mind-set impact your daily parenting?

Just imagine how much deeper we'd breathe (and how much better we'd sleep) if we had the prayer of Jehoshaphat on repeat. How often do we not know what to do? Or feel powerless over the things our kids are facing and navigating? And we think it's all up to us to figure it out, solve it, and be their

rescuer. We are trying to fill shoes in their lives that only fit their heavenly Father. The invitation to us is to rely on God, fix our eyes on Him, and trust the enoughness of God in our kids' lives.

And yet. What I find so beautiful, so humbling, and perhaps, at times, so frightening, is that God chooses to use us, to involve us, in the work He is doing in the lives of our children. God is not asking us to play His role. Yes, we are significant in their lives—oh so very significant. But we are not sovereign. **We can be instruments of grace while we rest in the assurance that God already has covered what we are trying so hard to control.**

God wants us to lean in and listen close as He says, *I've got this. Just like I've always had this. And by the way, I can do "immeasurably more than" you could ever "ask for or imagine" (EPH. 3:20). Will you trust Me?*

Ponder your response to that invitation.

On a scale of 1 to 5, how difficult is it for you to trust God?

1

2

3

4

5

Did you notice what Jehoshaphat's motivation was to trust the Lord in such a profound way (see vv. 6-7)? It was in remembering the Lord's faithfulness in the past that empowered Jehoshaphat to trust the Lord for the future.

What stories from Scripture, your life, or the lives of those around you remind you that God, not you, is the One holding all things together and can be trusted with your children?

God is our all-knowing, all-powerful, all-sufficient Father who gives us radical, extravagant, abundant grace.

CLOSE WITH PRAYER

Let's end today praising Him for who He is.

Our Sovereign Father, thank You for Your power and Your goodness. Like Paul, there are days when I am the worst of sinners. Forgive me for the times I doubt Your sovereignty and love. Help me to trust You with my heart, my life, and my kids. I will trust in Your grace. Like the psalmist, I will pray: *"LORD, you are my portion and my cup of blessing; you hold my future. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance"* (PS. 16:5-6).



DAY 4

Yesterday we explored the sovereignty of God, and today we will look at the grace of God. Not that these two things are independent from one another. They aren't. But it will help us further in our journey to have a common understanding of these words.

I can remember, so clearly, the first time I heard the expression, "Be the person you want your children to become." I had two children at the time, ages four and two, but my third was on the way. And I was a mess. Overwhelmed, discouraged, and disappointed in who I'd become—as my weaknesses and shortcomings were all being revealed and magnified through motherhood. So you can imagine the grief and despair I felt when I read an article urging me to be the person I wanted my children to become. Because, here's the thing—I thought that being the person I wanted them to become meant being perfect. I thought God was relying on me to be a perfect example for my kids to follow.

What emotions does the expression "be the person you want your children to become" evoke in you?

I know many moms who don't struggle with perfectionism but still feel the pressure of our culture's impossible standards to be close to flawless. How do you respond to that pressure? Are you more prone to try even harder, or does it make you just want to quit altogether? Explain.

What are the consequences of trying to be the perfect example for our kids to follow?

But we don't just feel the pressure from our culture. We might also think we find it in Scripture.

Read Titus 2:7. Write the verse in your own words.

Here, Paul was emphasizing to Titus that the example he set should foster rather than frustrate the spread of the gospel in the lives of people in Crete. Similarly, the example we set should foster rather than frustrate our children's understanding of what it looks like to follow Christ.

We must remember, though, our children don't need us to be the perfection of Christ. They need to see us in pursuit of Christ. They need us to point them to Christ. They need to see the power of Christ made perfect in our weaknesses.

We see this so beautifully demonstrated in Paul's own life.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. What was the affliction that Paul said was given to him (v. 7)?

Rather than respond to Paul's pleading by removing the affliction, what did God say to him? Answer by filling in the blank: "My _____ is all you need. My _____ works best in weakness" (v. 9, NLT).

Can we just sit with that for a minute? We will get to how Paul responded in a moment, but first can we put ourselves in Paul's shoes and think about how we'd respond to God's answer?

Share how you think you might have responded to God's answer.



I'm pretty confident I would have said something along the lines of, *God, thank You for Your grace. I appreciate that. I really do. But I don't think You heard me right. I don't want affliction. I don't like feeling weak. I want to be awesome. I want to be strong. I want to be self-sufficient and perfect. I guess what I'm saying, Lord, is that I don't want to need You or have to rely on Your power. I'd rather be You.*

Now let's look at how Paul responds in verses 9-10:

"So now I am glad to _____ about my _____, so that the power of Christ can _____" (NLT).

Paul shifted from begging God to remove his thorn to being glad to boast about the weaknesses it revealed—all at the mention of God's all-sufficient grace.

Grace is the unearned and undeserved favor of God.

*Grace has
no limits or
conditions.*

Grace is the means by which God saves, sustains, sanctifies, and strengthens us in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Grace has no limits or conditions. In fact, grace with conditions isn't grace at all.

Scripture doesn't reveal the exact nature of Paul's thorn—whether it was physical, psychological, or situational. But Scripture does tell us what the thorn was intended to do.

Why was the thorn given to Paul?

And what is the opposite of pride or conceit?

The thorn was intended to keep Paul humble. Could it be that God loved Paul enough to give him the thorn to protect him from pride, to allow him to experience God's grace in profound ways, and to keep Paul reliant on God to provide everything he would need?

We all have thorns in our lives—different hardships or afflictions—that we experience. Ongoing marital strife, financial hardship, depression, addiction, physical pain or limitations, broken relationships with extended family, job insecurity, unfulfilled dreams, just to name a few. These thorns can bring us to our knees and reveal the greatness of our need.

Have you seen God’s grace proven all-sufficient and all-powerful in your weakness and need? If so, please explain.

Now let’s apply this to our parenting. What hope does this passage give us as moms? See, the Lord’s gracious assurance to Paul is the very same assurance He gives to you and to me. When we are striving but not succeeding at being flawless examples for our kids to follow, God says, “My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.” So, just like the apostle Paul, we can boldly respond, *So now I can be glad to be honest with my children about my weaknesses, so that the divine power of Christ can work through me in my parenting. When I confess I am weak, I am finally strong.*

Our weaknesses

- help us parent from a posture of humility;
- keep us reliant on God to provide everything we need to parent the children He has entrusted to us; and
- allow us to experience for ourselves, and demonstrate to our kids, His sustaining grace.

Oh, the sweet relief I have found in knowing that my weaknesses point my children away from their flawed mom and straight to their flawless Savior. He’s the One I want their trust and hope set upon, not me.

You don’t have to be ashamed of your weaknesses and need. Jesus loves to meet you and equip you and strengthen you and glorify Himself through you in that place, by His grace. There is only One who has ever been a perfect example for our children to follow. And that One isn’t us. It’s Jesus.

Now this isn't to suggest that the example we set for our kids does not have a profound impact on them. Indeed it does. What we do and what we say absolutely matters. What we model has an enormous impact on the thought patterns and behavior of our children. I know you know the research. We should absolutely and wholeheartedly seek to be a godly example for them. But as hard as we try, we will fail. **Confessing this does not make us failures; it makes us free**—free to be moms who are honest about our weaknesses, grateful for our Savior, and eager to live in the likeness of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit at work within us.

Did you catch the end of that sentence? We set an example not by relying on our own power but on the power of the Holy Spirit that is made perfect in our weakness. In light of this, I can actually get OK—even excited—about the expression “be the person you want them to become.”

On a scale of 1-5, how free do you currently feel to be honest with your children about your weaknesses?

1 2 3 4 5

What has prevented you from feeling free to be honest? Or, what has enabled you to be honest?

What are some ways your life can demonstrate to your children that you are deeply grateful for how God's grace is sufficient for you?

How is striving to be a flawless example different than seeking to live in pursuit of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit?

Paul says in **1 CORINTHIANS 11:1**, *“Imitate me, as I also imitate Christ.”*

Who is the ultimate example that both Paul and the people of Corinth should have followed?

Paul encouraged the people of Corinth to imitate him because he sought to imitate Christ. As moms, we are to be an example to our children—but not an example of unachievable perfection. Instead, we strive to point them toward the One who is perfect for us as we follow His lead and rely on His Spirit.

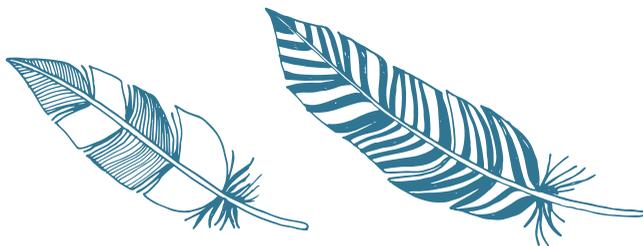
Our goal does not need to be perfection but letting our children see us enjoying Him, and thereby glorifying Him, as we live the free and abundant life Christ came to give us.

CLOSE WITH PRAYER

Let's close today by thanking God for the gift of motherhood. And let us beg Him to help us remember and trust in His sovereignty and grace as we seek to lead and love our children to the praise and glory of His grace.

Write your own prayer of gratitude below.

What
we do
and what
we say
absolutely
matters.



DAY 5

Every week on Day 5, we'll have a prayer activity to practice parenting open handed. Prayer is a powerful way to demonstrate our need for Christ and our reliance on Him for our kids. I may provide Scripture for you to meditate on, or a task I'll invite you to complete.

In 1 Peter 5:6-7, Peter told us to do two things. Humble ourselves and cast all of our anxiety on God. But it's "why" Peter told us to do this that always gets me. It's because God cares for us. My fellow mom, God cares so deeply for you. That means He cares about the things that you care about.

Casting our anxiety, worries, and problems on God is actually a very humbling act because it requires acknowledging that He is God and we are not. And it requires our trust in Him.

God is big enough and strong enough to bear the burdens and worries that are weighing you down. Will you join me now in casting it all on Him?

Today, we'll look at a few Scriptures that convey peace and repel worry. I hope you'll use these verses as prayers to our Father who is sovereign and full of grace.

Look up one verse or a few and personalize them, making them into prayers to God for peace in the midst of worry and fear.

Psalm 5:3

Psalm 118:5-9

Proverbs 3:5-6

Isaiah 26:3-4

Philippians 4:6-7

