

q u i e t m o m e n t s

FOR PARENTS



SELECTIONS BY ABI MAY



Selected and edited by Abi May

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quiet moments
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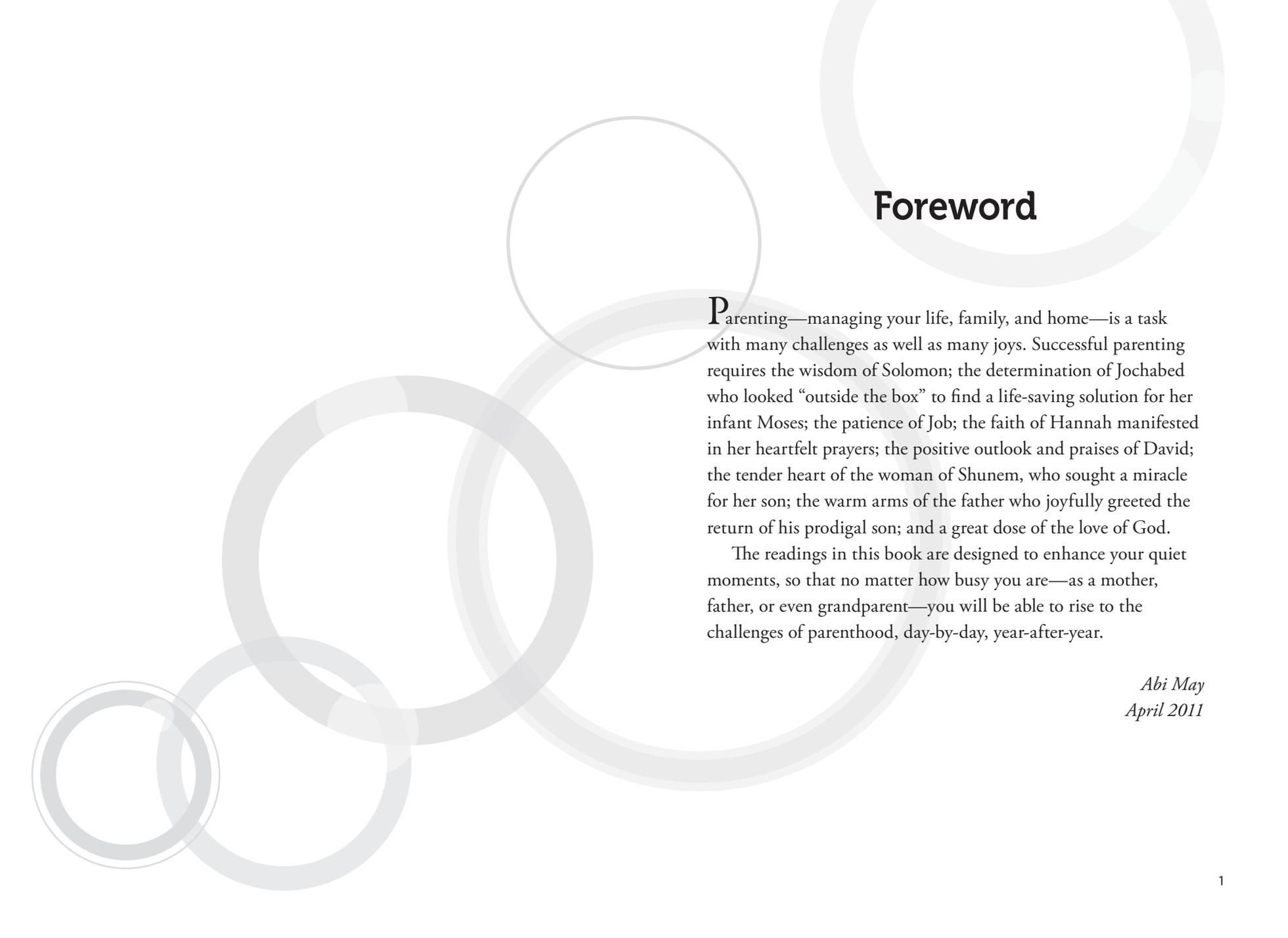
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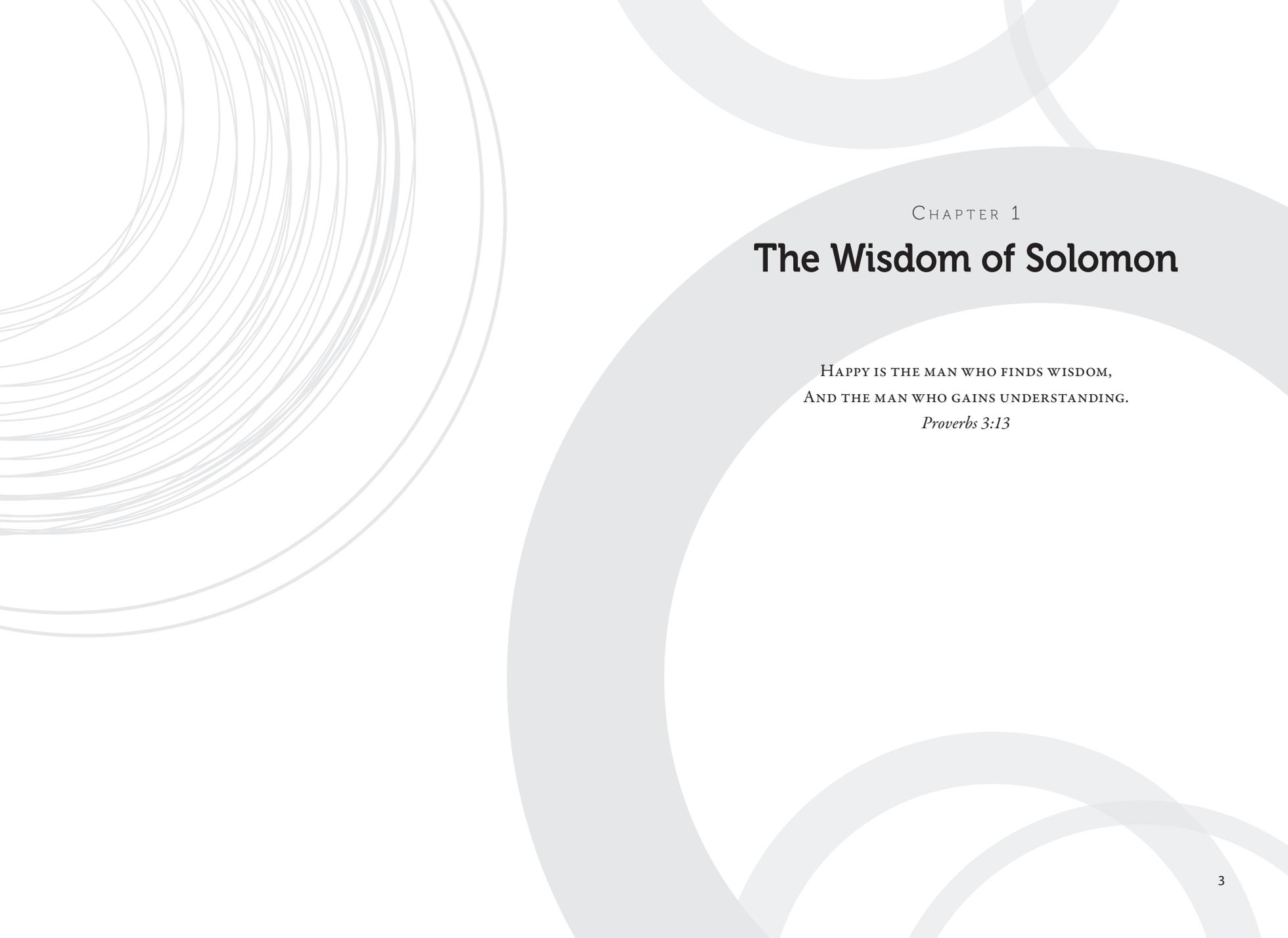


Foreword

Parenting—managing your life, family, and home—is a task with many challenges as well as many joys. Successful parenting requires the wisdom of Solomon; the determination of Jochabed who looked “outside the box” to find a life-saving solution for her infant Moses; the patience of Job; the faith of Hannah manifested in her heartfelt prayers; the positive outlook and praises of David; the tender heart of the woman of Shunem, who sought a miracle for her son; the warm arms of the father who joyfully greeted the return of his prodigal son; and a great dose of the love of God.

The readings in this book are designed to enhance your quiet moments, so that no matter how busy you are—as a mother, father, or even grandparent—you will be able to rise to the challenges of parenthood, day-by-day, year-after-year.

*Abi May
April 2011*



CHAPTER 1

The Wisdom of Solomon

HAPPY IS THE MAN WHO FINDS WISDOM,
AND THE MAN WHO GAINS UNDERSTANDING.

Proverbs 3:13

The LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, “Ask! What shall I give you?”

And Solomon said:

“O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?”

The speech pleased the LORD, that Solomon had asked this thing. Then God said to him:

“Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice, behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart.”

Taken from 1 Kings 3:5–12 ■

Problem solving

COMMIT YOUR WORKS TO THE LORD,
AND YOUR THOUGHTS WILL BE ESTABLISHED.

Proverbs 16:3

Parents are often amazed to discover how capable and resourceful their children are in solving their own problems, with a little guidance. All children encounter problems; that is a necessary part of growing up. It is through dealing with such challenges that they learn problem-solving skills that are essential for success in life. It takes time and patience to help children learn to solve their own problems, but it is a wise investment that will pay big dividends when the children get older, their problems become more complex, and the stakes are higher.

One tendency of parents is to be too quick to fix the problem or provide the answer. That may meet the immediate need, but it hinders the learning process. It's like the saying: Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for life. Teaching problem-solving is more important and more



beneficial in the long run than providing solutions. Helping children work through their problems also shows that you have faith in them, which boosts their confidence and self-esteem.

This is how God works with us. He could solve all of our problems with a snap of His fingers, but instead He usually expects us to reason things through, consider our options, and do what we can before He will step in and do what we can't. He involves us in working out the solution and brings us along step by step, not to make life more difficult but to help us grow from the experience.

Alex Peterson ■

Snail patrol

CONSIDER THE LILIES OF THE FIELD.

Matthew 6:28

Today I went for a walk with some of my friends' kids in the countryside surrounding the village in which we live, an area consisting of farmland, dirt paths, and small woods. The weather was great, so it was a good opportunity for the kids to get some fresh air and exercise as they ran around looking for the little creatures that are abundant in spring and summer.

It was an enjoyable break for me, away from the beehive of activity in our house, which doubles as living space and office for our local foundation and volunteer work. Out on those country trails there are no computers, no pressing work, no phone calls, no chores, no meetings, no messes to clean up, and none of the myriad of other things that keep us quite busy most of the day.

Time can seem to stand still while out in nature—at least until the kids excitedly holler, “Ladybug!” or “Spider!” But even such sudden alerts are okay, because just a few minutes of peace is usually

all I need to clear my head. Then I'm ready to jump back into action and run into the bushes to get a photograph of the latest "cool bug" they found and to take in the moment with these little explorers.

When Jesus said that unless you become as little children you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven,¹ maybe He wasn't just talking about heaven to come, but also about the peace and little bit of heaven we experience in our hearts here and now when we take the time to put our cares aside, quiet our minds and spirits, and tune in to His voice speaking to us through creation.

The children I was with seemed to do that naturally. They weren't worried about the work that still needed to get done back home, or the bills that needed to be paid; they were simply full of energy, excited about life, and happy to have a big guy along to watch out for them and take snapshots of their activities. How much more peace should we have, knowing that we have the ultimate big guy looking out for us and, I'm sure, taking snapshots of our lives too?

Jay Phillips ■

BE OF GOOD COURAGE,
AND HE SHALL STRENGTHEN YOUR HEART,
ALL YOU WHO HOPE IN THE LORD.

Psalm 31:24

All parents feel inadequate in some way or another, at some time or another. It is part of parental love to want the best for your children even if it means giving of yourself beyond your natural limits.

But don't make the mistake many parents do in thinking they have to carry the whole load themselves. If you do that, you'll soon wear out. You need to learn to share the load with Me. If you can't give your children everything you would like to every day, give them what you can and then trust Me for the rest.

The most important thing you can give your children is love—your love and My love. Do that, and you will have happy, well-adjusted children; you will have succeeded as a parent. But to have that love, you must take time with Me and My Word, in prayer and reflection. I have all the strength and peace and faith and love and answers you need. I love your children and know exactly what they need day by day. I want to fill your every need so together we can fill theirs, but to get those things you must spend time with Me.

¹ Matthew 18:3



When it seems impossible to make time for Me, that's when you need it most. Come into My arms and find rest. Cast your burdens upon Me. My shoulders are broad enough and My arms strong enough to carry any load. Make time to be with Me each day and I will answer your prayers for your children. I will make you the parent you want to be. I will do what you can't. And last but not least, your children will see a new light upon your face, for they will see Me there.

A message from Jesus received in prayer ■



Love ever gives—
Forgives—outlives—
And ever stands
With open hands.
And while it lives,
It gives.
For this is Love's prerogative—
To give—and give—and give.
John Oxenham

Nourish your spirit

A SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

MAN SHALL NOT LIVE BY BREAD ALONE, BUT BY EVERY WORD
THAT PROCEEDS FROM THE MOUTH OF GOD.

Matthew 4:4

Good nourishment from a balanced diet of vegetables and fruit, proteins, carbohydrates, and fats is important for maintaining good health. The same applies to our spirits. We all have days when we are busier than usual, but we should make a habit of taking some time for “food for the soul.”

You may find it helpful to plan your spiritual diet for the coming week, much like you might plan ahead the meals you will cook and what to shop for. This will help ensure that you get at least a few minutes of spiritual feeding each day. Find what works best for you. Here are some ideas to get you started.

Having a fairly structured, ongoing project will help you avoid spending time in the often-hecktic early morning deciding what to read. Try reading a chapter a day from the book of Proverbs, followed by a Psalm and a page from a book of daily devotionals.

“What can we do to promote world peace?”

Go home and love your family.

*Mother Teresa of Calcutta, upon receiving
the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979*

Times of deeper study will help you find answers to your questions and solutions to your problems. You might have a study project of working through the Gospels and book of Acts, or the epistles, or enroll in a Christian study course.

Lighter feeding can come from short inspirational reading. Consider listening to Christian music or reading Christian fiction or poetry for variety in your routine. Right before bed is an ideal time to read and reflect on something.

Make it easy for yourself by keeping your reading material handy. For instance, if you like to have your spiritual breakfast in bed, keep the books you'll need for that nearby; or if you'll have it over coffee in the kitchen, keep your material there.

Follow your plan for one week, and make adjustments as needed. Then follow your modified plan for another week, and so on. See what a difference those times of positive spiritual input make in how your days go.

Abi May ■

Whose hands?

SEE, I HAVE INSCRIBED YOU ON THE PALMS OF MY HANDS.

Isaiah 49:16

A basketball in my hands is worth about \$19.

A basketball in Michael Jordan's hands is worth about \$33 million.

A tennis racket in my hands is useless.

A tennis racket in Roger Federer's hands is a Wimbledon championship.

A rod in my hands might keep away a small dog.

A rod in Moses' hands parted the Red Sea.

A slingshot in my hands is a kid's toy.

A slingshot in David's hand was a mighty weapon.

Two fish and five loaves of bread in my hands is a couple of fish sandwiches.

Two fish and five loaves of bread in Jesus' hands fed thousands.

Nails in my hands might produce a birdhouse.

Nails in Jesus Christ's hands produced salvation for the entire world.

Put your concerns, your worries, your fears, your hopes, your dreams, your families and your relationships in God's hands because, as you can see, it depends on whose hands they're in.

Author unknown ■

Wisdom

My son, if you receive my words,
And treasure my commands within you,
So that you incline your ear to wisdom,
And apply your heart to understanding;
Yes, if you cry out for discernment,
And lift up your voice for understanding,
If you seek her as silver,
And search for her as for hidden treasures;
Then you will understand the fear of the LORD,
And find the knowledge of God.

For the LORD gives wisdom;
From His mouth come knowledge and understanding;
He stores up sound wisdom for the upright;
He is a shield to those who walk uprightly.
When wisdom enters your heart,
And knowledge is pleasant to your soul,
Discretion will preserve you;
Understanding will keep you.
Proverbs 2:1–7,10–11 ■

Keys to a happy home

Look to God and follow His ways

Who is wise and understanding among you?
Let him show by good conduct that his works
are done in the meekness of wisdom.

James 3:13

The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle,
open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits,
impartial and sincere.

And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace
by those who make peace.

James 3:17–18 (ESV)

Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does
them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on
the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the
winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall,
for it was founded on the rock.

Matthew 7:24–25 ■

The Giovanna solution

After four years and a 44-hour bus ride, I was finally visiting my daughter and son-in-law and seeing my young granddaughter, Giovanna, for the first time. She had my heart instantly—so cute, so smart, so active. Other grandparents will understand if I say that my granddaughter is the most adorable, wonderful girl in the world!

I spent as much time as I could with her, trying to get to know and understand her. It was amazing to see how much Giovanna looked and acted like her mother had at the same age, but at the same time she very definitely had her own unique personality and ways.

I put great emphasis on my children's education and started early, and my daughter and son-in-law have enthusiastically started doing the same with Giovanna. At 20 months Giovanna can already read a few words, counts to 20, knows the basic colors, is starting to learn geometric shapes, and has memorized a number of simplified Bible verses. She is very bright, but still exudes the innocence of a toddler.

One day she was running around, playing, and being a little rowdy. In a flash she went from doing her famous “A-frame” exercise on the bed (head and feet firmly planted on the mattress, bottom up, arms crossing the A) to landing on the floor with a thud. She looked surprised, but thankfully wasn't seriously hurt. She sat there for a moment with an expression that was a mix of shock, disbelief, and embarrassment.

After she recovered and stood up, I offered to pray for her because I was sure that such an unexpected fall must have been at least a little painful. As soon as I finished the prayer, Giovanna opened her big brown eyes, and there it was—that unmistakable sparkle of playfulness. She unfolded her hands and was ready to get back to the important affairs of her young life: more jumping and playing.

A few days later her father needed to travel to another city and be gone for a couple of days, and she missed him. He has made a habit

Stay simple

ASSUREDLY, I SAY TO YOU, UNLESS YOU ARE CONVERTED AND
BECOME AS LITTLE CHILDREN, YOU WILL BY NO MEANS ENTER
THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

Matthew 18:3

of spending one-on-one time with her at the same time each day, whenever possible, and that was when she missed him most while he was away. One day my daughter told Giovanna that instead of being upset, she should pray for her daddy, and they prayed together. Immediately her expression changed from one of worry and loss to one of peace and trust; she was her happy, playful self again.

Her simple faith made me reevaluate my own. It's one thing to pray and trust that God will answer (that's why we pray in the first place, because we expect some kind of answer), but it's often something else to pray and immediately stop worrying about the situation because we truly believe the answer is already on the way. Giovanna really believed, so she could happily get on with life.

So why worry? We can apply the Giovanna solution to our own problems and disappointments. We simply need to commit those situations to Him in prayer, trust that He will work them out, and then not worry about how or when the answer will come.

Victoria Olivetta ■

I spoke great truths, profound words that changed lives and continue to do so. But I also spoke to the children. I was simple, I was clear, and I didn't lose My appreciation of little things. I stopped to enjoy the flowers. I cooked for My disciples.

It's when you can't find joy in the everyday things of life that you become complicated and lose the human touch. You exchange depth of character for a labyrinth of complex thinking, a heart that is sensitive to the things of the spirit for mere head knowledge.

Simplicity is a gift. Everyone starts out with it, but as some people grow up they discount this gift because they associate it with ignorance, naiveté, immaturity, and a lack of sophistication. They prefer to weave a web of complexity to cover it. The gift of simplicity remains for those who have the humility and wisdom to value it and claim it as their own.

There is much to discover throughout life and even more in heaven, but you will always find that the most profound truths, the greatest beauty, and the most outstanding wisdom are all expressed simply.

A message from Jesus received in prayer ■

CHAPTER 2

The Determination of Jochabed

BY FAITH MOSES, WHEN HE WAS BORN, WAS HIDDEN THREE
MONTHS BY HIS PARENTS, BECAUSE THEY SAW HE WAS A
BEAUTIFUL CHILD; AND THEY WERE NOT AFRAID
OF THE KING'S COMMAND.

Hebrews 11:23



Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, “Every son who is born you shall cast into the river, and every daughter you shall save alive.”

And a man of the house of Levi went and took as wife [Jochabed], a daughter of Levi. So the woman conceived and bore a son. And when she saw that he was a beautiful child, she hid him three months.

But when she could no longer hide him, she took an ark of bulrushes for him, daubed it with asphalt and pitch, put the child in it, and laid it in the reeds by the river’s bank. And his sister stood afar off, to know what would be done to him.

Then the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river. And her maidens walked along the riverside; and when she saw the ark among the reeds, she sent her maid to get it. And when she had opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby wept. So she had compassion on him.

And the child grew, and he became her son. So she called his name Moses, saying, “Because I drew him out of the water.”

Exodus 1:22; 2:1–6,10 ■

Make it magical

OUT OF THE MOUTH OF BABES AND NURSING INFANTS

YOU HAVE PERFECTED PRAISE.

Matthew 21:16

They say it’s the little things in life that often bring the greatest joy. This is true of the hour I spend first thing each morning with three toddlers so their mothers, all fellow volunteers with whom I live and work, can get on top of their day. I must admit, though, that this hasn’t always been the case.

It was a great plan in theory, but with all three still in diapers, one or the other of them usually had a smelly “surprise” for me upon arrival, while another would be a bucket of tears, crying over the fact that her mother was leaving her with me for a while. “Believe me,” I often found myself muttering, “I wish this wasn’t happening more than you do!”



In those early days of this venture, I would greet them with a cup of coffee in hand, and as soon as I could I would plop myself down in my beanbag chair and prepare to wait out the next hour. Of course that state of affairs usually came to an abrupt end when a toddler fight would break out with screams that could be heard within a five-mile radius.

After a few days of this, one morning one of them picked up a book from the floor, walked over, and sat herself down in my lap. “Book?” she said, looking at me with her big round eyes.

“Okay, why not?” As I began reading, the other two waddled over and sat down beside us.

As I read to them, I was surprised at how much they already knew. Each would point to something familiar on the page and identify it using their baby language, or try to imitate the sound of one of the animals.

We read book after book, and I discovered anew that toddlers are like sponges, absorbing everything. They were learning just by me reading to them, and I found myself enjoying it as well. Now that hour with them is one of my favorite times of the day. Whatever it is we’re doing, without fail one of them will shout out “Den!” (“Again,” in their baby language) each time the activity ends, and they all break out in fits of laughter when I start it up again.

Being able to help them learn and discover new things and hearing them laugh in delight is far more rewarding than anything I expected in the beginning. There are still some smelly surprises and the occasional toddler tantrum, but I’ve learned that my times with them are what I make them, and they can be magical!

Stephanie Paone ■



Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD,
The fruit of the womb is a reward.
Like arrows in the hand of a warrior,
So are the children of one's youth.
Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them.

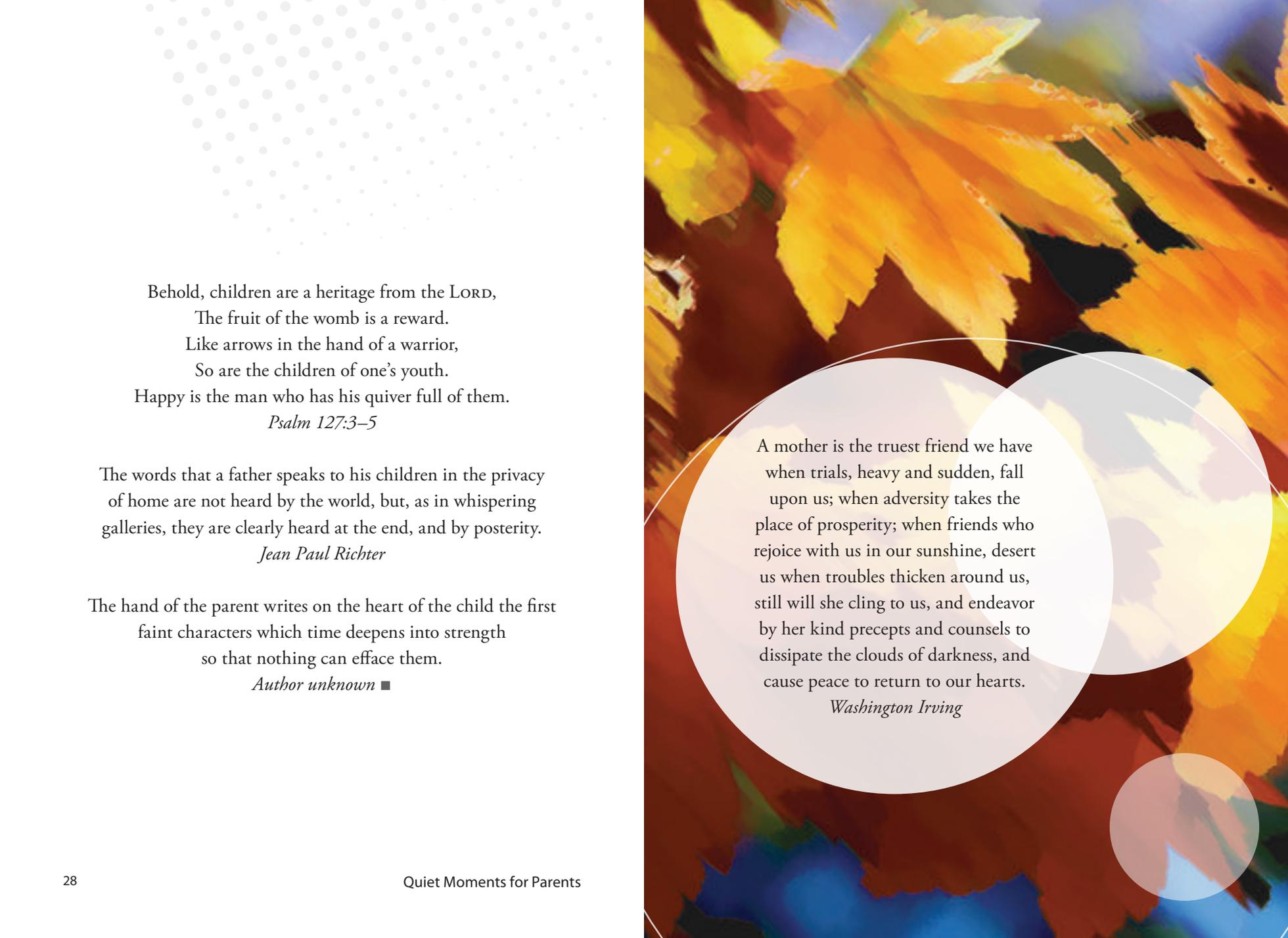
Psalm 127:3–5

The words that a father speaks to his children in the privacy of home are not heard by the world, but, as in whispering galleries, they are clearly heard at the end, and by posterity.

Jean Paul Richter

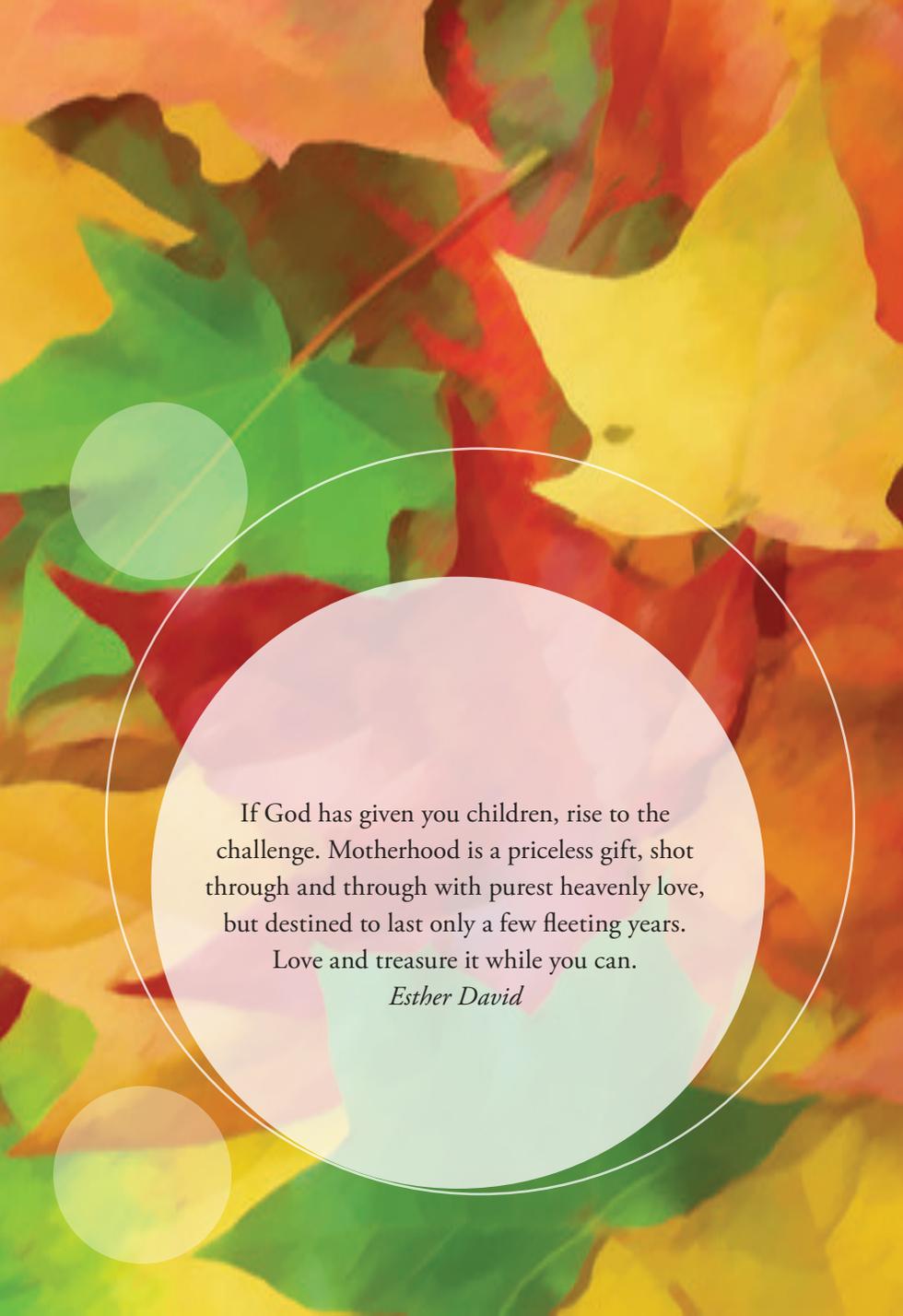
The hand of the parent writes on the heart of the child the first faint characters which time deepens into strength so that nothing can efface them.

Author unknown ■



A mother is the truest friend we have when trials, heavy and sudden, fall upon us; when adversity takes the place of prosperity; when friends who rejoice with us in our sunshine, desert us when troubles thicken around us, still will she cling to us, and endeavor by her kind precepts and counsels to dissipate the clouds of darkness, and cause peace to return to our hearts.

Washington Irving



If God has given you children, rise to the challenge. Motherhood is a priceless gift, shot through and through with purest heavenly love, but destined to last only a few fleeting years.

Love and treasure it while you can.

Esther David

IT IS GOD WHO WORKS IN YOU BOTH TO WILL
AND TO DO FOR HIS GOOD PLEASURE.

Philippians 2:13

Because children are often a reflection of their parents, it's very easy to get discouraged and feel that you have failed when one or more of your children isn't doing well in some area. But remember they're also God's children, and they are a work in progress, just like you are.

All He expects is that you try your best, give them your love, and leave the rest up to Him. Now that doesn't mean you should just throw up your hands in despair, let "God take care of it," and quit when the going gets rough. He probably intends for you to be part of His solution. You need to find out from Him what He wants you to do, and do it; then put the rest in His hands and let Him do what you can't do.

Derek and Michelle Brookes ■

Problem solving with my teen

OH GOD ... NOR DO WE KNOW WHAT TO DO,
BUT OUR EYES ARE UPON YOU.
2 Chronicles 20:12

Now that my oldest, Chris, is 13, I have found that I need to change in how I communicate with him. He is not the child he was a few years back. All of a sudden, he is taller than me. How time has flown! It seems like just yesterday he was a constantly active two-year-old, getting into everything.

Like most parents, I suppose, my tendency has been to think that I instinctively know what's best for my children, and to take action accordingly. That worked well enough when Chris was small, but now that he's reached a stage where he wants to make more of his own decisions, I've found that I need to take a different approach and involve him more in the decision-making process—to treat him less like a child and more like a teammate.

When an issue comes up, it's more important than ever that I take time to listen to his ideas and understand both his viewpoint and his needs, as well as to explain mine. Then we try to come up with a solution together that will be good for both of us, as well as for anyone else involved.

When I fall into my old habit of trying to tell him what to do without considering his side, he feels squelched, pulls away, and misses a learning opportunity—and I lose his full cooperation. But when I remember to consult rather than give orders, things go well, he takes another step toward learning to make wise, responsible, loving decisions, and our bonds of love and mutual respect are strengthened.

Petra Laila ■

Stunted growth

JESUS SAID TO HIM, "IF YOU CAN BELIEVE, ALL THINGS
ARE POSSIBLE TO HIM WHO BELIEVES."

IMMEDIATELY THE FATHER OF THE CHILD CRIED OUT AND SAID
WITH TEARS, "LORD, I BELIEVE; HELP MY UNBELIEF!"

Mark 9:23–24

When I was a kid, I saw plenty of goldfish in the houses of my friends, and I remember wondering why so many people would want to keep such small, unexciting creatures as pets.

Then one day, when I was about ten years old, I went on a school field trip to a botanical garden that had a pond stocked with fish.

One especially large, brilliantly colored fish stood out to me.

"What kind of fish is that one?" I asked our guide.

"That's a goldfish," she replied.

I was confused. "Aren't goldfish supposed to be small?" I asked with a note of 9-year-old sarcasm.

"Not at all," she replied. "Goldfish will grow even larger than these. It really just depends on the size of their environment."

I took in the information and determined to never again show myself so ignorant about goldfish, but it was years before I understood the broader lesson.

How often have I been like a goldfish in a fishbowl? How often have I limited myself by my perception of my world? Worse still, how many times have I put others in a small bowl in my mind? How many times have I written off someone as insignificant or unexciting? How many times have I failed to see others' potential to grow?

How much more could I achieve if I forgot my perceived limitations and dared to swim beyond the boundaries I've set for myself? And what would happen if I moved others from their small bowls into the ocean of limitless possibilities that Jesus offers?

Just imagine a world full of people with that perspective, who truly believe that anything is possible and reach out to claim it. Together we could do astounding things. Together we could work miracles.

Peter Story ■

HAVING FOOD AND CLOTHING,
WITH THESE WE SHALL BE CONTENT.

1 Timothy 6:8

Those words went through my mind as I washed the breakfast dishes. Was that even possible? Could I actually be satisfied having nothing but food and clothes? The apostle Paul wrote, “I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content.”¹ Not me. There have definitely been times when I wished I had some of the extras I saw others enjoying. I haven’t always been satisfied. How could I be satisfied with only food and clothes? I asked myself as I finished the dishes.

As if in answer to my question, my attention was drawn to my seven-month-old niece, Kylie, as she played quietly and happily gummed a slice of apple. Now she definitely looked content—the perfect picture of peace and tranquility. But what in the world did she have? A diaper and a slice of apple, yet she was perfectly happy.

I had my answer. Kylie wasn’t worried about whether or not she would have food tomorrow or if she would run out of diapers. She had her food, she had her clothes, and she was perfectly content, trusting her mother to take care of her and give her exactly what she needed, when she needed it.

I should be the same way, I realized—happy and satisfied with what God gives me, and trusting God that He will take care of me and give me the things that I truly need. And now I am. I have not only food and clothing and other material comforts, but I have things that many millions of people in the world don’t have. I have Jesus and His gift of salvation. I have my family, my health, friends. I have little Kylie who loves me no matter what. I really do have all that I need. I am truly content!

Andrew Mateyak ■

¹ Philippians 4:11

Parenting by example

BE AN EXAMPLE ... IN WORD, IN CONDUCT, IN LOVE,
IN SPIRIT, IN FAITH, IN PURITY.

1 Timothy 4:12

Parenting has never been easy, but all parents have one great thing going for them from day one: Their children love and look up to them more than anyone else in the world. This is an important part of the grand scheme of things, because while your children are a gift from heaven, they are a work in progress. It's your job to help them grow into loving, responsible adults.

The love and respect your children feel for you are inborn, but love and respect aren't static. They increase or diminish day by day according to how you interact with your child. So don't betray your children's trust. Set the kind of example they will be proud to follow.

If you want your children to be outgoing and genuinely concerned about others, be that way yourself. If you want them to be unselfish, be unselfish. If you want them to be honest, be honest.

If you want them to be optimistic and solution oriented, let them see you approach life's challenges and disappointments positively. If you want them to love, respect, and have a genuine connection with Me, keep your own connection strong through spending time with Me and reading My Word and putting what it says into practice. If you want them to have thankful hearts, thank and praise Me for My goodness at every turn

If you set the right example for your children during their formative years, those bonds of love and respect will be unbreakable, no matter what may befall you or them. They will also be equipped to grow into adults that both you and I can be proud of. Then when you come home to Me, you'll hear Me say, "Well done, good and faithful parent!"¹

A message from Jesus received in prayer ■

¹ Matthew 25:21, paraphrased

Package prayer

A SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

CAST YOUR BURDEN ON THE LORD,
AND HE SHALL SUSTAIN YOU.

Psalm 55:22

Soft background music may help set the tone. Begin this exercise by closing your eyes, and breathe deeply and slowly for a minute. Now mentally articulate one by one the concerns and worries on your mind today, such as things you need to take care of, or situations at work or with your children, or health issues.

As you bring up in your mind each thing that you're concerned about, imagine yourself packaging it up and placing it in Jesus' hands. As you do, thank Jesus for how He's going to deal with that problem in the way He knows is best.

Take as much time as you need to unload all of your cares in this specific, methodical way.

Discipline your mind to focus on each problem only as long as it takes to call it up in your mind and picture yourself handing it over to Jesus. Once it's in His hands, don't dwell on it any longer or let your thoughts wander to the details, but move on to the next problem.

When you have finished going through your list, thank and praise Him for His unfailing love, His unlimited power, His concern for you, and His help in working out your problems.

Abi May ■

Life is in the seed

A SOWER WENT OUT TO SOW HIS SEED.

Luke 8:5

Planting seeds and watching them grow can be a wonderful, gratifying experience. A seed is the beginning of something much bigger. The seed of the globe turnip, for example, is less than 1 mm (one-twentieth of an inch) in diameter, but within a few months it can grow into a mature turnip that weighs 27 million times its original weight. If conditions are right, it will increase its own weight by 1500% in one minute.

You might think that it would take a large seed to produce a large plant. Not so. The giant redwood tree, the largest tree in the world, grows from a seed only 1.6 mm (1/16 of an inch) long. Nor is a large seed required for beauty. One of the most stunning flowers, the orchid, comes from one of the tiniest seeds and grows solely on

moisture and nutrients it draws from the air, no soil required. A million orchid seeds weigh 29 grams (about 1 ounce).

It takes the proper conditions for seeds to germinate and the plant to grow and mature, but if conditions aren't right, some seeds are able to wait it out. Beneath thick ice, in a frozen lemming burrow, scientists found seeds of the arctic tundra lupine which they calculated to be 5,000 years old. The seeds germinated in 48 hours when put in warm, fertile soil.

So if you feel inconsequential, too small, too young, or too old, take heart! Perhaps there is latent greatness in you, just waiting to be brought to life by the power of God. Let the warm sunshine of His love and the water of His Word work their miracle.

Curtis Peter van Gorder ■

Squirrel power

CASTING ALL YOUR CARE UPON HIM, FOR HE CARES FOR YOU.

1 Peter 5:7

“Miserable!” That was the only way to describe how I was feeling that day. My husband had had to travel—again!—and there I was alone with our four children. Finances were low, my health was bad, and my teenage daughter was going through a crisis. I prayed—oh, how I prayed!—that Jesus would make things a little easier to bear.

Looking out my window at a grove of trees swaying in the gentle breeze, I noticed a little squirrel, squeaking away as he climbed up and down the trees, seemingly without a care in the world. I envied the little fellow.

My squirrel chose that moment to change tactics. Instead of running up and down the trees, he started hopping from one tree to the next. He jumped over to the last tree in the cluster, and then looked at one more tree that stood apart from the others. He seemed to be deliberating.

I mentally measured the distance between the squirrel and that tree, and it seemed two or three times as far as he had been jumping. Here was a massive challenge.

“You can’t be serious, little fellow!” I muttered.

But he wasn’t looking for my advice. He ran the length of the branch a few times, squealing frantically. Then he stopped and eyed the distance once more, crouched, and leaped. I wanted to turn my eyes away. Surely this was going to end badly!

But no! He flew across that immense span and landed in the other tree with the grace and glory that come from knowing one is meant to perform such feats. He chattered in victory and scampered farther up the tree, as if to his reward.

I knew then what had been missing. I had been so busy looking at my problems—measuring the distance between the trees—that I was afraid to let go and sail to the other side. I had lost my faith in my maker, my Savior, my best friend.

As I watched the squirrel, now merrily chattering away in the treetop, I knew that Jesus had answered my prayer—not through a spectacular miracle, but rather the example of a happy little squirrel. The same God who took care of him was going to take care of me.

Jo Dias ■

THEY SHALL STILL BEAR FRUIT IN OLD AGE;
THEY SHALL BE FRESH AND FLOURISHING.

Psalm 92:14

Nobody grows old by merely living a number of years. People grow old only by deserting their ideals. Years may wrinkle the skin, but to give up interest wrinkles the soul. Worry, doubt, self-distrust, fear, and despair ... these are the long, long years that bow the head and turn the growing spirit back to dust.

Whatever your years, there is in every being's heart the love of wonder, the undaunted challenge of events, the unfailing, childlike appetite for "what next," and the joy and the game of life.

You are as young as your faith, as old as your doubt; as young as your self-confidence, as old as your fear; as young as your hope, as old as your despair.

Samuel Ullman ■

Every house where love abides
and friendship is a guest, is surely
home, and home, sweet home; for
there the heart can rest.

Henry van Dyke



To bring up a child in the
way he should go, travel
that way yourself.
Josh Billings

Keys to a happy home

Teach your children God's Word

Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.

Luke 8:11

These words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.

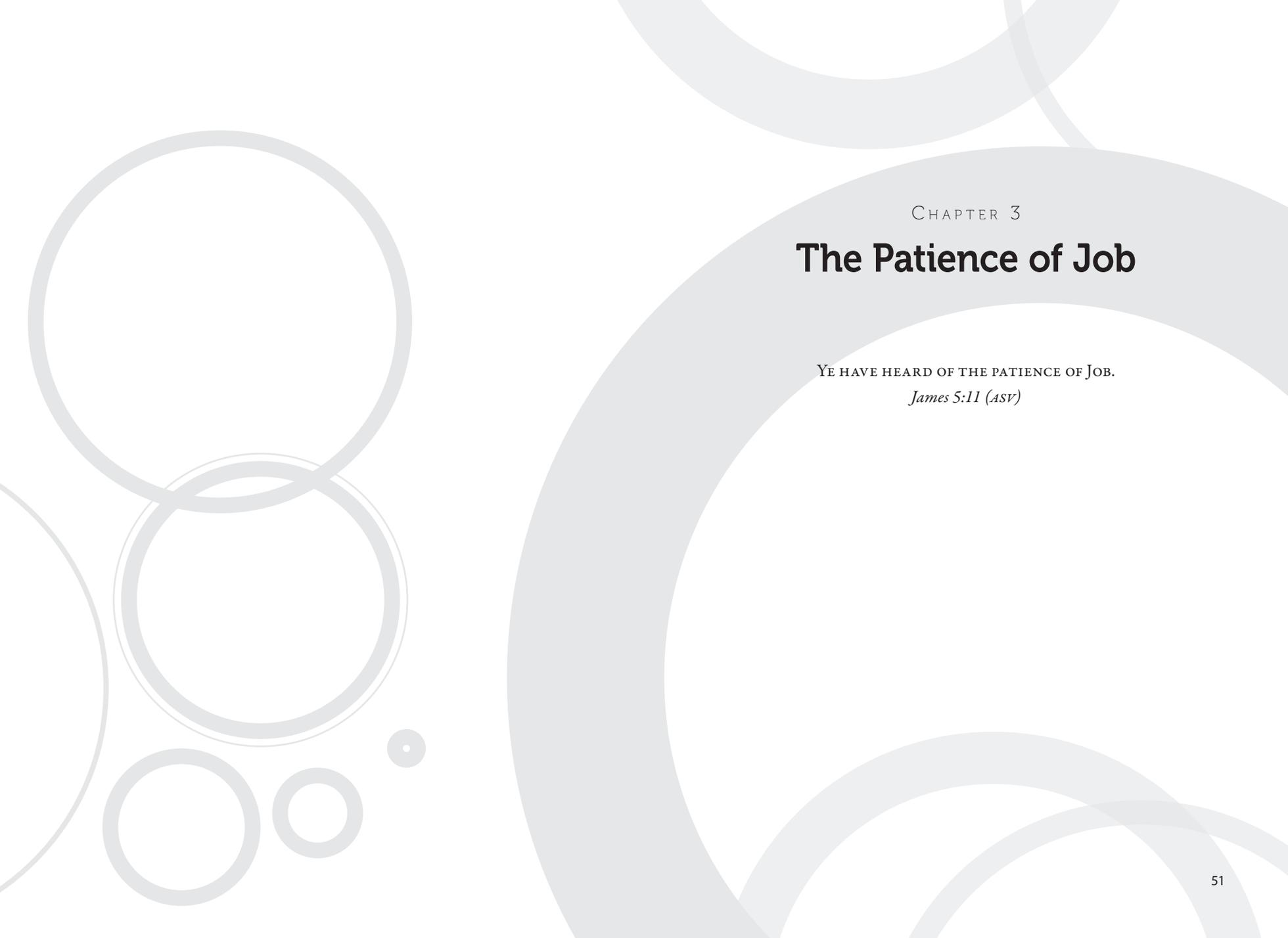
Deuteronomy 6:6-7

The things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

2 Timothy 2:2

Tell your children about it,
Let your children tell their children
And their children another generation.

Joel 1:3 ■



CHAPTER 3

The Patience of Job

YE HAVE HEARD OF THE PATIENCE OF JOB.

James 5:11 (ASV)



Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

Revelation 14:12

By your patience possess your souls.

Luke 21:19

Let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

James 1:4

Walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy.

Colossians 1:10–11 ■

What to do when you feel frazzled

THOUGH I WALK IN THE MIDST OF TROUBLE,
YOU WILL REVIVE ME.

Psalm 138:7

There are going to be times in the day-to-day routine of parenting when you feel overwhelmed by situations and circumstances. You've had an especially trying day at work, your eight-year-old won't do her homework, your teenager's stereo is shaking the house, your toddler didn't make it to the potty in time—and your dinner guests will be here any minute! You feel pushed to the brink.

Every parent faces days like this. You're not alone. And you're not alone in a greater sense: Jesus is right there with you. He understands, and He waits with encouragement and solutions. If you have the opportunity, talking with someone else—maybe your

spouse or a friend—can help you see things differently, calm your spirit, and give you a chance to pray together for the Lord’s help. You can even ask your children to pray with you. Their faith and simple prayers can be a wonderful encouragement.

Whatever you do, don’t give in to feelings of frustration and discouragement. Shoot up a prayer and ask Jesus to give you power for the hour and grace for the space, and He will. Ask Him to help you see your children as He sees them, to see what they are going to become. He will help you view the situation optimistically and with hope. The outlook may be bleak, but the “uplook” (looking up to Jesus) is always bright.

Derek and Michelle Brookes ■

What a parent’s love can do

The greatest gifts my mother ever gave me were the gifts of courage and faith. ... As a volunteer in Central America, I face many problems of my own every day. Some are bigger than others, of course, but every time I run into a situation that seems utterly impossible, I remember those moments from my childhood where my mother’s faith and courage shone brightest, and that puts things into perspective. A verse in the Bible says, “With God nothing will be impossible,”¹ and that sums up the most vivid lesson from my childhood—thanks to my mother, who taught through her example.

Dan Johnston

My mother was the making of me. She was so true and so sure of me, I felt that I had someone to live for—someone I must not disappoint. The memory of my mother will always be a blessing to me.

Thomas A. Edison ■

¹ Luke 1:37

The day the bouncer broke

PRAY WITHOUT CEASING.

1 Thessalonians 5:17

I was thrilled to be a new mother again. Allen was one of those happy, mellow little guys. I would put him in his bouncer, and he would be happy to sit there, awake or asleep, while I rocked the bouncer with one foot and sat in my chair and worked. I had a desk job and worked part-time at home, so I was happy for the opportunity to continue my work, even with such a young baby in tow. I took pride in being able to multitask so well, and others commended me. Even when Allen grew older and chubbier and was awake for longer spells, he still loved to be in his bouncer.

Then one day it seemed to rest closer to the ground. I thought Allen's older sister, Jessica, who was a toddler at the time, might have sat in it and bent it. I tried to return the heavy wire frame to its original shape, but it would not comply. Poor Allen's bottom would hit the floor if I tried to rock him.

I asked my husband to look at it, and his conclusion was that it would need to be re-welded. "Don't bother," I replied. It would be easier to get a new one.

Then came Allen's nap time. I was used to bouncing him to sleep as I continued my work, but now I had to rock him in my arms until he fell asleep. I first tried rocking him while I walked back and forth across the room, and then while I sat in a rocking chair. When he

finally went to sleep, I didn't want to put him in his crib for fear that he would wake up. So there I sat, feeling useless. I thought about everything I needed to get done, and got even more frustrated.

Then a different thought came to mind. Pray. I remembered reading a book once titled *Don't Just Stand There, Pray Something*.¹ So I did. I prayed for my baby, for my husband's work, for my daughter, for my various responsibilities, for friends and family members. By the time the baby woke up, I felt surprisingly refreshed and upbeat. I actually felt as though I had accomplished more than if I had been sitting at my computer typing away. And I probably had.

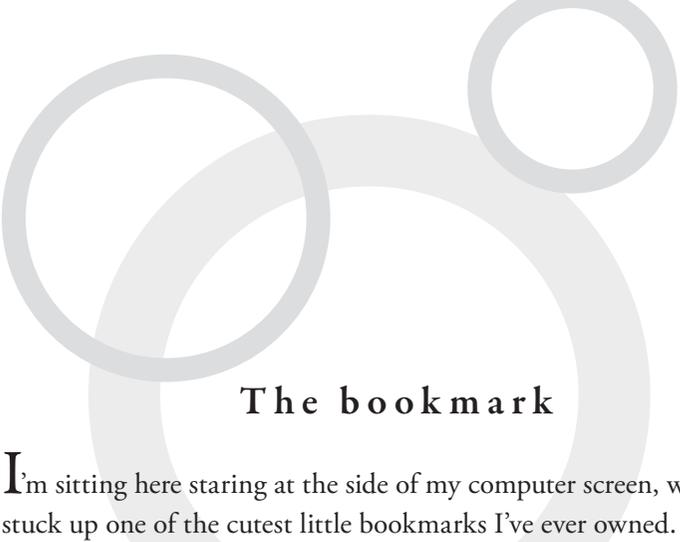
Jesus said that we "always ought to pray."² Okay, so I'm not even close to that level of prayerfulness, but maybe if I spend my son's naptimes upholding others in prayer, I might come closer to that ideal. And so I discovered once again that "all things work together for good to those who love God."³ Through this interruption in my accomplishment-driven routine, He was able to get through to me about something of much more lasting value: the power of prayer.

Bonita Hele ■

¹ Ronald Dunn, *Don't Just Stand There, Pray Something* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001)

² Luke 18:1

³ Romans 8:28



The bookmark

I'm sitting here staring at the side of my computer screen, where I've stuck up one of the cutest little bookmarks I've ever owned. It has a picture of a mother hugging a little child, and a quote from Charles Dickens at the bottom: "It is not a slight thing when they, who are so fresh from God, love us." When I read that quote, it thrilled me through and through. I resolved to use that bookmark for my next reading project. Unfortunately, I failed to immediately tuck the dear little bookmark safely away, and so it lay, halfway to greatness, on my desk—at just at the right height for a very cute short person (my three-year-old daughter) to spot it and pick it up.

This bookmark is one of those with three sides of a little square cut out near the top, so it can be hooked over the top of a page and stay in place. By the time I noticed that Kimberly had found it, she had pulled on and accidentally broken the top part off.

I knew this was an innocent act, of course. She hadn't meant to break it; she was just trying to figure the thing out. But because I had had such a special bonding experience with that bookmark, I was a bit distressed. I snatched the pieces from her, and put them aside.

Later, after Kimberly was in bed, I picked up the two pieces of the bookmark and read the quote again. Suddenly the whole experience struck me in an entirely new light. Did this bookmark have to be perfect to be special? I could tape it back together and it would be as good as new—maybe even better than new because it would have something that it hadn't had before: evidence of having been touched by those little hands that I love so dearly. Now that bookmark is twice as special to me, Scotch tape and all.

Jasmine St. Clair ■

Avoid misunderstandings

LET EVERY MAN BE SWIFT TO HEAR,
SLOW TO SPEAK, SLOW TO WRATH.

James 1:19

Sometimes it seems that children choose the worst possible times to misbehave, and sometimes it is not so much actual misbehavior as it is annoying behavior. When parents are under pressure, are preoccupied with other work or other thoughts, aren't feeling well, or are simply not in a good mood, that's bound to affect the way they interact with their children. Some things that are normally allowed or overlooked—a certain level of noise or rambunctiousness, for example—push the parent over the edge, resulting in harsh words, more severe punishment than the offense actually warrants, or “the look” that sends the message “You're in trouble” but leaves the child confused.

Children usually don't see the big picture, so when a parent's frustrations boil over like that, they often assume more of the blame

than they actually deserve, which can lead to even more damaging conclusions—“Mommy wishes I wasn't here,” “Daddy doesn't love me,” “I'm no good.”

Avoid such confidence-shattering misunderstandings by catching yourself short of the boiling point and putting the questionable behavior in context. “I would love to hear you sing that song again, but right now I need to concentrate on driving.” “I have a headache, so I'm going to have to ask you to not do that right now.” And if you don't catch yourself in time, an after-the-fact explanation and apology will set the record straight. By giving the child an opportunity to be part of the solution to your problem, you will have turned a potentially damaging situation into a positive one.

Alex Peterson ■

Keys to a happy home

Pray for God's guidance and help in raising your children

Oh, send out Your light and Your truth!
Let them lead me.

Psalm 43:3

Lead me in Your truth and teach me,
For You are the God of my salvation;
On You I wait all the day.

Psalm 25:5

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God,
who gives to all liberally and without reproach,
and it will be given to him.

James 1:5

Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding;
In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct your paths.

Proverbs 3:5–6 ■

WE TOOK SWEET COUNSEL TOGETHER.

Psalm 55:14

Your children will never forget the special times they spend with you. Aren't those some of the memories you treasure most from your own childhood—when your parents showed their love in the form of time and attention?

Children thrive on personal attention, and if they don't get it, just like the rest of us, they feel bad, unimportant, or even rejected. You don't always have to spend a great deal of time with children to make them know you love and appreciate them, but you do have to spend some—and the quality of that time is just as important as the quantity.

Time spent with your children is not only the greatest gift you can give them, it's also the greatest investment you can make in them. Nothing else will make a more lasting difference in their lives. As someone once wisely said, "Your children need your presence more than your presents." Play with your children, read with them, hold them, encourage them, enjoy them. Go for walks or just sit around together and talk. Ask questions and listen to their answers—really listen.

Derek and Michelle Brookes ■

Quietness of spirit

WAIT ON THE LORD;
BE OF GOOD COURAGE,
AND HE SHALL STRENGTHEN YOUR HEART;
WAIT, I SAY, ON THE LORD!

Psalm 27:14

As you wait on Me in prayer, I am able to fill you with My strength. What does it mean to wait on Me? It means to give your thoughts and will to Me and to accept Mine. Often I do not reveal My will—what I know will prove best in the long run—all at once. That is often a step-by-step process. As that process takes place, you are filled with My strength and My grace for each step. As long as you're yielding and accepting, you'll receive all the grace and strength and peace of mind you need; you'll never lack. This is the simple principle of operating in My strength. To do it right, you must acknowledge Me and listen for My instructions.

It's a three-step process. First, you humbly give Me your will; second, you ask Me to show you My will in the matter; and third, you take action by asking Me for strength, yielding to My will, and doing it. As you do these things, My Spirit flows into you, supporting you and giving you exactly what you need in that situation. It is a beautiful state—the state of perfect peace with Me.

A message from Jesus received in prayer ■

A successful young attorney said, “The greatest gift I’ve ever received came in a very small package that was light as a feather. My dad gave it to me one Christmas.

Inside the box was a note that read as follows: ‘Son, this year I will give you 365 hours. An hour every day after dinner is yours. We’ll talk about what you want to talk about, we’ll go where you want to go, play what you want to play. It will be your hour!’ My dad not only kept that promise, but every year he renewed it. That was the greatest gift anyone ever gave me.

I am the result of his time.”

Moody Monthly

When parents aren't perfect

HE SAID UNTO ME, "MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR THEE: FOR MY STRENGTH IS MADE PERFECT IN WEAKNESS." MOST GLADLY THEREFORE WILL I RATHER GLORY IN MY INFIRMITIES, THAT THE POWER OF CHRIST MAY REST UPON ME. . . .

FOR WHEN I AM WEAK, THEN AM I STRONG.

2 Corinthians 12:9–10

Parents know from the start that they don't know all the answers and aren't perfect, but babies and small children are so innocent and trusting that they don't even notice. That begins a few years later and peaks in the teen years. The solution is not in striving to reach the unattainable standard of "perfect parent," but rather in learning to use your imperfections and inabilities as steppingstones. Here are three advantages of that approach:

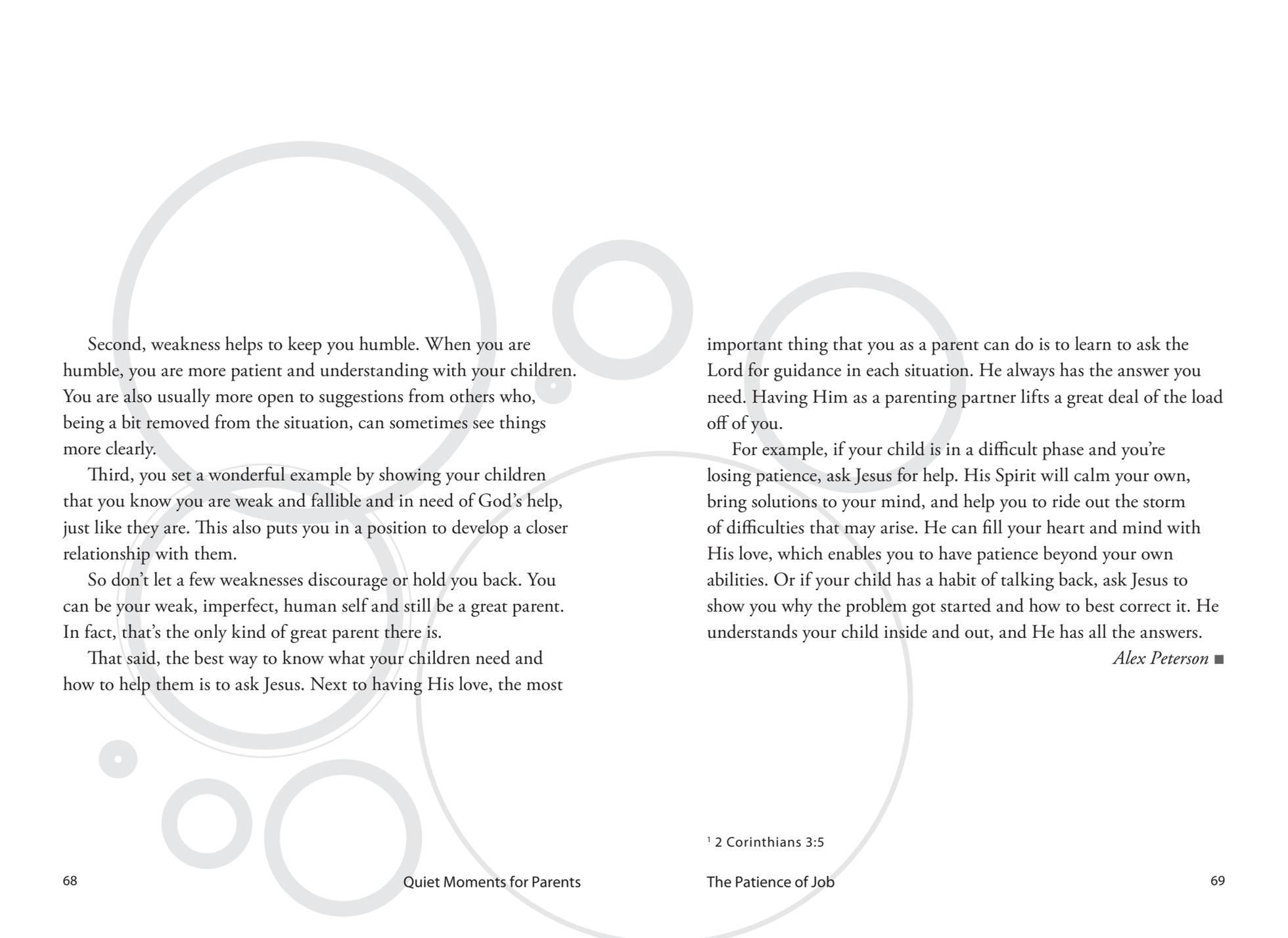
First, when you know you are weak and insufficient in yourself, you are quicker to seek and accept God's help. "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God."¹ Dependence on God will equip you with strength and wisdom that you could never attain on your own.

Children learn to smile
from their parents.

Shinichi Suzuki

All the wealth in the world cannot be
compared with the happiness of living
together happily united.

Margaret of Youville



Second, weakness helps to keep you humble. When you are humble, you are more patient and understanding with your children. You are also usually more open to suggestions from others who, being a bit removed from the situation, can sometimes see things more clearly.

Third, you set a wonderful example by showing your children that you know you are weak and fallible and in need of God's help, just like they are. This also puts you in a position to develop a closer relationship with them.

So don't let a few weaknesses discourage or hold you back. You can be your weak, imperfect, human self and still be a great parent. In fact, that's the only kind of great parent there is.

That said, the best way to know what your children need and how to help them is to ask Jesus. Next to having His love, the most

important thing that you as a parent can do is to learn to ask the Lord for guidance in each situation. He always has the answer you need. Having Him as a parenting partner lifts a great deal of the load off of you.

For example, if your child is in a difficult phase and you're losing patience, ask Jesus for help. His Spirit will calm your own, bring solutions to your mind, and help you to ride out the storm of difficulties that may arise. He can fill your heart and mind with His love, which enables you to have patience beyond your own abilities. Or if your child has a habit of talking back, ask Jesus to show you why the problem got started and how to best correct it. He understands your child inside and out, and He has all the answers.

Alex Peterson ■

When I lose my temper

When I have lost my temper
I have lost my reason too.
I'm never proud of anything
Which angrily I do.
When I have talked in anger
And my cheeks were flaming red
I have always uttered something
Which I wish I had not said.
In anger I have never
Done a kindly deed or wise,
But many things for which I felt
I should apologize.
In looking back across my life,
And all I've lost or made,
I can't recall a single time
When fury ever paid.
So I struggle to be patient,
For I've reached a wiser age;
I do not want to do a thing
Or speak a word in rage.
I have learned by sad experience
That when my temper flies
I never do a worthy deed,
A decent deed or wise.
Author unknown

An angry man stirs up strife.
Proverbs 29:22 ■

Finding rest of spirit

A SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

REST IN THE LORD AND WAIT PATIENTLY FOR HIM.

Psalm 37:7

Any weight, no matter how light it may seem at first, will wear you down if you carry it long enough. This is true physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. That's why it's so important to learn to take a few minutes on a regular basis to rest and renew your spirit. Even Jesus needed that. When the demands of His ministry to the multitudes became too much, He would escape to a private place and commune with His Father in prayer.¹ He instructs us to do the same, and He promises unparalleled results. "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden ... and you will find rest for your souls."²

This exercise can help you rest in spirit.

Lie down where you will be comfortable and free of distractions. Soft lighting and music may help create a relaxing atmosphere.

Thank Jesus for slowing you down, quieting your mind, lifting your worries and concerns, and giving you heavenly peace and a sense of general well-being—for renewing you in body, mind, and spirit.

The Faith of Hannah

Lie still and concentrate on relaxing your toes. When your toes are very relaxed, think about relaxing the rest of your feet, then your ankles, then your calves, knees, and so on. Then do the same with your arms, beginning at your fingertips. Then do the same with your face, neck, and torso. Think about each body part until it feels completely relaxed.

When you've finished relaxing your entire body, imagine Jesus putting the rest of the universe on hold while He gives you His undivided attention. Imagine Him taking the weights you've been carrying, slinging them over one of His broad shoulders, and then lifting and carrying you. Enjoy that weightless, carefree, stress-free feeling. End your time by thanking the Lord for that time of heavenly rest, and ask Him to help you carry that spirit of peace and calm with you when you return to your work.

Abi May ■

ASK, AND IT WILL BE GIVEN TO YOU; SEEK, AND YOU WILL FIND;
KNOCK, AND IT WILL BE OPENED TO YOU. FOR EVERYONE WHO
ASKS RECEIVES, AND HE WHO SEEKS FINDS, AND TO HIM
WHO KNOCKS IT WILL BE OPENED.

Matthew 7:7–8

¹ Matthew 14:23; Mark 1:35, 6:46; Luke 6:12

² Matthew 11:28–29

Hannah had no children. Year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD, she wept and did not eat.

Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat by the doorpost of the tabernacle of the LORD. And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the LORD and wept in anguish.

She made a vow and said, “O LORD of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life.”

Now Hannah spoke in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard. Therefore Eli thought she was drunk. So Eli said to her, “How long will you be drunk? Put your wine away from you!” And Hannah answered and said, “No, my lord, I am a woman of sorrowful spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor intoxicating drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD.”

Then Eli answered and said, “Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition which you have asked of Him.”

So the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad.

And Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her.

So it came to pass in the process of time that Hannah conceived and bore a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, “Because I have asked for him from the LORD.”

Taken from 1 Samuel 1:2–28 ■

Getting answers to prayer

When you pray for someone or some situation, the first requirement is faith:

“Whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.”¹

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”²

There are also a few other basic principles to prayer.

It may seem to go without saying that you need to ask, but you’d be surprised how many people get stuck in “worry” or “wish” mode; they continue to “have not because they ask not.”³

Sometimes “when you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives.”⁴ You need to make sure that your aims are right, and you need to trust that God knows what’s best for you and be willing to accept His answer, even when He doesn’t answer your prayer in the way you wanted or expected Him to.

God is all-powerful, and He truly does want to give us the very best. If you can grasp and believe those two points, you will find great cause to thank and praise Him even before He answers, and that praise will push your prayers to a whole new level.

It's not just a matter of including words of praise in your prayer, though; it's the attitude in which those prayers are prayed. When you praise and really mean it, that shows you're putting your confidence in God. Prayers prayed with full faith in God's power, when coupled with thankfulness for all He has already done and all He will yet do, are prayers full of praise. They are positive declarations of faith, as opposed to a frantic beseeching. Do you see the difference?

Alex Peterson ■

¹ Mark 11:24

² Hebrews 11:6

³ James 4:2

⁴ James 4:3 (NIV)

Follow Me¹

Your children need Me, like you do. They need to learn to include Me in their daily lives. They need to learn to trust Me when the going is hard. They need to learn to depend on Me. They need to learn to bring their problems to Me. They need to learn to pray for others. They need to learn to listen to My voice, so I can help them make the right choices. Most of all, they need to learn to love Me and accept My love.

Do you want your children to learn all these things? They will as they see them in you. The best way to get your children to go the right way is to lead the way. I want the best for your children and it is Mine to give, but you are the channel through which most of My blessings will flow. How much I am able to work in your children's lives depends largely on how much I am able to work in yours. Love Me with all your heart. Seek to please Me. Ask Me to lead the way. Follow closely, and I will do the rest.

A message from Jesus received in prayer ■

¹ John 1:43

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. If we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

1 John 5:14–15

Prayer is an act of faith; we pray because we believe that God can and will answer. But sometimes God doesn't answer as quickly as we would like or expect Him to, and this tests our faith. When we continue to pray in such cases—not with a doubting, accusatory, “Why haven't You answered?” attitude, but with an “I'm still trusting You to answer in Your good time” attitude—we show God that we haven't lost faith.

Alex Peterson

If we hope for what we do not see,
we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.

Romans 8:25 ■

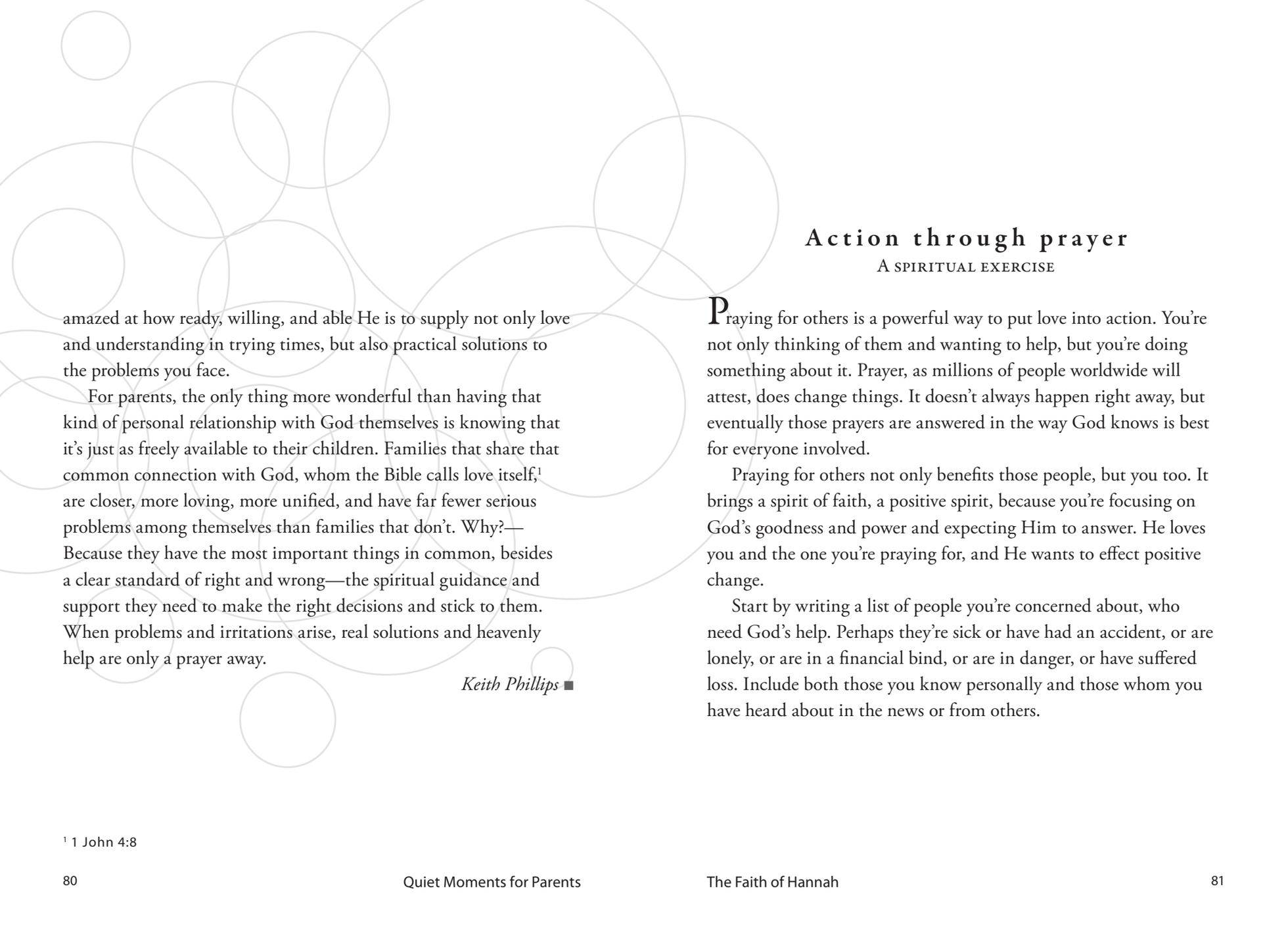
Growing together

FOR THE PROMISE IS TO YOU AND TO YOUR CHILDREN.

Acts 2:39

The greatest discovery that any of us can make in life is that we can have a close personal relationship with our heavenly Father through His Son, Jesus, because that connection puts us in touch with every other good thing we need.

Making that connection is instantaneous, but that is only the start. Like any other meaningful relationship, it develops and matures over time, and it grows the quickest through daily interaction. As you learn to turn to Him in prayer and get to know Him and His plan better through reading His Word, you will come to understand how deeply He loves you personally, how much He wants to see you happy, fulfilled, and living up to your full potential, and how directly He wants to be involved in your life. You will be



amazed at how ready, willing, and able He is to supply not only love and understanding in trying times, but also practical solutions to the problems you face.

For parents, the only thing more wonderful than having that kind of personal relationship with God themselves is knowing that it's just as freely available to their children. Families that share that common connection with God, whom the Bible calls love itself,¹ are closer, more loving, more unified, and have far fewer serious problems among themselves than families that don't. Why?—Because they have the most important things in common, besides a clear standard of right and wrong—the spiritual guidance and support they need to make the right decisions and stick to them. When problems and irritations arise, real solutions and heavenly help are only a prayer away.

Keith Phillips ■

Action through prayer

A SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

Praying for others is a powerful way to put love into action. You're not only thinking of them and wanting to help, but you're doing something about it. Prayer, as millions of people worldwide will attest, does change things. It doesn't always happen right away, but eventually those prayers are answered in the way God knows is best for everyone involved.

Praying for others not only benefits those people, but you too. It brings a spirit of faith, a positive spirit, because you're focusing on God's goodness and power and expecting Him to answer. He loves you and the one you're praying for, and He wants to effect positive change.

Start by writing a list of people you're concerned about, who need God's help. Perhaps they're sick or have had an accident, or are lonely, or are in a financial bind, or are in danger, or have suffered loss. Include both those you know personally and those whom you have heard about in the news or from others.

¹ 1 John 4:8

Say a prayer for each in turn, claiming an appropriate promise of God from the Bible. Work your way down your list for 10 or 15 minutes, spending a minute or so praying for each person.

Add people to your list daily as their needs come to your attention. As your list grows, you probably won't be able to pray for every person in the time you have allotted. Pray for the most serious and urgent situations first, and as many of the others as you have time for. Whenever you reach the bottom of your list, start again at the top.

When God answers one of your prayers, thank Him for doing so, and then drop that entry from your daily prayer list. You may want to keep a separate list of answered prayers and take a moment to review it at the beginning of your prayer time to boost your faith that He will also meet the needs still on your prayer list.

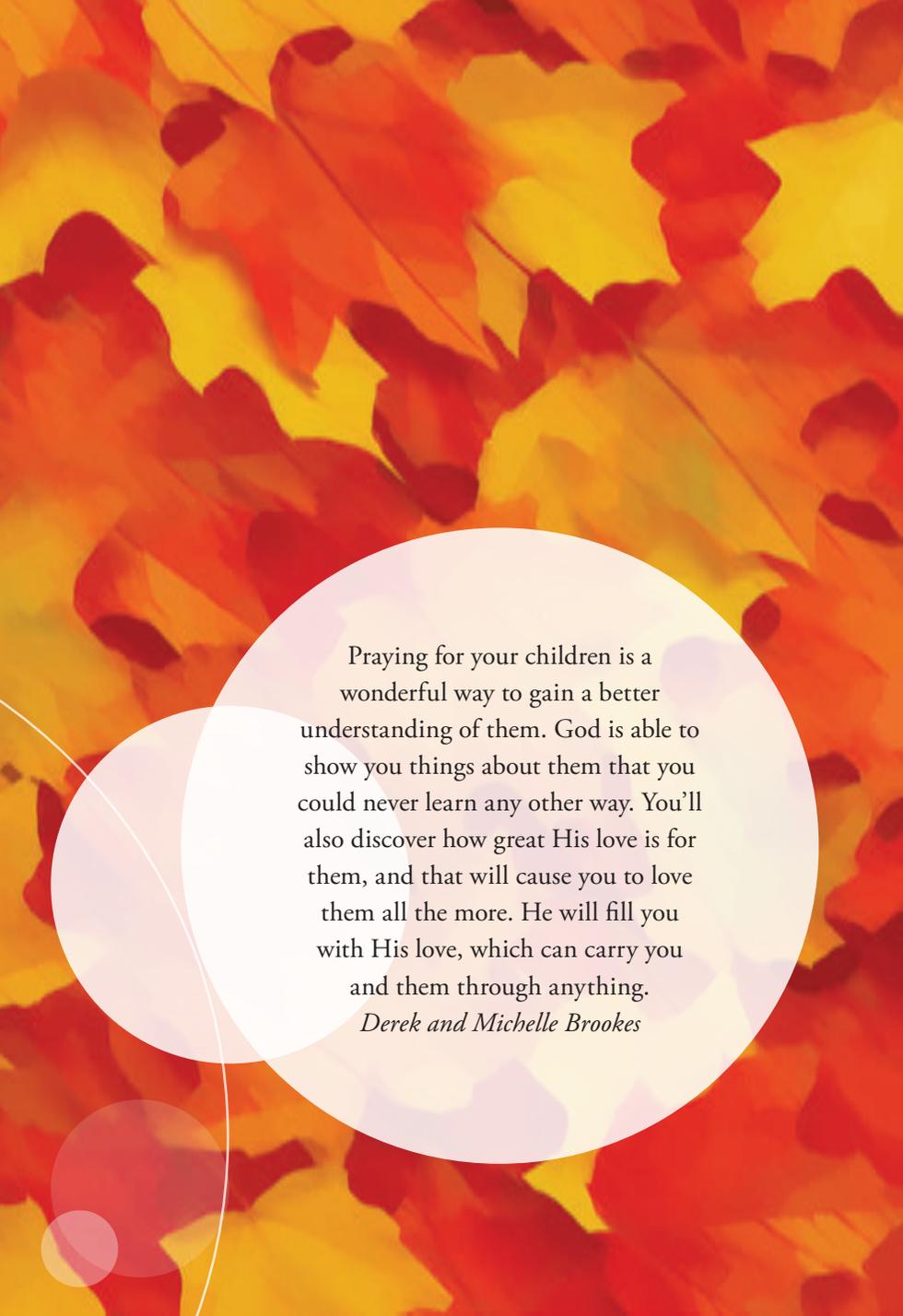
Make praying for others a daily habit, and you will not only help make their lives better, but your faith will grow and your spiritual life will be enriched as you see God work.

Abi May ■

Here is the great secret of success: Work with all your might, but never trust in your work. Pray with all your might for the blessing in God, but work at the same time with all diligence, with all patience, with all perseverance.

Pray and work. Work and pray.

George Mueller



Praying for your children is a wonderful way to gain a better understanding of them. God is able to show you things about them that you could never learn any other way. You'll also discover how great His love is for them, and that will cause you to love them all the more. He will fill you with His love, which can carry you and them through anything.

Derek and Michelle Brookes

Parenting through prayer

WE GIVE THANKS TO THE GOD AND FATHER OF OUR LORD
JESUS CHRIST, PRAYING ALWAYS FOR YOU.

Colossians 1:3

It's not easy raising children in today's world. Many of the godly values that you want to encourage in your children are constantly being attacked by others who are going the opposite direction. You worry that even your best efforts will fail and that your children will turn their backs on the values you hold dear. I know you're tempted sometimes to give up, but don't. Your concern and care are not in vain. There's only so much that you can do, even though you try your best. But I'm capable of doing much more than you ever could, and I am here to help. I also understand your children even better than you do, and I know how to best handle their problems. I want to work with you to shape your children into the godly people you and I both want them to become.

Anxiety and the deep blue sea

ALL THE RIVERS RUN INTO THE SEA,
YET THE SEA IS NOT FULL;
TO THE PLACE FROM WHICH THE RIVERS COME,
THERE THEY RETURN AGAIN.

Ecclesiastes 1:7

Commit your children to Me in prayer. Through prayer you can be the better parent you want to be. Through prayer you can help protect your children from harm and unwholesome influences. Through prayer you can find My solutions to their problems. Through your prayers I can do what you can't do.

Set aside time each day to pray for your children. Each time you're faced with a troublesome issue, ask Me for the answer. Start today to be a better parent through prayer. Changes that you haven't thought possible will come to pass through the power of prayer.

A message from Jesus received in prayer ■

I grew up around creeks, lakes, and rivers, but when I was sixteen I went to Atlantic City, New Jersey, and saw the ocean for the first time. At the boardwalk the night we arrived, I walked out on a wooden pier. As the first thunderous waves crashed beneath my feet, I grabbed the railing, terrified. Since then I have had a cautious fondness for the ocean. I've never been a strong swimmer, but I love the look of the ocean, the feel of sand between my toes, and even the weightless feeling of being lifted from my feet and carried about by gentle waves—as long as I have something buoyant to hang onto.



So when we spent a summer near the beach and my two teenage sons developed a keen interest in boogie boarding, I could relate. I was happy to see them securely tethered to their boards a hundred yards out in the water, waiting for that perfect wave. But as time went on, they got braver and braver, insisting that the perfect wave was to be found further and further out to sea. I would sit on the shoreline watching the dots that were my sons in the midst of all that blue ocean and try to control my anxiety.

Sometimes a mistake parents make is letting worry be the guideline for deciding what their children are able to do. If something causes the parents to worry, they won't let their children do it. Worry seems almost a necessary part of parenting. It is a sign of love and concern. It is also a warning signal that it's time to pray. I think worry can actually be a good thing when it causes us to channel our negative, anxious thoughts into a prayer that can help bring about a positive outcome in that situation.

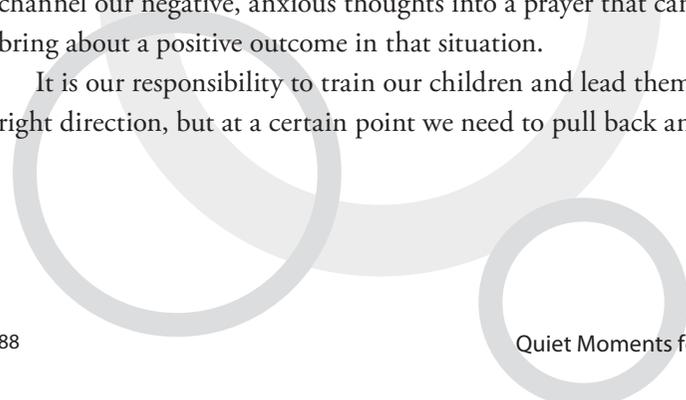
It is our responsibility to train our children and lead them in the right direction, but at a certain point we need to pull back and trust

God to keep them from serious harm. As children grow, they need to be able to learn through an ever-broadening range of experiences; they need to learn to take responsibility for themselves, and they need to learn to pray themselves when “out in the deep blue sea.”

It gives them a sense of security, though, to know that their parents are “on the shore,” still looking after them and still vigilant in prayer—like the time when one of my sons experienced a moment of sheer panic after a wave caught him off guard and knocked him for a loop, and the cord that tethered him to his boogie board slipped off. He thought he was going to drown, but he remembered that I was on the beach praying for him, and he called out to God himself. He knew in that instant he was going to be okay, and he was.

As my kids grow up and move away, I think it's important that they know they have a mother who prays for them. That also reminds them to turn to God in moments of anxiety. I can't be there to hold them up, but He can. I can't meet all their needs or solve all their problems for them, but He can work miracles when they exercise their faith and pray.

Josie Clark ■



Keys to a happy home

Make a time and place for prayer

When you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

Matthew 6:6

Seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul.

Deuteronomy 4:29

In the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.

Mark 1:35

He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed.

Luke 5:16 ■

A prayer for the day

YOU ARE GREAT, AND DO WONDROUS THINGS;
YOU ALONE ARE GOD.

TEACH ME YOUR WAY, O LORD;

I WILL WALK IN YOUR TRUTH;

UNITE MY HEART TO FEAR YOUR NAME.

I WILL PRAISE YOU, O LORD MY GOD, WITH ALL MY HEART,
AND I WILL GLORIFY YOUR NAME FOREVERMORE.

FOR GREAT IS YOUR MERCY TOWARD ME.

Psalms 86:10-13

Thank You, Jesus, for always being ready and willing to come to my aid. It's a special token of Your love that You help me throughout the day, in every situation I face. Whenever problems arise, You are always there to help me solve them. You are truly concerned about every little detail, and You always know best. With each passing day, I want You to be more a part of my life and thoughts and decisions. You're so good to me!

Author unknown ■

THE PRAYER OF A RIGHTEOUS MAN IS POWERFUL AND EFFECTIVE. ELIJAH WAS A MAN JUST LIKE US. HE PRAYED EARNESTLY THAT IT WOULD NOT RAIN, AND IT DID NOT RAIN ON THE LAND FOR THREE AND A HALF YEARS. AGAIN HE PRAYED, AND THE HEAVENS GAVE RAIN, AND THE EARTH PRODUCED ITS CROPS.

James 5:16–18 (NIV 1984)

According to the Bible, we're supposed to be content in whatever state we may find ourselves.¹ On one hand it would seem that whenever we pray for the Lord to change a certain situation, we are, in effect, not being content with the way things are. But we can't base our whole life and philosophy on that one verse; we have to balance that with other spiritual principles. If we take that verse to mean that we should always be content no matter what, we will never "come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain ... help in time of need,"² or pray for one another to be healed³—or pray for anything, for that matter.

When we feel something needs to be changed, we should first of all pray and ask the Lord to change it. At the same time we should ask the Lord and ourselves if there is anything He wants us to do to help bring about that change. But once we've prayed and done our part, while we're waiting for the Lord to answer, we need to give thanks in all things.⁴ If we truly believe that the Lord knows best and is in control, we'll be content with His answer. And even if the desired change never comes, we are supposed to keep thanking the Lord anyway because we know that "He does all things well."⁵

Maria Fontaine ■

¹ Philippians 4:11

² Hebrews 4:16

³ James 5:16

⁴ 1 Thessalonians 5:18

⁵ Mark 7:37

CHAPTER 5

The Positiveness of David

O LORD MY GOD, I WILL GIVE THANKS TO YOU FOREVER.

Psalm 30:12

Praise the LORD!

Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good!

For His mercy endures forever.

Psalm 106:1 ■

A psalm of David

I will bless the LORD at all times;
His praise shall continually be in my mouth.
My soul shall make its boast in the LORD;
The humble shall hear of it and be glad.
Oh, magnify the LORD with me,
And let us exalt His name together.

I sought the LORD, and He heard me,
And delivered me from all my fears.
They looked to Him and were radiant,
And their faces were not ashamed.
This poor man cried out, and the LORD heard him,
And saved him out of all his troubles.
The angel of the LORD encamps all around
those who fear Him,
And delivers them.

Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good;
Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!

Psalm 34:1–8 ■

Pancakes and pudding

HOW SWEET ARE YOUR WORDS TO MY TASTE,
SWEETER THAN HONEY TO MY MOUTH!

Psalm 119:103

My nine- and ten-year-olds came whining to me again.

“Mommy, Chalsey’s taking all the Lego blocks!”

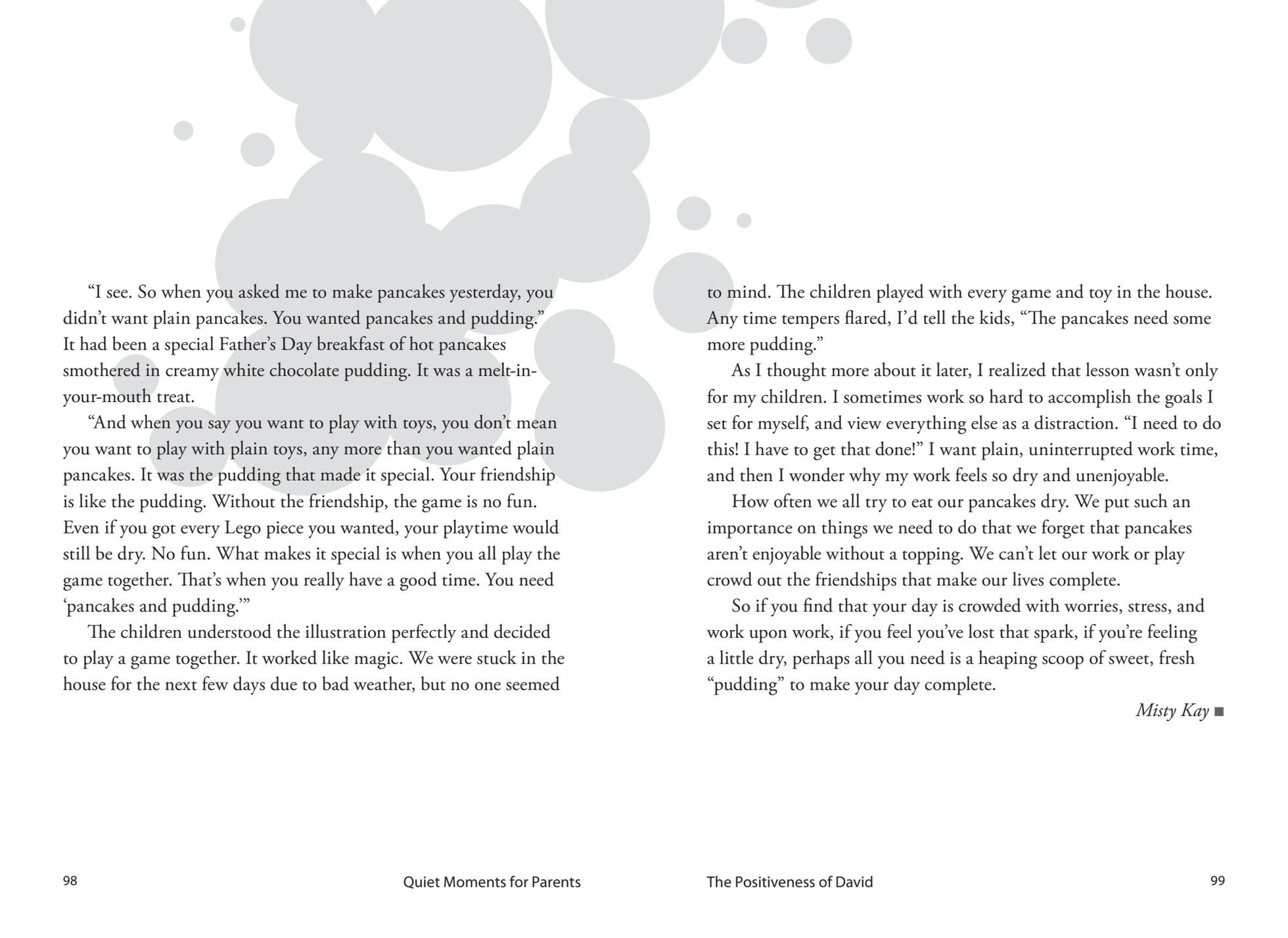
“Davin always gets the best pieces!”

Kristy, my five-year-old was crying. “It’s not fair. I want to build an airplane, but they don’t want to.”

This had been going on all afternoon. It was one thing after another. No matter how many toys they had, they couldn’t have fun. Something was missing. I shot up a quick prayer for an illustration that would help us to get a grip on the problem.

“Who likes plain, dry pancakes?” I asked. The kids froze and looked surprised at my sudden change of subject. “Who likes plain pancakes with nothing on them—just dry, get-stuck-in-your-throat pancakes?”

“Not me!” they all cried in unison.



“I see. So when you asked me to make pancakes yesterday, you didn’t want plain pancakes. You wanted pancakes and pudding.” It had been a special Father’s Day breakfast of hot pancakes smothered in creamy white chocolate pudding. It was a melt-in-your-mouth treat.

“And when you say you want to play with toys, you don’t mean you want to play with plain toys, any more than you wanted plain pancakes. It was the pudding that made it special. Your friendship is like the pudding. Without the friendship, the game is no fun. Even if you got every Lego piece you wanted, your playtime would still be dry. No fun. What makes it special is when you all play the game together. That’s when you really have a good time. You need ‘pancakes and pudding.’”

The children understood the illustration perfectly and decided to play a game together. It worked like magic. We were stuck in the house for the next few days due to bad weather, but no one seemed

to mind. The children played with every game and toy in the house. Any time tempers flared, I’d tell the kids, “The pancakes need some more pudding.”

As I thought more about it later, I realized that lesson wasn’t only for my children. I sometimes work so hard to accomplish the goals I set for myself, and view everything else as a distraction. “I need to do this! I have to get that done!” I want plain, uninterrupted work time, and then I wonder why my work feels so dry and unenjoyable.

How often we all try to eat our pancakes dry. We put such an importance on things we need to do that we forget that pancakes aren’t enjoyable without a topping. We can’t let our work or play crowd out the friendships that make our lives complete.

So if you find that your day is crowded with worries, stress, and work upon work, if you feel you’ve lost that spark, if you’re feeling a little dry, perhaps all you need is a heaping scoop of sweet, fresh “pudding” to make your day complete.

Misty Kay ■

That's life!

A PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

I WILL GIVE THANKS TO YOU, O LORD . . .

AND SING PRAISES TO YOUR NAME.

2 Samuel 22:50

Jesus, thank You for life and all it involves. When something goes wrong, we often say, “That’s life!” But life is so much more than the little things that don’t turn out the way we wish they had.

Waking up each morning with eyes that see and ears that hear—
that’s life!

Talking with a child and catching a glimpse of the world through
those innocent eyes—that’s life!

Pausing in the middle of a hectic day to watch a bird soar or a
butterfly flit among the flowers—that’s life!

Chatting with an old friend and remembering just how special
that friendship is—that’s life!

Receiving an unexpected word of encouragement—that’s life!

Holding a newborn baby and catching his first smile—that’s life!

Walking in nature, taking in its sights and sounds, and breathing
that fresh air—that’s life!

Lying down to sleep at night and thanking God for all the
blessings that the day brought—that’s life!

Bonita Hele ■

Whenever you hear of someone doing a great thing, you may be sure that behind it somewhere is a great background. It may be a mother’s training, a father’s example, a teacher’s influence, or an intense experience of his own, but it has to be there or else the great achievement does not come, no matter how favorable the opportunity.

Catherine Miles



If you want your children to improve, let them overhear the nice things you say about them to others.

Haim Ginott

The upward look

THEN THE SECRET WAS REVEALED TO DANIEL IN A NIGHT VISION. SO DANIEL BLESSED THE GOD OF HEAVEN.

Daniel 2:19

There was once a university professor who sprinkled his lectures with personal reflections that invariably began with, “As I was walking in my garden, it occurred to me that...” Over and over he passed on to his students thoughts that his garden had inspired.

One day he invited two of his most promising students to visit him at home, and over a cup of coffee the students asked to see his garden. To their amazement it was only a narrow strip, barely wider than the walkway, with the house on one side and a high wall on the other.

“Is this really the garden where you have all those inspiring thoughts, Doctor?” one of the students asked.

“Yes,” came the professor’s reply.

“But it’s so small!” protested the student.

“Ah, yes,” said the professor, a twinkle in his eye as he gestured toward the sky, “but look how high it is!”

Retold by Abi May ■

Confident children

BUILD CITIES FOR YOUR LITTLE ONES.

Numbers 32:24

Mutual respect strengthens the bond of love in a parent-child relationship. It also engenders unity, obedience, and appreciation.

Respect within a family is manifested through consideration, understanding, thoughtfulness, a willingness to listen, and loving communication. And it works both ways; if you want your children to show you respect, show them respect.

Children learn by observation and imitate what they see. If lack of respect is the problem, it probably started with the child's parents, peers, or other influences such as TV, movies, or computer games. Minimizing such negative influences is half the battle; setting clear guidelines as to what's expected and then consistently upholding that standard is the other.

Ways that you can show your children respect include:

- Treating each child as an individual
- Being sensitive to their feelings; putting yourself in their position
- Not belittling them or using sarcasm when they falter
- Not intentionally embarrassing them
- Asking and suggesting, rather than giving commands
- Paying attention when they speak and hearing them out; not being too quick to provide your perspective
- Treating them as though they were slightly more mature than they actually are
- Giving their ideas serious consideration; thinking in terms of how you can help their ideas to work

Alex Peterson ■

Giving thanks

When my daughter was very young, I overheard her praying for the rain to stop and for the next day to be nice. I said, “Honey, I don’t think the Lord minds us asking Him to stop the rain. He wants us to make our wants and wishes known to Him, and He promises to give us our needs, but we also need to realize that He can’t always give us what we want. We need both sunny and rainy days. If we call sunny days ‘nice days,’ it makes us think of rainy days as ‘bad days,’ so let’s try to always praise God for the beautiful day He’s given us, whether it’s rainy or sunny.”

It seemed such a simple, childish lesson—to be thankful for both rain and sun—but it made me realize that the way we talk about things affects our overall happiness and outlook on life. Sad to say, many of us have formed the bad habit of adopting a negative terminology regarding certain situations. If we want to be more positive, think more positively, and react more positively, we need to work on changing our vocabulary to be more positive, because it’s pretty hard to talk about a “bad” day and think of it positively. To change the way we think about things, we need to also change the way we talk about them.

Maria Fontaine ■

The valley of praise

THE STORY OF 2 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 20

Word was rushed to Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, announcing the swift approach of a vast army from three kingdoms that had formed an alliance. Jehoshaphat, knowing that his own army was no match for the invaders, turned to God for help. He proclaimed a time of prayer and fasting, and people from throughout the land poured into the capital to take part.

Then, in the midst of all the people, Jehoshaphat prayed. “O Lord, God of our fathers, are You not God in heaven? You rule over kingdoms and nations, and power and might are in Your hand. None can withstand You.” As the king continued, people’s spirits were strengthened. “We know that in the time of calamity, whatever peril it may be, if we stand in Your presence and cry out to You in our distress, You will hear and save us. We have no power against this great army that comes against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon You!”

Then a young priest named Jahaziel prophesied with a loud voice, “Thus says the Lord to you: ‘Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God’s!’” God had heard and come to answer their prayers.

“You will not need to fight in this battle,” God’s message through Jahaziel continued. “Position yourselves, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, who is with you!”

King Jehoshaphat bowed to the ground in worship. The crowd followed the king’s lead, while the priests raised their voices to praise the Lord.

The next morning as the troops made preparations for battle, King Jehoshaphat encouraged them. “Believe in the Lord your God, and so shall you be established. Have faith in His prophets, and so shall you have good success.”

The king consulted with the people, and it was decided that singers should lead the troops into battle. That daring step of faith showed that they believed God would fight for them.

“Praise the Lord for the beauty of His holiness,” Jehoshaphat instructed the singers as they took their position. “Give thanks to the Lord, for His mercy endures forever.” They were thanking God in advance for the victory He had promised the day before.

No sooner had they begun to sing and praise than God “set ambushes against the people who had come against Judah; and they were defeated.”

The Bible doesn’t specify what those “ambushes” were, but it does explain that the men of those three invading kingdoms began to fight among themselves. When the army of Judah came to a promontory overlooking the battlefield, they saw only dead bodies on the ground. No one had escaped.

Jehoshaphat and his men gathered so many valuables from the bodies that it took them three days to collect them all.

On the fourth day they assembled in the Valley of Berachah, which means “the Valley of Praise,” and there they blessed God. Then they returned home with joy, for the Lord had triumphed over their enemies.

Praise is the voice of faith. If you really believe God has heard your prayers, you will start praising Him for the answer, even before you see it. When you’re tempted to get down and discouraged, remember the power of praise and look to God.

Taken from “Treasures,” © 1987 ■

Jump-start

JOY COMES IN THE MORNING.

Psalm 30:5

The surest way to help your loved ones get off to a great start each day is by starting the day with love. Easier said than done, you might say, when you're just waking up yourself! But if you pray for that extra oomph you need and give it a try, I think you'll be pleasantly surprised.

Don't just eat breakfast together in silence, staring at your plate, the newspaper, or the back of the cereal box. Count your blessings together. Thank Me for the wonderful things you're sure I'm going to do for you that day in answer to prayer and because I love you. Read a short passage from the Bible. Pray for each other and the different things you expect to face that day, and claim a promise from My Word for each victory you need.

Tank up on Me! I am love and light, My strength is unfailing, and all things are possible for Me. Fill up on Me first thing, and you and your loved ones will be ready for any challenge the day may bring your way.

Those few minutes you have together in the morning are also a great time to give encouragement. Tell her how nice she looks. Tell him you're sure he's going to do great in school. Give a parting hug or kiss that conveys "I can't wait to be with you again!"

Start the day with love, and love will carry you through the day.

A message from Jesus received in prayer ■

Keys to a happy home

**Think on the good things.
Count your blessings!**

In the multitude of my anxieties within me,
Your comforts delight my soul.

Psalm 94:19

Many, O LORD my God, are Your wonderful works
Which You have done;
And Your thoughts toward us
Cannot be recounted to You in order;
If I would declare and speak of them,
They are more than can be numbered.

Psalm 40:5

Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 5:20 ■

A new morning, a fresh start

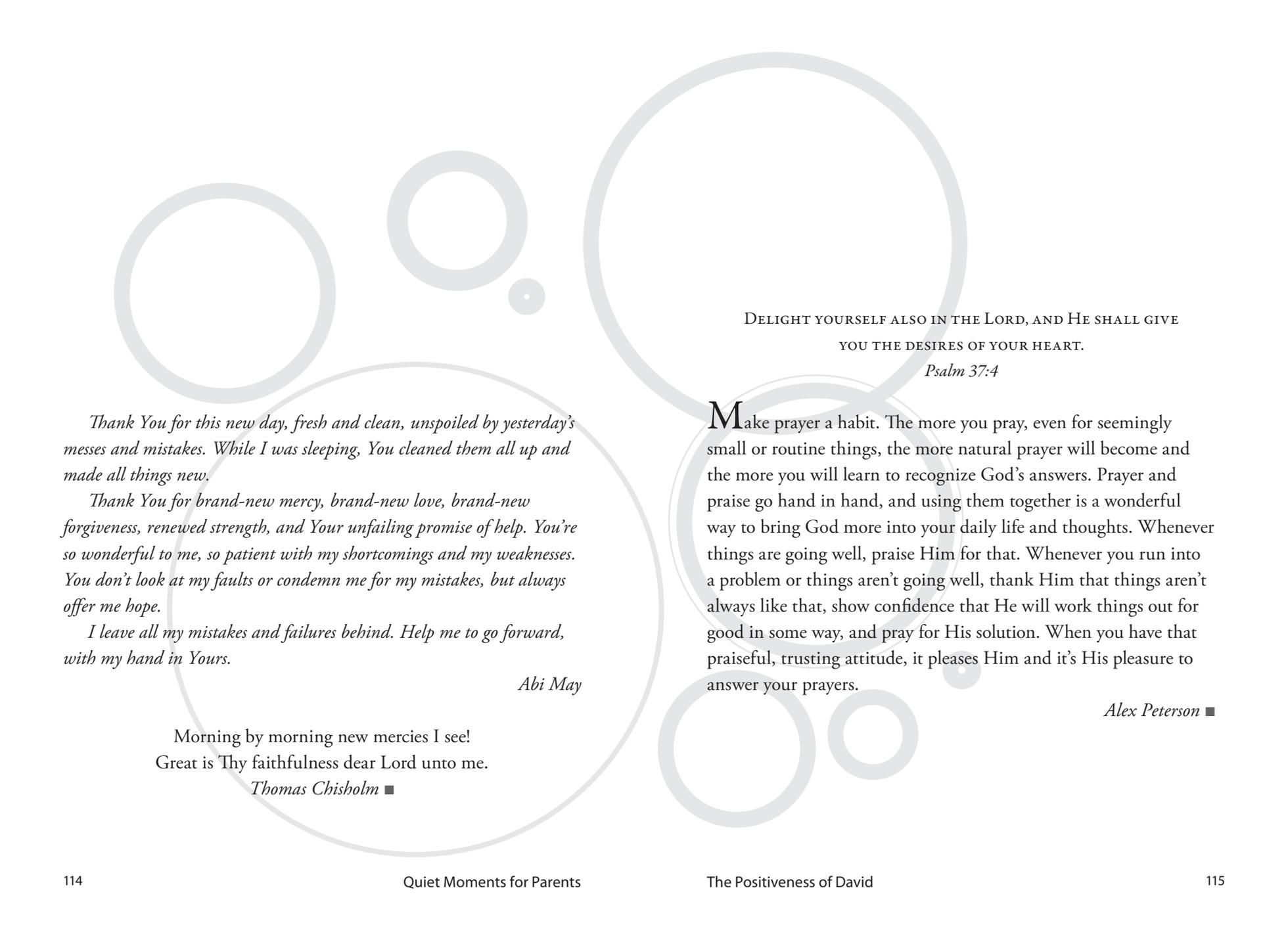
A SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

MY VOICE YOU SHALL HEAR IN THE MORNING, O LORD;
IN THE MORNING I WILL DIRECT IT TO YOU,
AND I WILL LOOK UP.

Psalm 5:3

Every morning is a new chance to do things differently, better than we have before—especially when we take time to connect with God, get His perspective on the areas we want to improve in, and ask Him to help us make the necessary adjustments in our thinking, attitudes, and actions. In fact, there is nothing He would rather do than help us change for the better.

A wonderful way to start your day is with a prayer of thanksgiving to God for His loving care. Take a few minutes first thing tomorrow morning to do this, and see what a difference it makes in your day. You can use the following prayer, or one of your own. Or start with this one, and tailor it to your circumstances by adding specifics.



Thank You for this new day, fresh and clean, unspoiled by yesterday's messes and mistakes. While I was sleeping, You cleaned them all up and made all things new.

Thank You for brand-new mercy, brand-new love, brand-new forgiveness, renewed strength, and Your unfailing promise of help. You're so wonderful to me, so patient with my shortcomings and my weaknesses. You don't look at my faults or condemn me for my mistakes, but always offer me hope.

I leave all my mistakes and failures behind. Help me to go forward, with my hand in Yours.

Abi May

Morning by morning new mercies I see!
Great is Thy faithfulness dear Lord unto me.

Thomas Chisholm ■

DELIGHT YOURSELF ALSO IN THE LORD, AND HE SHALL GIVE
YOU THE DESIRES OF YOUR HEART.

Psalm 37:4

Make prayer a habit. The more you pray, even for seemingly small or routine things, the more natural prayer will become and the more you will learn to recognize God's answers. Prayer and praise go hand in hand, and using them together is a wonderful way to bring God more into your daily life and thoughts. Whenever things are going well, praise Him for that. Whenever you run into a problem or things aren't going well, thank Him that things aren't always like that, show confidence that He will work things out for good in some way, and pray for His solution. When you have that praiseful, trusting attitude, it pleases Him and it's His pleasure to answer your prayers.

Alex Peterson ■

Under construction

LET THE PEACE OF GOD RULE IN YOUR HEARTS,
... AND BE THANKFUL.
Colossians 3:15

The bold red letters glared at us as we crawled along in bumper-to-bumper traffic, maneuvering between potholes and gravelly ditches that had turned what was once smooth pavement into an obstacle course. “UNDER CONSTRUCTION!” Noise, dirt, sweat-soaked workers, and clogged roads had been part of our lives since the city began a road-expansion project several months earlier. Traffic had always been notoriously bad in this part of sprawling Bangkok, but it was worse now.

Barricades had gone up, squeezing three-lane traffic into a single lane. The diggers came next, tearing up the asphalt and clunking and shuddering as they worked around the clock. Construction dust covered everything. Our hour-long commutes into town took twice as long, while we stalled and chafed in exhaust fumes and dust.

“Why do they have to do construction here?” I routinely

complained to my dad on our weekly trips to give English lessons at an orphanage near the center of town. “It makes life so inconvenient and confusing for everyone!”

Dad, having long ago outgrown the notion that the world existed to cater to him, would glance sympathetically in my direction and say nothing.

Eventually I became accustomed to the noise and inconvenience, and Dad and I discovered that the car was a great place to catch up on little bits of each other’s lives that we had missed in the bustle of our busy days.

The day finally came when the constant jackhammering stopped, the large yellow machines were hauled away one by one, and the barricades with their red-lettered signs and flashing orange lights were carted off to the next construction site.

The next week we made our usual trip to the orphanage, and as usual I braced myself for the long ride. A minute or two later Dad maneuvered our pickup onto an entry ramp and suddenly we were racing above the snarl of city traffic below. The newly constructed flyover, with its smooth surface and intersection-free lanes, took us to the orphanage in a record time of fifteen minutes.

On the way home, as we once again sped above the clogged streets and honking cars, Dad broke the silence. “Do you still wish they hadn’t done construction here?”

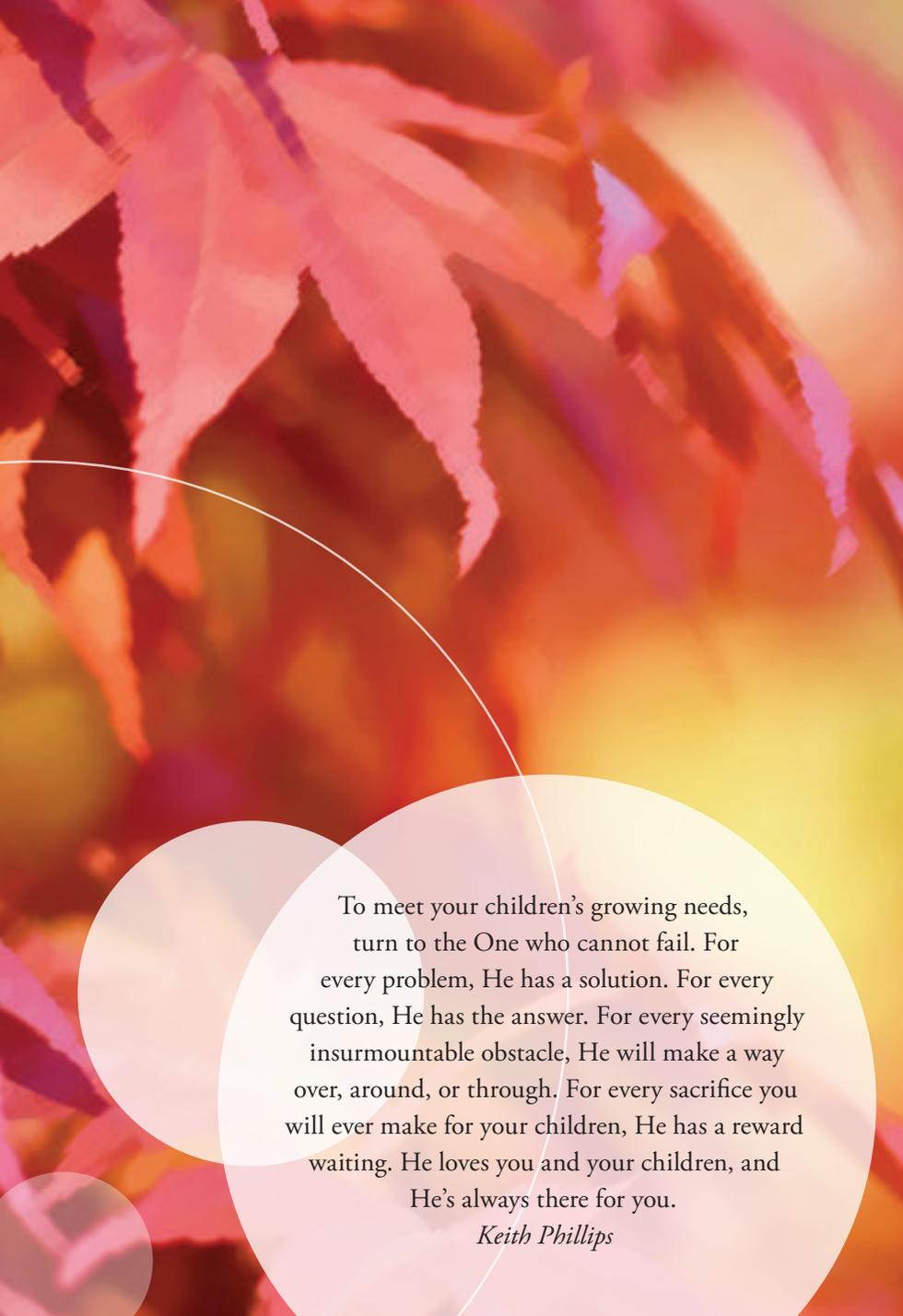
“Of course not!” I replied, suddenly realizing that the temporary inconvenience we had lived through was nothing compared to the benefits that would now be enjoyed for years.

“Life is full of ‘construction sites,’” Dad said. “Learn to be thankful for them and be patient. God is in the process of turning each one into something better.”

Christina Andreassen ■

You have a lifetime to work,
but children are only young once.

Polish proverb



To meet your children's growing needs, turn to the One who cannot fail. For every problem, He has a solution. For every question, He has the answer. For every seemingly insurmountable obstacle, He will make a way over, around, or through. For every sacrifice you will ever make for your children, He has a reward waiting. He loves you and your children, and He's always there for you.

Keith Phillips

The positive power of praise

LIFT UP YOUR HANDS IN THE SANCTUARY,
AND BLESS THE LORD.

Psalm 134:2

When your heart is weighed down with worry, fear, sorrow, or pain, instead of dwelling on your woes, think about Jesus and His love. Count your blessings. If nothing else, you can be grateful for all the other problems you could have but don't, because God has spared you from them.

Look on the bright side. Think on the good things. Thank God for all He has done. Chase away the dark clouds by letting in the light of God's Word, prayer, praise, song. Do anything you can to occupy your mind with positive thinking.

If you're thinking about God's goodness and putting that in the focal point of your concentration, then this pushes the doubts and lies and fears out of the way. You can't be positive and negative at the same time, so fill your mind with the light of praise to God, and it will push the darkness out.

Alex Peterson ■

The Tenderness of a Mother

Though the fig tree may not blossom,
Nor fruit be on the vines;
Though the labor of the olive may fail,
And the fields yield no food;
Though the flock may be cut off from the fold,
And there be no herd in the stalls—
Yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will joy in the God of my salvation.
Habakkuk 3:17–18 ■

WE WERE GENTLE AMONG YOU, JUST AS A NURSING
MOTHER CHERISHES HER OWN CHILDREN.

1 Thessalonians 2:7

One day Elisha went to Shunem, where there was a notable woman.

The woman bore a son ... and the child grew. Now it happened one day that he went out to his father, to the reapers. And he said, "My head, my head!" So he said to a servant, "Carry him to his mother."

When he had taken him and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and then died. And she went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God [Elisha], shut the door upon him, and went out.

Then she saddled a donkey, and said to her servant, "Drive, and go forward; do not slacken the pace for me unless I tell you." And so she departed, and went to the man of God at Mount Carmel.

Now when she came to the man of God, she caught him by the feet, but Gehazi [his servant] came near to push her away. But the man of God said, "Let her alone; for her soul is in deep distress."

When Elisha came into the house, there was the child, lying dead on his bed. He went in therefore, shut the door behind the two of them, and prayed to the LORD. ... The child opened his eyes. ... And when she came in to him, he said, "Pick up your son."

So she went in, fell at his feet, and bowed to the ground; then she picked up her son and went out.

Taken from 2 Kings 4:8–37 ■

AS ONE WHOM HIS MOTHER COMFORTS,
SO I WILL COMFORT YOU.

Isaiah 66:13

I don't know what planet I was on when I thought that when I became a parent, all the skills I'd need would simply come to me. It wasn't long before I realized that parenting, for the countless incomparable joys it has brought into my life, is hard work. Being a parent has meant adjusting my aspirations and priorities to match my new reality. Every day is a learning process as I adapt to the evolving needs of my children.

Katiuscia Giusti ■

Not a problem!

THE LOVING-KINDNESS OF THE LORD IS FROM EVERLASTING TO
EVERLASTING TO THOSE WHO REVERENCE HIM.

Psalm 103:17 (TLB)

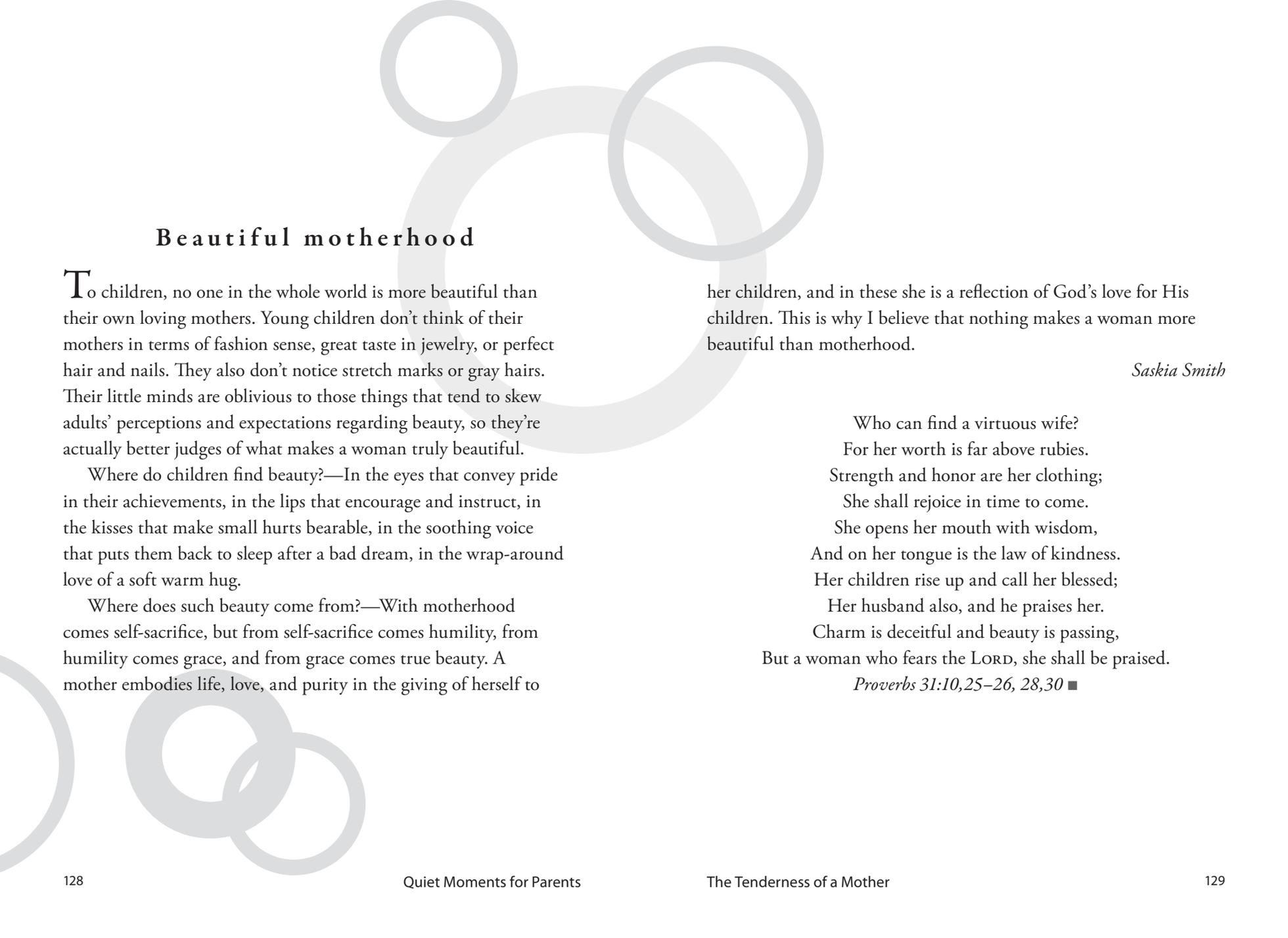
It was the end of another long, hectic day. My husband had been away on business for almost three weeks, and caring for our eight-year-old son and a two-month-old baby on my own had been a new and challenging experience. I was looking forward to some much-needed sleep, when my baby became fussy. In a matter of minutes he developed a high fever and vomited. For the next couple of hours I comforted him and tried to calm him down.

Finally he seemed to be going to sleep, which meant I would be able to get some sleep too, but by the time I got myself ready for bed and was about to lie down, he started vomiting again. I got up, changed him, and cleaned up the mess, but no sooner had I finished when he threw up again—this time all over me. So I went through the entire cleanup routine again, only to have to go through it again a fourth time a couple of minutes later.

Thankfully, after that he fell into a peaceful sleep. As I lay there watching him sleep, I thought about what had just happened. Although he had made a mess of himself several times, I didn't mind having to clean him up over and over. I didn't feel disgusted at him in the least, and the thought of distancing myself from him because of his messes never crossed my mind. To the contrary, love compelled me to take him into my arms, care for him, and make him feel safe and loved.

Jesus, I reflected, is like that with us. Regardless of how many times we mess up, He's always there, ready to take us into His arms, clean us up, and make us feel loved and secure. His love for us isn't in any way diminished by our sins and shortcomings, and whenever we turn to Him for help, He's always there for us. He understands our frailties and loves us anyway, and nothing can separate us from His love.

Angela Hernandez ■



Beautiful motherhood

To children, no one in the whole world is more beautiful than their own loving mothers. Young children don't think of their mothers in terms of fashion sense, great taste in jewelry, or perfect hair and nails. They also don't notice stretch marks or gray hairs. Their little minds are oblivious to those things that tend to skew adults' perceptions and expectations regarding beauty, so they're actually better judges of what makes a woman truly beautiful.

Where do children find beauty?—In the eyes that convey pride in their achievements, in the lips that encourage and instruct, in the kisses that make small hurts bearable, in the soothing voice that puts them back to sleep after a bad dream, in the wrap-around love of a soft warm hug.

Where does such beauty come from?—With motherhood comes self-sacrifice, but from self-sacrifice comes humility, from humility comes grace, and from grace comes true beauty. A mother embodies life, love, and purity in the giving of herself to

her children, and in these she is a reflection of God's love for His children. This is why I believe that nothing makes a woman more beautiful than motherhood.

Saskia Smith

Who can find a virtuous wife?
For her worth is far above rubies.
Strength and honor are her clothing;
She shall rejoice in time to come.
She opens her mouth with wisdom,
And on her tongue is the law of kindness.
Her children rise up and call her blessed;
Her husband also, and he praises her.
Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing,
But a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised.

Proverbs 31:10,25–26, 28,30 ■

Keys to a happy home

Treat children gently and in love

He will feed His flock like a shepherd;
He will gather the lambs with His arm,
And carry them in His bosom,
And gently lead those who are with young.

Isaiah 40:11

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.

Ephesians 4:32

Above all things have fervent love for one another, for “love will cover a multitude of sins.”

1 Peter 4:8 ■

Quiet moments

A SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

TRUST ... IN THE LIVING GOD, WHO GIVES US
RICHLY ALL THINGS TO ENJOY.

1 Timothy 6:17

The next time you feel flustered or overwhelmed, find a quiet spot and take five minutes to try this: Close your eyes and focus your thoughts on a restful scene. It can be as elaborate as a sandy beach with warm waves washing over your toes and a balmy breeze rustling the palm trees and your hair, or it can be as simple as relaxing in your favorite chair on your day off. Now picture Jesus joining you for the experience, happy, relaxed, and looking forward to a little downtime with you. Once you have that picture firmly in your mind, try to “be there” for a few minutes. Feel your body, mind, and spirit relax. When you return to the “real” world, you’ll feel more rested and be in a better state of mind for whatever the rest of the day may have in store for you.

Abi May ■

Interview with mom

BLESS THE LORD, O MY SOUL,
AND FORGET NOT ALL HIS BENEFITS.

Psalm 103:2

Mothers give so much. Their entire lives are a gift of love to their families. We journey far from our beginnings, and then something tugs at our heartstrings and draws us home to rediscover who we are and where we came from.

I sat down with my mother a few months before she passed away and asked her some questions about her life. If you haven't ever done that, I suggest you do. It's sure to help you appreciate your mother even more.

Mom told me much about her life and dreams, both fulfilled and unfulfilled.

"Do you have any regrets?" I asked her. "What would you major on if you could live your life again?"

She answered by showing me something she had written in her journal: If I could, I would find more country lanes to walk, bake more cookies, plant more spring bulbs, swim at dusk, walk in the rain, dance under the stars, walk the Great Wall, wade along sandy shores, pick up sea shells and glass, glide through fjords in northern

lands, sing country ballads, read more books, erase dismal thoughts, dream up a fantasy.

"Is there any message that you would like to pass on to your children and grandchildren?" was my next question.

Again she flipped through her journal and found the answer already written there: Stop waiting to live until your car is paid off, until you get a new home, until your kids are grown, until you can go back to school, until you finish this or that, until you lose ten pounds.

Flipping a few more pages she came to this entry: Pray for what you wish. God loves to answer because answered prayer deepens faith and adds glory to His name.

And again: Savor the moment. Savor your walking and talking with friends, the smiles of little children. Savor the dazzling light of morning that holds the multicolored way. Savor God's great earth, rolling hills, the birds, the blooms, the diamond dewdrops glittering on a crab apple tree—all His wonders from His hand.

When I asked how she managed to stay so upbeat even though her health was failing, she turned to this one: What special poet makes your heart ring? Who shines a light on the dark corners of despair, easing the ache, chasing out care? Who makes your feet to dance and your hands to clap? When you have found this one, you will have found a treasure.

As for me, I found my special poet a few months later when I read this, Mom's farewell poem:

My love to souls whom I have known,
With thanks for tender mercies shown
That kindled hope at winter's door
And sprinkled petals on the floor
To soften summer's way.
Be not dismayed nor weep for me,
For I am now forever free
From body's confines, toil and pain.
Now let me soar to heaven's plane
And there with angels play.

Curtis Peter van Gorder ■

Thank you, mothers!

LOVE NEVER FAILS.

1 Corinthians 13:8

A mother's love is one of the best examples of My love for My children, because a godly mother loves unconditionally, continually, and despite the circumstances. It is a special love that I place in each mother's heart because I knew that through the love that mothers have for their children, all of you would better understand My love.

You may feel incapable in your task as a mother. You see your faults and know that you aren't perfect. But, oh, there is so much beauty surrounding a mother! You mothers resemble Me in the way you unselfishly give, sometimes without seeming to receive much in return, and in the way you pray for your children and support their dreams.

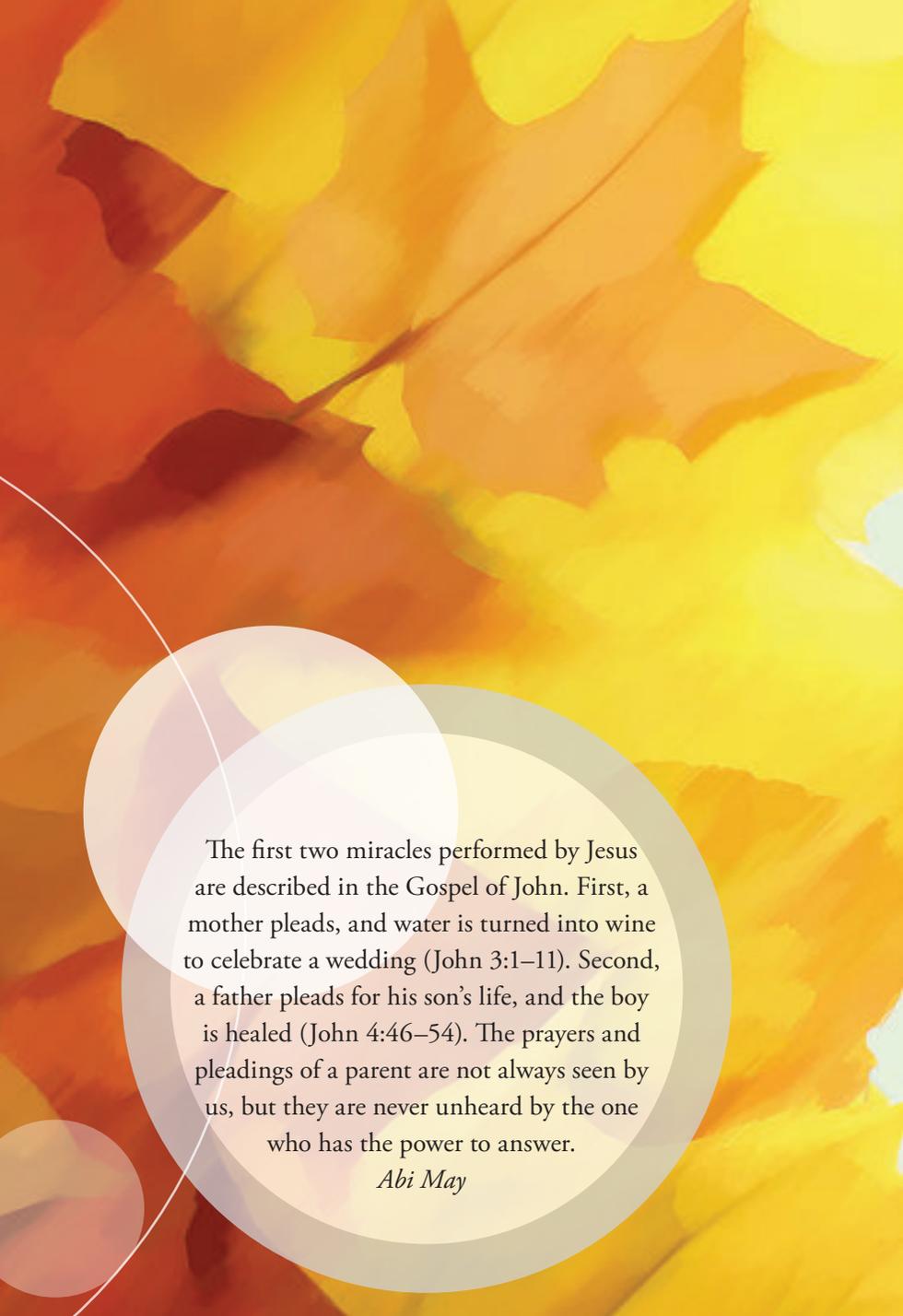
I knew when I gave you children that there would be times of disappointment, desperation, and heartbreak, but I also knew that there would be times of great joy and love beyond measure, and that in your children you would find much of the meaning to your life.

Being a mother requires a lot, but it also has its rewards—the joy of holding a newborn, the smile of a little child, the happy moments shared as a family, the appreciation and respect shown by your grown child, and the love exchanged all along the way. These and many more are My blessings for all that you give up to be a mother. And one day here in heaven you will receive the ultimate reward for all that you have given. It will be the greatest family reunion ever, untarnished by tears or earthly limitations, where unveiled love will envelop you. In that moment you will experience the rewards of motherhood to the full.

A message from Jesus received in prayer ■

Science has its explanations for how children come into being, but when you first hold your baby and look into those little eyes, you know that you are holding a miracle. You are looking at one of the great mysteries of the universe—a glimpse of heaven and the creative power of God. There in your arms is tangible proof of the love God has for you, for He has chosen you to parent a new soul.

Derek and Michelle Brookes



The first two miracles performed by Jesus are described in the Gospel of John. First, a mother pleads, and water is turned into wine to celebrate a wedding (John 3:1–11). Second, a father pleads for his son’s life, and the boy is healed (John 4:46–54). The prayers and pleadings of a parent are not always seen by us, but they are never unheard by the one who has the power to answer.

Abi May

Mother

Youth fades, love droops, the leaves of friendship fall; a
mother’s secret hope outlives them all.

Oliver Wendell Holmes

No influence is so powerful as that of the mother.

Sarah Josepha Hale

The love of a mother is never exhausted. It never changes—it
never tires—it endures through all; in good repute, in bad
repute, in the face of the world’s condemnation,
a mother’s love still lives on.

Washington Irving

Mother is the bank where we deposit
all our hurts and worries.

Author unknown

The woman is at the heart of the home. Let us pray that we
women realize the reason for our existence: to love
and be loved and through this love become
instruments of peace in the world.

Mother Teresa ■

Through the eyes of a child

GOD HAS CHOSEN THE FOOLISH THINGS OF THE WORLD ...

GOD HAS CHOSEN THE WEAK THINGS OF THE WORLD.

1 Corinthians 1:27

About a week before my son Tristan's fourth birthday, we talked about what kind of birthday cake he wanted.

Last year he chose a "caterpillar" cake, as at the time bugs fascinated him. That cake wasn't too difficult—just a string of crescent-shaped cake pieces with bright, multicolored icing. I expected him to choose something equally simple this year, so you can imagine my chagrin when, after looking through a book with imaginative cake ideas for children, he chose the "knights and castle" cake.

I set to work on the cake. Book in hand, I tried to follow the directions as best I could, but my cake was lopsided, the icing didn't stick well, and the turrets weren't equal in height or diameter. I felt so discouraged! *Poor Tristan*, I thought. *He's going to be so disappointed! He's been looking forward to and talking about his knights and castle cake all week, and now look what he's going to get!*

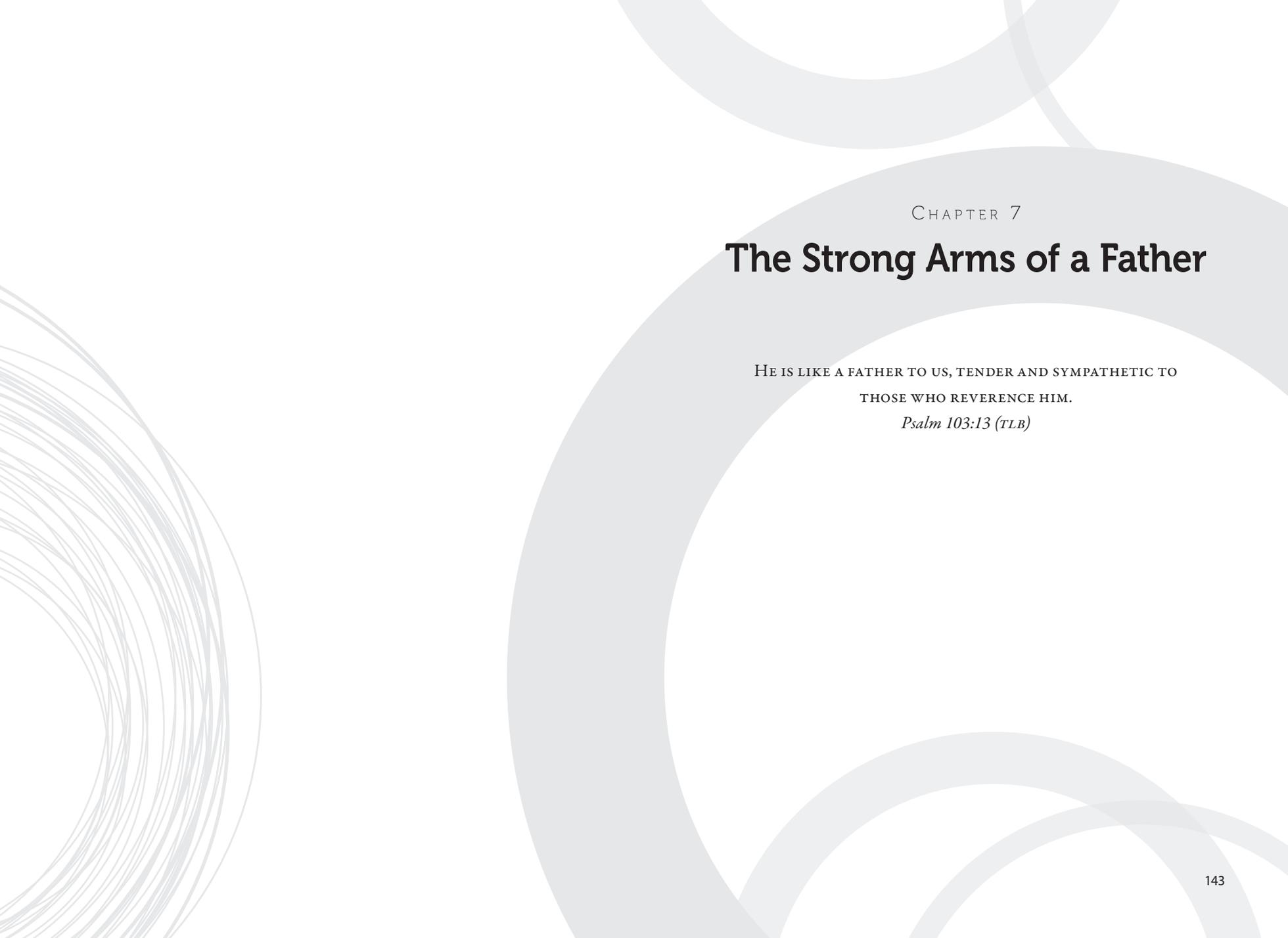
I finally finished the cake, adding the final touches as best I could. I was done, but felt like crying.

I decided I'd better let Tristan see the cake, to prepare him for the embarrassing moment when he and his friends would see it at the party. Tristan's eyes widened and, to my surprise, a huge smile spread across his face. "Wow, Mom! It's so cool!" he exclaimed. "It's just what I wanted!"

In those few minutes I was taught a lesson that can take a lifetime to learn. How many times had the Lord chosen to let things in my life turn out differently than I had hoped or imagined? How many times had my dreams seemed to turn out a little lopsided, distorted, with pieces missing?

Oh, that I can learn to see life through the eyes of a child—full of faith, hope, love, and positiveness, instead of seeing the imperfections.

Marie Claire ■



CHAPTER 7

The Strong Arms of a Father

HE IS LIKE A FATHER TO US, TENDER AND SYMPATHETIC TO
THOSE WHO REVERENCE HIM.

Psalm 103:13 (TLB)

A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me." So he divided to them his livelihood.

And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want.

Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything.

But when he came to himself, he said, "How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.'"

And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son."

But the father said to his servants, "Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

Luke 15:11-24 ■

I WILL BE A FATHER TO YOU,
AND YOU SHALL BE MY SONS AND DAUGHTERS,
SAYS THE LORD ALMIGHTY.

2 Corinthians 6:18

The scope and depth of God's love are beyond our comprehension, but the Bible likens it to the love of a father for his children. God doesn't enjoy seeing you in trouble. He isn't trying to make life hard for you. He is on your side and wants nothing more than to see you happy and fulfilled. That doesn't mean He will never let you have problems, but when you find yourself in over your head, you can be sure He will be there for you.

Keith Phillips ■

ENCOURAGE HIM AND STRENGTHEN HIM.

Deuteronomy 3:28

Praise is a superior motivator. Children thrive on praise. It's more important and more beneficial to praise a child for good behavior than it is to scold for bad behavior.

There are times when admonitions and correction are needed, but by learning to preempt problem situations with praise and other positive reinforcement, you will build self-esteem in your children and find yourself less discouraged, exhausted, and frustrated at the end of the day. It's a win-win parenting strategy.

The more you focus on the positive, the more things you will find to praise your child for and the less you will have to deal with bad behavior. Praise encourages actions that warrant more praise.

Be consistent, be sincere, and be creative—but be believable. For example, if the child tries to do something new with disastrous results, commend the effort, not the outcome. Or if the ill-fated attempt was meant to be a surprise for you, commend the thoughtfulness. Always accentuate the positive, and make the good memorable.

Alex Peterson ■

DO NOT BE OVERLY RIGHTEOUS.

Ecclesiastes 7:16

One father confessed that he hadn't realized how dishonest he'd been with his son until he learned a hard lesson. His son received a very low grade in English. In spite of scoldings and extra study, it seemed the boy simply could not bring up his grade. One day he said to his father, "I guess when you went to school you got all A's in English."

"What makes you say that?" the father asked.

"Well, if you didn't do well," said the son, "you wouldn't scold me the way you do."

The way he had corrected his son was a misrepresentation of the truth. "No, the fact is that I had a really hard time with English," the father replied. "Especially spelling."

From that moment on the boy did better, freed from the impression that he was inferior and a failure. Seeing that his dad had the same problems, but succeeded, gave him hope.

Author unknown ■

THESE CHILDREN ARE MY CHILDREN.

Genesis 31:43

I felt the delivery room, then the rest of the world, shift to some strange but wonderful new dimension. I was holding my first child—just minutes old—for the first time. It seemed that heaven and earth revolved around the tiny baby boy in my arms, and perhaps for that moment they did. It took me a while to realize that only the focal point of my world had changed forever. I was no longer the most important thing happening.

My wife and I had been in this together from the start, of course, and throughout her pregnancy I had tried to be involved and supportive. Still, when the big day came, she was way ahead of me.

For her the birth was a sweet and natural transition to the next phase of a loving and nurturing relationship that had been going on for nine months; for me it was a sudden awakening of emotions that I hadn't imagined before.

In the days that followed, I noticed myself changing in unexpected ways. Pastimes that had once seemed so important or even necessary lost their appeal. I drove much more carefully, especially when the baby was in the car. Life was dearer now. I had more reason to work hard, and more to come home to. I wasn't just a husband, but a husband and a father. I was a family man!

Keith Phillips ■

Include Me

YOU WILL SHOW ME THE PATH OF LIFE;
IN YOUR PRESENCE IS FULLNESS OF JOY.

Psalm 16:11

If you want a happier family and happier family life, here's how: Include Me in everything you do.

I'm not talking about dry, formal, somber religiosity—anything but! You just might be surprised at how much fun I can be! The benefits of including Me are too numerous to list here, but I'll give you three.

One: I'm full of ideas. My Father and I created this world together—the first-ever family project, if you will—and you've got to admit, we came up with some pretty good stuff! If we made it all for you and want you to enjoy it to the full—which we did—don't you think I can show you better things to do together than to sit semi-comatose in front of a TV?

Two: I can relate. I can relate to every generation and know better than anyone how to bring generations together and keep them together. Don't forget, I've been at this a long time. There's no situation you face that I haven't helped others deal with before, so consult with Me the moment you begin to have problems on the home front.

Three: More love. Isn't that what you want most for your family—love? I am love—the very spirit of love—so where I am, love is. I have so much love to give you and yours—more than you could possibly imagine and much more than you can contain. It's here for you any time, all the time, just for the asking.

Just say, “Jesus, thank You for being a part of our family—the head of our family. Be with us now in what we're about to do.”

A message from Jesus received in prayer ■

Keys to a happy home

Teach your children to trust in God

ONLY TAKE HEED TO YOURSELF, AND DILIGENTLY KEEP
YOURSELF, LEST YOU FORGET THE THINGS YOUR EYES HAVE
SEEN, AND LEST THEY DEPART FROM YOUR HEART ALL THE DAYS
OF YOUR LIFE. AND TEACH THEM TO YOUR CHILDREN AND YOUR
GRANDCHILDREN.

Deuteronomy 4:9

No one ever promised me it would be easy, and it's not. But I also get many rewards from seeing my children grow, make strong decisions for themselves, and set out on their own as independent, strong, likable human beings. And I like who I am becoming, too. Having [children] has made me more human, more flexible, more humble, more questioning.

A father ■

Those who know Your name will put their trust in You.

Psalm 9:10

I will put My trust in Him. ... Here am I
and the children whom God has given Me.

Hebrews 2:13

Come, you children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

Psalm 34:11

That the generation to come might know them,
The children who would be born,
That they may arise and declare them to their children,
That they may set their hope in God,
And not forget the works of God,
But keep His commandments.

Psalm 78:6-7 ■

The father shall make known
Your truth to the children.

Isaiah 38:19

His little arms crept 'round my neck,
and then I heard him say
Four simple words I can't forget,
four words that made me pray.
They turned a mirror on my soul,
on secrets no one knew,
They startled me,
I hear them yet,
he said, "I'll be like you!"

Herbert Parker

Teach ... with your life: by word, by demeanor,
by love, by faith, by integrity.

1 Timothy 4:12 (THE MESSAGE) ■

A dad is respected
because he gives his children leadership.

A dad is appreciated
because he gives his children care.

A dad is valued
because he gives his children time.

A dad is loved
because he gives his children the one thing
they treasure most—himself.

Author unknown



A man's children and his
garden both reflect the amount
of weeding done during the
growing season.

Author unknown

Look on the bright side

A SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

Life is seldom problem free, and it seems that many of our problems involve the people closest to us—family members, co-workers, neighbors, and others with whom we interact on a regular basis. Even if those people aren't the cause of our problems, they are affected by our reactions to them. If we are in the habit of reacting negatively, that can sour life and relationships faster than almost anything else.

One of the secrets to both happiness and success with people is to not allow the relatively small problems and irritations of daily life to cast large shadows. Helen Keller hit on that truth when she said, "Keep your eyes to the sunshine and you cannot see the shadows." The apostle Paul was more specific when he said, "Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just,



God in skin

BUT NOW, THUS SAYS THE LORD, WHO CREATED YOU, “FEAR NOT, FOR I HAVE REDEEMED YOU; I HAVE CALLED YOU BY YOUR NAME; YOU ARE MINE.”

Isaiah 43:1

whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.”¹

For the next couple of weeks, why not take a few minutes each night to reflect on your day? What were the high points and low points? Did you thank God for the highs? How could you have reacted better to the lows by looking on the bright side? There’s something to be gained from even the worst situations if you look for it. By recasting the events of your day in a more positive light, you condition yourself to react more positively in the future.

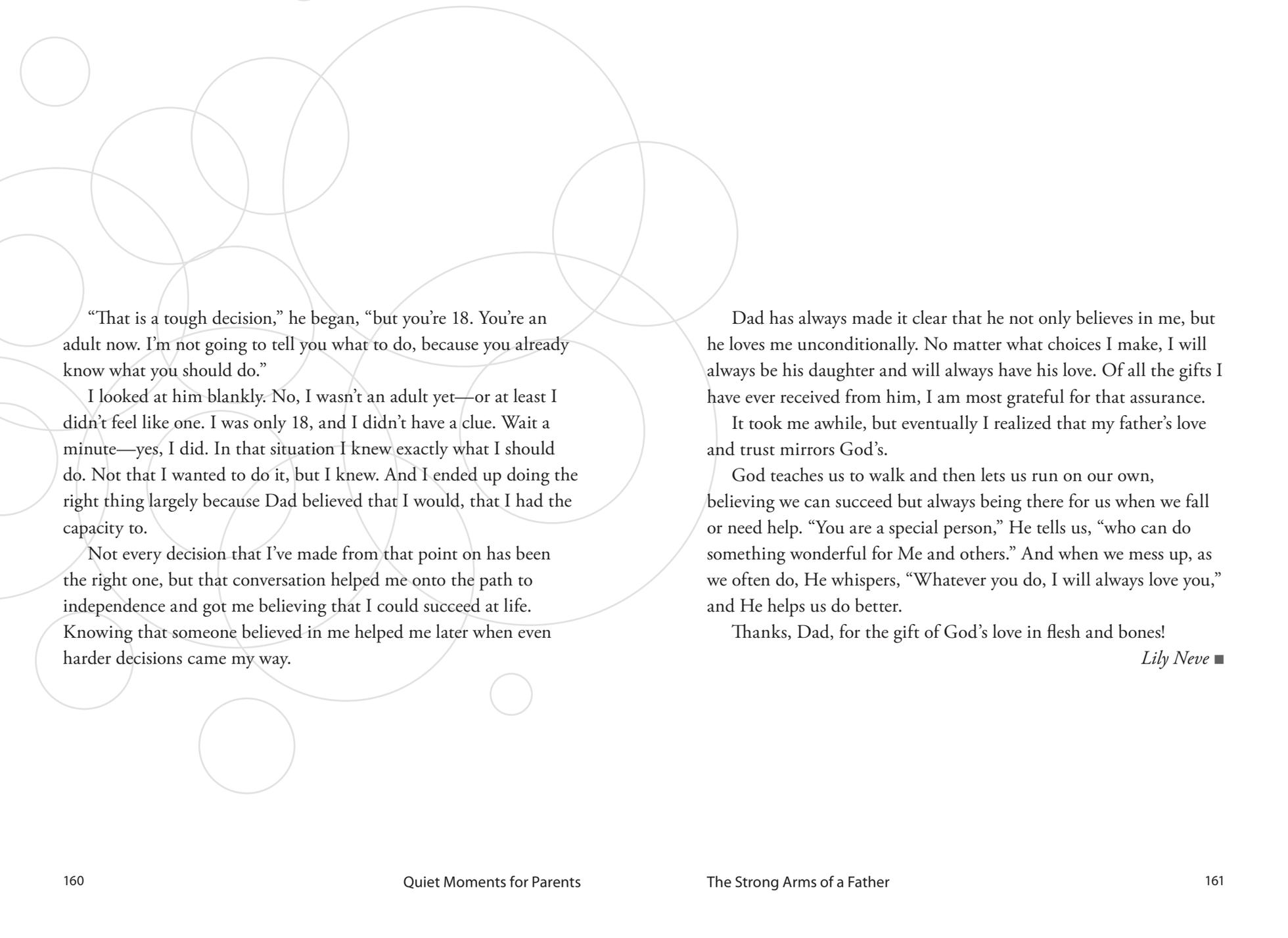
Abi May ■

I read once that a good father prepares us for our relationship with our heavenly Father, God.

My father may not realize it, but one thing that shaped my life was a conversation he and I had sitting on a hill overlooking our home the summer I was 18. He probably doesn’t even remember it—so simple and yet so typical of him and his wise and loving way of advising without overtly giving advice.

We talked about everything that day, and I found myself telling him about a boyfriend, the problems we’d encountered, and what our friendship might lead to. I don’t remember how I explained it all, but I do remember how awkward I felt. After I’d gotten it all out, I looked at him and asked plaintively, “What do I do now, Daddy? Tell me what to do.”

¹ Philippians 4:8



“That is a tough decision,” he began, “but you’re 18. You’re an adult now. I’m not going to tell you what to do, because you already know what you should do.”

I looked at him blankly. No, I wasn’t an adult yet—or at least I didn’t feel like one. I was only 18, and I didn’t have a clue. Wait a minute—yes, I did. In that situation I knew exactly what I should do. Not that I wanted to do it, but I knew. And I ended up doing the right thing largely because Dad believed that I would, that I had the capacity to.

Not every decision that I’ve made from that point on has been the right one, but that conversation helped me onto the path to independence and got me believing that I could succeed at life. Knowing that someone believed in me helped me later when even harder decisions came my way.

Dad has always made it clear that he not only believes in me, but he loves me unconditionally. No matter what choices I make, I will always be his daughter and will always have his love. Of all the gifts I have ever received from him, I am most grateful for that assurance.

It took me awhile, but eventually I realized that my father’s love and trust mirrors God’s.

God teaches us to walk and then lets us run on our own, believing we can succeed but always being there for us when we fall or need help. “You are a special person,” He tells us, “who can do something wonderful for Me and others.” And when we mess up, as we often do, He whispers, “Whatever you do, I will always love you,” and He helps us do better.

Thanks, Dad, for the gift of God’s love in flesh and bones!

Lily Neve ■

What makes a dad great

My son, hear the instruction of your father.

Proverbs 1:8

One father is more than a hundred schoolmasters.

George Herbert

Small boys become big men through the influence
of big men who care about small boys.

Author unknown

My father gave me the greatest gift anyone could give
another person: he believed in me.

Jim Valvano

Father!—To God himself we cannot give a holier name.

William Wordsworth

Any man can be a father. It takes someone special to be a dad.

Author unknown ■

The connection

FEAR NOT, FOR I AM WITH YOU;

BE NOT DISMAYED, FOR I AM YOUR GOD.

I WILL STRENGTHEN YOU,

YES, I WILL HELP YOU,

I WILL UPHOLD YOU WITH MY RIGHTEOUS RIGHT HAND.

Isaiah 41:10

God's idea of prayer is not a ritual, but loving and lively communication between a father and his beloved children.

But sad to say, most people don't think they can talk to God like that. Some think they're not religious enough, not righteous enough, or not spiritual enough. Some think He's too big, too far above them. Some think He's too busy to be concerned about them and their problems, which they think must seem awfully petty to Him. Some feel unworthy, not good enough. Some feel guilty or ashamed about things they've done. Some are even afraid of Him. If only they understood how differently God sees it!

The Love of God

God wants to have a personal relationship with each of us, and He wants it to be the deepest, most meaningful, most fulfilling and rewarding, most natural part of our lives. Now that's not to say He wants to take away from the other relationships and activities that we enjoy and consider important. To the contrary, He wants to be a part of all that. He wants to make our day-to-day living easier, He wants to give the things we experience greater meaning, and He wants to enjoy them with us. In a word, He wants to make our lives better. He wants to add a wonderful new dimension to all that we do—the dimension of His loving presence.

Julie Vasquez ■

WHO SHALL SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF CHRIST?
SHALL TRIBULATION, OR DISTRESS, OR PERSECUTION,
OR FAMINE, OR NAKEDNESS, OR PERIL, OR SWORD?
YET IN ALL THESE THINGS WE ARE MORE THAN
CONQUERORS THROUGH HIM WHO LOVED US.

FOR I AM PERSUADED THAT NEITHER DEATH NOR LIFE,
NOR ANGELS NOR PRINCIPALITIES NOR POWERS, NOR THINGS
PRESENT NOR THINGS TO COME, NOR HEIGHT NOR DEPTH,
NOR ANY OTHER CREATED THING, SHALL BE ABLE TO
SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD WHICH IS
IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD.

Romans 8:35,37–39 ■

TRUST IN HIM AT ALL TIMES, YOU PEOPLE;
POUR OUT YOUR HEART BEFORE HIM;
GOD IS A REFUGE FOR US.

Psalm 62:8

Don't make the mistake many parents do in thinking they have to carry the whole load themselves. If you do that, you'll soon wear out. You need to learn to share the load with Me.

I love your children and know exactly what they need day by day. I want to fill your every need so together we can fill theirs, but to get those things you must spend time with Me.

Cast your burdens upon Me. My shoulders are broad enough and My arms strong enough to carry any load. Make time to be with Me each day and I will answer your prayers for your children. I will make you the parent you want to be. I will do what you can't. And last but not least, your children will see a new light upon your face, for they will see Me there.

A message from Jesus received in prayer ■

Bring back the joy

At some point, most adults have looked at a child playing blissfully and wished they could turn back the clock. Children at play look happy, carefree, and thrilled about life. They laugh a lot, are easily entertained, and get excited about the simplest things. They have their problems and hurts too, of course, but they are resilient. Children live in the moment and generally spend more time being happy than adults. Here are a few ways you can recapture some of that childhood magic.

Rediscover the world around you. Take a closer look at things that form the backdrop of your days—buds on the tree you pass on your way to the car, rays of morning sun through the kitchen window, white clouds against a cerulean sky, the spiderweb on the drain spout.

Savor your food. Don't just eat and run; slow down long enough to think about and enjoy it. When was the first time you had that dish? What favorites do you have now that you didn't like as a child?

Learn something. Children don't have time to get into ruts because they're too busy discovering new things. Take up a new hobby or activity. Read a new author. Travel, if only vicariously via travelogue.

Reward yourself. Set a goal for the week and pick out a reward for when you reach it. Anticipation is one of the best incentives, and it works at any age.

Talk to a child. If you want a fresh perspective, ask a child about almost anything. Wit, wisdom, imagination, hope, pathos—they've got it all. Don't be surprised if you are revisited by some of your own childhood thoughts.

Take downtime. Your world won't come crashing down if you stop doing and accomplishing for a few minutes. Relax. Contemplate happy thoughts. Let your imagination run wild.

Be thankful for small things. A child can be delighted by a cheap gift, a chance to go outdoors, a bit of attention, a free swing at the park. Think of the little things you enjoy, and give thanks.

Alex Peterson ■

The puzzle

When I was 11, I became fascinated with jigsaw puzzles. My mother and I would relax together at the kitchen table, piecing together increasingly complex puzzles. It has been a while since I've had the time to assemble a major puzzle, but my toddler is learning to put simple ones together. I can take one look at the pieces and easily tell where they will fit, yet my little boy sometimes struggles to find the proper place for the piece he is holding. When he gets stuck and frustrated, he turns to me and I give him a suggestion or a clue. Eventually he figures out where each piece goes and is happy. I love that look of accomplishment that he gets when he has completed the puzzle.

Sometimes we face complicated situations where there appears to be no way out or through. It's often during those times that we realize "resorting to prayer" is our best option. How like children we are, trying to piece together and make sense of difficult situations ourselves, when God is ready, willing, and able to help. Like a parent, He enjoys helping us work on the puzzle of life.

Bonita Hele ■

“I was here first!”

CAST YOUR BREAD UPON THE WATERS,
FOR YOU WILL FIND IT AFTER MANY DAYS.

Ecclesiastes 11:1

My three-year-old son Manuel was playing an educational game on the computer when his six-year-old sister Alondra demanded that he let her have a turn. Manuel’s response was typical. “I was here first!”

I don’t know where Manuel picked that up, but it got me thinking. It’s a generally accepted principle of human society that those who “get there first” have more rights than those who get there after them. The first one to set foot on virgin land is entitled to take possession of it. The first one to find a pearl in the sea, or strike gold or oil may claim it as his own. The first one to make a scientific discovery or invention may patent his find and claim any profits that may result. The first one to sit at a restaurant table has more right to it than the fellow who arrives later. The first one to settle in on a particular spot on the beach becomes the owner of that spot for the day.

In my children’s case, if one of them has been playing for half an hour at the computer, I tell him or her that it’s time to let the other

one have a turn. Most other parents probably do something similar. But if we applied that principle to every aspect of society, there would be absolute chaos. Can you imagine a landowner saying, “I’ve had this plot of land for quite a while, so it’s time to let someone else enjoy it”? Or can you imagine a man who has a good job giving it to someone else who is out of work and short of money?

Those examples are rather extreme, but what about little acts of selflessness? How often do you see people who have a seat on the bus or subway offering it to able-bodied others who have just boarded, simply because they look like they’d appreciate a chance to rest their weary feet? Are little sacrifices like that too much to expect?—Or do we fail to make them simply because we don’t see anyone else making them and no one really expects us to do so either?

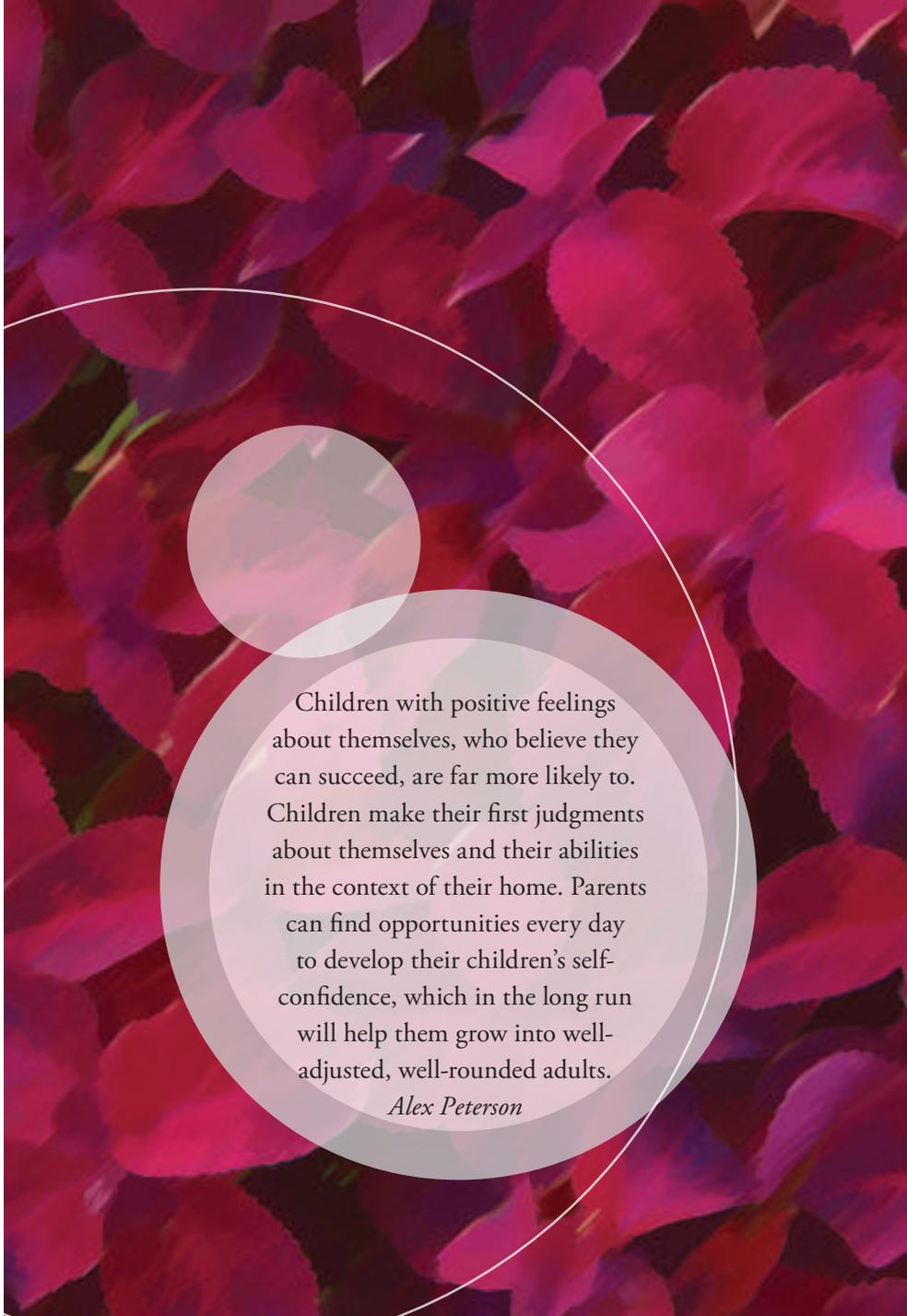
It’s a matter of selfishness, when you get right down to it, and selfishness is part of our sinful human nature. But the love of

Jesus can help us break out of that mold, overcome our selfish first reactions, swim against the tide, and do the loving thing. Jesus said, “Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away,”¹ and “Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.”² Those are certainly revolutionary concepts in this day and age. How we cling to our selfish rights! But that giving, selfless kind of love is actually what God wanted for us all from the beginning—and His love can help us achieve it. If we would practice this kind of love, so many problems would disappear. The world would be a different place. So why not try it? Give what you can, then get ready for God to flood you with more!

Jorge Solá ■

¹ Matthew 5:42

² Luke 6:38



Children with positive feelings about themselves, who believe they can succeed, are far more likely to. Children make their first judgments about themselves and their abilities in the context of their home. Parents can find opportunities every day to develop their children’s self-confidence, which in the long run will help them grow into well-adjusted, well-rounded adults.

Alex Peterson



Keys to a happy home

Treat your children gently and in love

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.

Galatians 5:22–23 (KJV)

Be kindly affectionate to one another...
in honor giving preference to one another.

Romans 12:10

Be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men.

Titus 3:2

A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but
be gentle to all, able to teach, patient.

2 Timothy 2:24

Fathers, do not provoke your children,
lest they become discouraged.

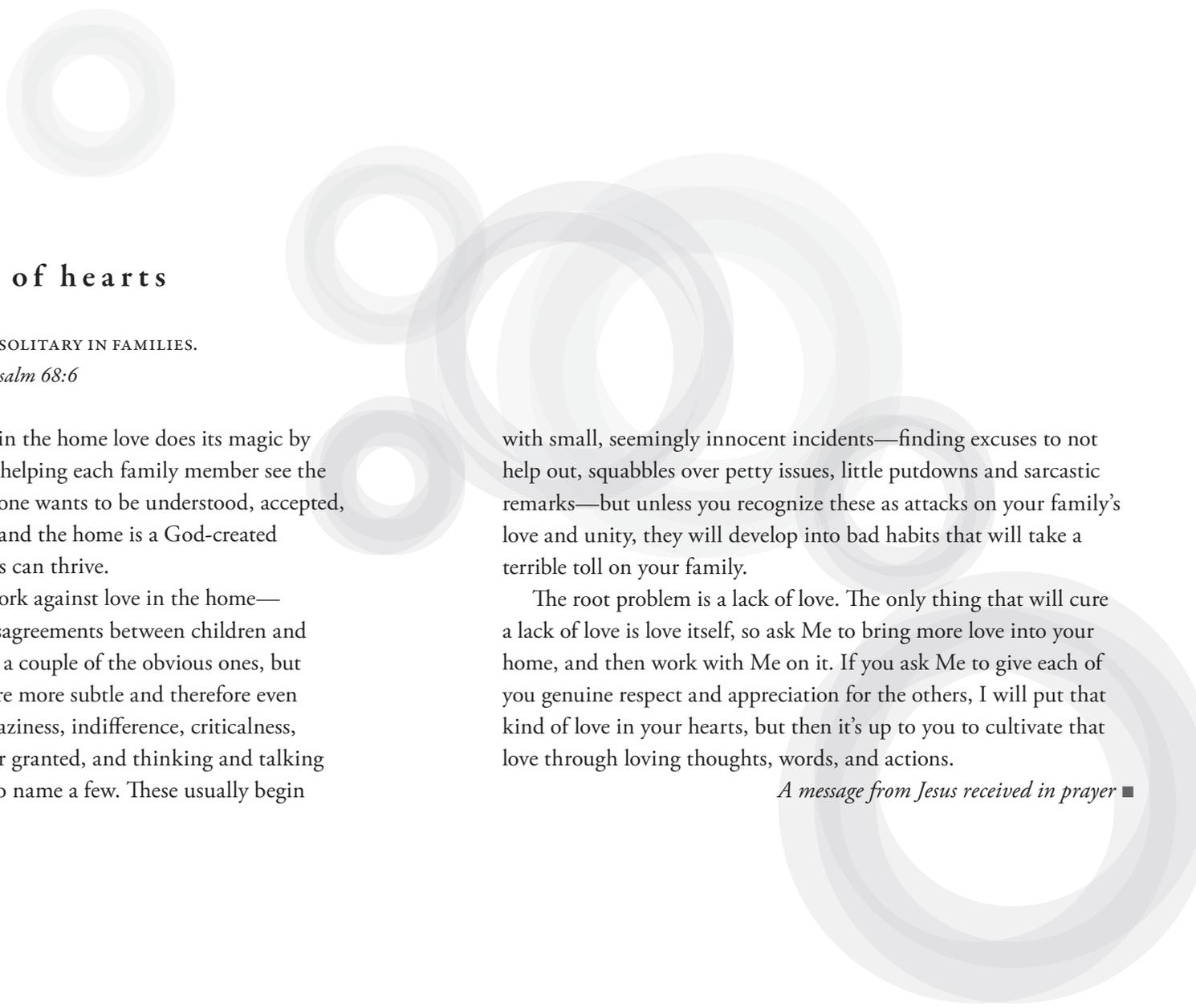
Colossians 3:21

She opens her mouth with wisdom,
And on her tongue is the law of kindness.

Proverbs 31:26 ■

Mothers are
instinctive
philosophers.

Harriet Beecher Stowe



Home of hearts

GOD SETS THE SOLITARY IN FAMILIES.

Psalm 68:6

Love has creative power, and in the home love does its magic by engendering unselfish acts and helping each family member see the others in a positive light. Everyone wants to be understood, accepted, and loved for who he or she is, and the home is a God-created environment where these things can thrive.

There are also things that work against love in the home—enemies of love, if you will. Disagreements between children and parents and sibling rivalries are a couple of the obvious ones, but there are other problems that are more subtle and therefore even more dangerous—selfishness, laziness, indifference, criticalness, nagging, taking one another for granted, and thinking and talking negatively about one another, to name a few. These usually begin

with small, seemingly innocent incidents—finding excuses to not help out, squabbles over petty issues, little putdowns and sarcastic remarks—but unless you recognize these as attacks on your family's love and unity, they will develop into bad habits that will take a terrible toll on your family.

The root problem is a lack of love. The only thing that will cure a lack of love is love itself, so ask Me to bring more love into your home, and then work with Me on it. If you ask Me to give each of you genuine respect and appreciation for the others, I will put that kind of love in your hearts, but then it's up to you to cultivate that love through loving thoughts, words, and actions.

A message from Jesus received in prayer ■

Just be your special self

HE CALLS HIS OWN SHEEP BY NAME.

John 10:3

Dressing my three preschool sons alike seemed sensible at the time. It made clothes shopping easier, for one, and because they were brothers with similar builds and complexions, they looked good in the same clothes. At home it gave a sense of order, however superficial, to a household with three little boys in perpetual motion, and in public it showcased what I was sure was the most adorable set of kids ever. On a deeper level, it appealed to my sense of equity. I didn't love one above the others, and had determined to never say or do anything that might cause them to think otherwise; I would treat them impartially in all things, big and small.

But as soon as they got old enough to make more of their own choices, coordinated clothes were out. As their individual needs changed and became more diverse, I found I continually needed to adapt and change how I gave each one my love and support. I still didn't love one more or less than the others, but I couldn't always treat them the same.

Now that those boys are grown men, in many respects they could hardly be more different from one another. My early attempts to establish uniformity now seem pure folly, and I thank God for giving each of them the sense to pursue his own interests, develop his own skills, and become his own person. Each probably has some things that he would like to change about himself—there's always room for improvement—but I love them dearly just as they are.

That's how God loves us. We compare ourselves unfavorably with others, or we fuss over something about ourselves that we don't like, but all the while He's trying to tell us, "I love you the way you are. If something needs to change, I'll let you know and will help you fix that, but otherwise just be your special self." If we could all believe that, how happy we would be!

Keith Phillips ■

Appreciation

A SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

Jesus taught, “Do to others as you would have them do to you.”¹ There are many ways to put this Golden Rule into practice; appreciation is one.

Think for a moment about your family, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances. Doesn't it make your day when one of them says or does something to show they appreciate you?

Everyone benefits from appreciation. Here's an exercise to strengthen your appreciation skills.

Pick three people that you interact with daily, and make it a goal to show appreciation to each of them at least once today. Be on the lookout for things that you genuinely admire about them or can thank or commend them for, and say or do something that tells them so. Take a moment at the end of the day to reflect on how it went. Did you meet your goal? What effect did it have on the recipients?

Repeat the exercise every day for a week, targeting some of the same people and some new ones as the week progresses. Make an

effort to not choose only those people you like most or feel closest to. Even the most difficult people to get along with have some good qualities.

Showing appreciation will not only give the recipient a lift, it will also improve your own outlook by helping you view those around you more positively. It seems to be human nature to notice the bad more easily than the good, and it's often relatively minor things that sour our relations, such as idiosyncrasies that we find irritating. By making a conscious effort to look for things to appreciate in others, focusing on the good will override human nature and make you a more positive person.

Appreciation is contagious. It may not happen overnight, but in time it will nearly always bring about a remarkable change in any home, workplace, or circle of friends.

Abi May ■

¹ Luke 6:31 (NIV)

My love for you is complete

LET US LOVE ONE ANOTHER, FOR LOVE IS OF GOD; AND
EVERYONE WHO LOVES IS BORN OF GOD AND KNOWS GOD.

1 John 4:7

Have you ever thought about the word “love” and all it encompasses? There are many different kinds of love—many facets of love.

There is the unconditional love that a mother feels for her children, and the love and respect that children feel for their parents.

There is the kinship love that brothers and sisters feel for each other, or the friendship love that you feel for your best friend.

There is the love and appreciation that a student or athlete feels for his teacher or coach who helps him to become a better person or player.

There is a love that a man feels for a woman, which makes him want to marry her and live with her day in and day out and protect and provide for her. And there is the love that a woman has for a man, which makes her want to bear his children and love and care for their family.

My love for you is all this and more. My love for you is complete, for I am love. I give each person a measure of My love, but My love is immeasurable and limitless. I love you with a perfect and everlasting love that will never be taken away.

A message from Jesus received in prayer ■

Keys to a happy home

Love is the cornerstone

That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory,
to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner
man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith;
that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to
comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length
and depth and height—to know the love of Christ
which passes knowledge; that you may be filled
with all the fullness of God.

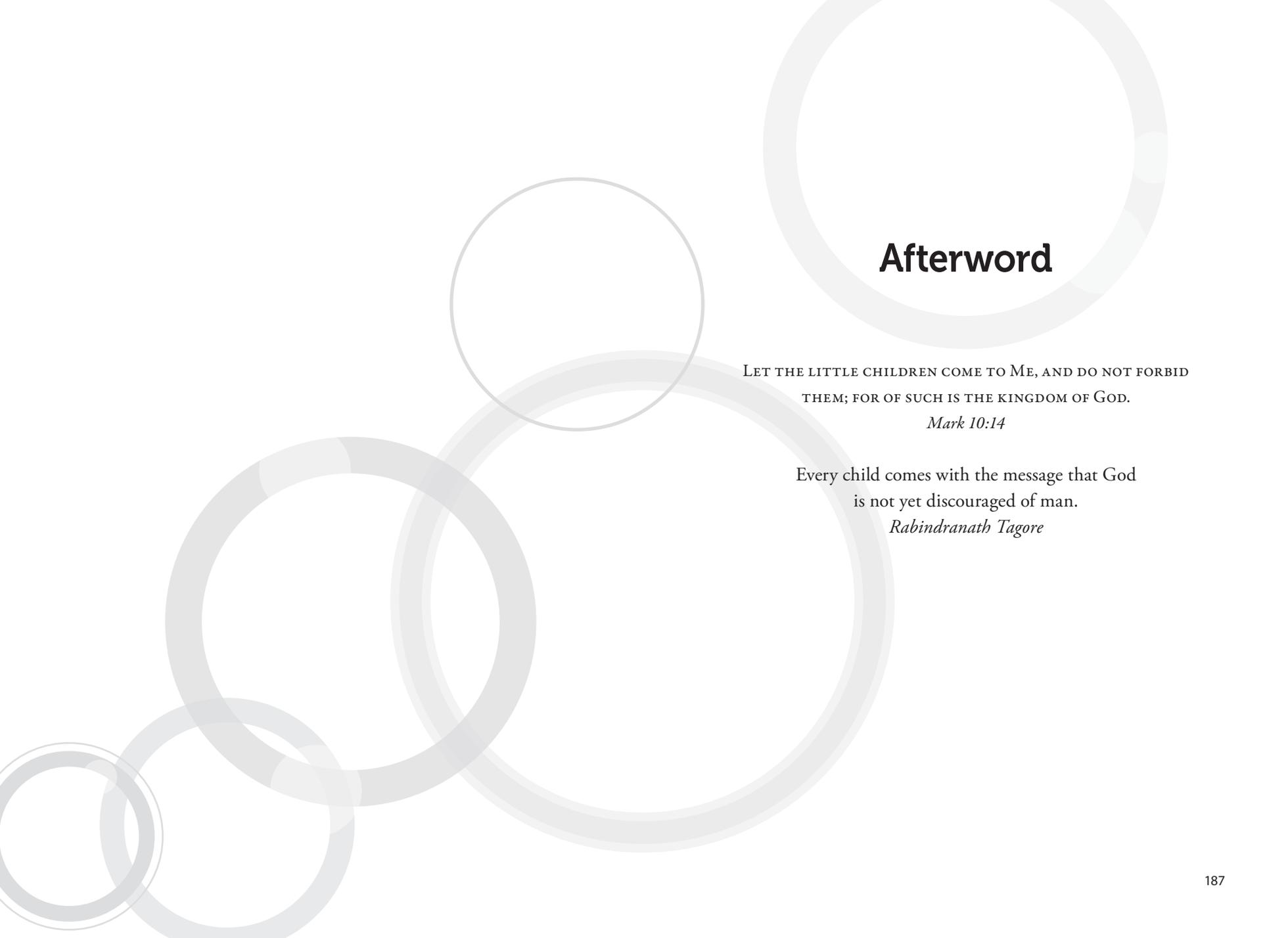
Ephesians 3:16–19

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another;
as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

John 13:34

That their hearts may be encouraged,
being knit together in love.

Colossians 2:2 ■



Afterword

LET THE LITTLE CHILDREN COME TO ME, AND DO NOT FORBID
THEM; FOR OF SUCH IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

Mark 10:14

Every child comes with the message that God
is not yet discouraged of man.

Rabindranath Tagore

Thank you, dear parents...

for being part of the miracle of bringing new lives into the world;
for loving the children I have entrusted to your care;
for opening your hearts and lives to these gifts of joy;
for teaching them that I am love by your own loving examples;
for giving them a listening ear and a shoulder to cry on;
for comforting them when they hurt and need extra tender
loving care;
for giving of yourselves for them, asking nothing in return, which
teaches them unselfishness and self-sacrifice;
for showing mercy, even when they least deserve it, that they might
understand My mercy and forgiveness;

for praying for them in all things big and small, that they might
learn the power of prayer;
for leaning on Me when your own strength runs out, which teaches
them that My grace and strength are always enough;
for never losing faith, which teaches them the rewards of faith;
for holding on to the promises of My Word, that they too might
learn to put their trust in Me;
for giving them back to Me, knowing that I always care for My own;
for loving them unconditionally, no matter where their choices may
take them;
for helping them grow into men and women we can all be proud of.

A message from Jesus received in prayer ■

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ABOUT THE COMPILER

Abi May is a British educator and member of the Institute for Learning. She is also a writer and compiler who specializes in inspirational anthologies. Previous books include:

The Wonder of Christmas (2007, Aurora Production)

The Wonder of Love (2011, Aurora Production)

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