

Created to
CARE

God's Truth for
Anxious Moms



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Peace in Our Kids’ Physical Protection

We are human moms with human kids—and we care about their very human needs. It’s strep throat season around here right now. I have spent the last two weeks taking the kids to the doctor, one at a time, as they graciously share their germs with one another. Trips to the doctor make for long days. We can’t get anything else done on those days. I fall into bed exhausted with a huge checklist left unchecked. But I push away that nagging checklist and remind myself that the kids got what they needed, and that’s what’s most important.

Physical protection is a huge part of motherhood. It can easily become all-consuming. As we saw in the intro, “Wired for Worry,” our concern for our children’s well-being is a good thing. Their physical needs have been entrusted to us. “Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb?” (Isa. 49:15). We were made to care. Unfortunately, it can be very hard for us moms to care without worrying.

God expects us to do what we can to protect our kids. Even if it means spending every day, for weeks on end, at the doctor’s

office. Maybe it means staying up late to research new recipes in order to protect your child from food allergies. But there comes a point when each one of us have to recognize our limitations. We do not have sovereign control over our kids' safety and well-being. But God does. And we must submit everything that we do for our kids to his control.

The most practical way we can submit our protective instincts to God is by saturating our motherhood with prayer. There will be many times when we reach the end of our strength, knowledge, and ability to protect our kids—but we can never reach the bottom of God's love and care. We are limited, but God is not. He is the one who is “able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think” (Eph. 3:20).

As we bring all our concerns to God in prayer—whether big or small, physical or spiritual—we must be willing to trust him with the answers to those prayers. God delights in giving us our daily bread, but we don't get to pick what that bread looks like. When I hold my toddler who is hot and crying with an ear infection, I pray that the pain will leave. I'm asking for bread from my Father. But I know that his definition of bread might be different from mine. It's like when my five-year-old asks for a cupcake right before dinner and I say no. He is too little to understand why. I can ask and ask and ask for health and safety for my kids, but I have to trust that God knows what they need. He knows how to use them (and me) for his glory. If more pain means more glory, only God can help me to accept that. He can also help me to praise him for it.

Caring vs. Idolizing

You know that special panic that rises in your chest when something doesn't feel quite right? That motherly instinct is

what snaps us into action. But when do we cross over from caring for our children to idolizing them? Idolizing our kids means holding them with a closed fist. It produces stress and anxiety. But we can pour ourselves into caring for our kids without idolizing them. Caring without idolizing looks like:

- not being the helicopter mom—enjoying your kids and watching them enjoy life within reasonable bounds of protection.
- being less likely to judge other moms or to feel judged by them—being confident in your decisions for your kids' safety rather than constantly second-guessing them.
- recognizing that your kids' well-being is ultimately dependent on God—not you. This protects you from guilt over things you can't control and from the temptation to think of all the hypothetical things that could go wrong.

How do you know if you are idolizing your kids' health and safety? Look at the three guidelines listed above and turn them into questions to test yourself: Are you an anxious helicopter mom? Are you judgmental of other moms' decisions about health and safety (or defensive about your own decisions)? Do you constantly feel guilty when your kids are sick or hurt? We can all answer yes to some or all of these questions at any given moment of the day. This is when we turn our anxiety back over to God and say, "I trust you. I've done what I can in my limited strength with my limited knowledge and limited power. I leave the results in your hands."

Sometimes when I'm anxious about my kids' safety, I think about my ninety-five-year-old grandma. She raised her kids on baby formula and canned food. She drove them around before car seats were invented. She did the best she could with the

resources that she had. And the generations after us will look at what we did as parents and say, “You did *what??*” We have nothing to lose from being as faithful as we can be, as long as we work with joy and leave the results to God.

Comfort for the “What-ifs”

When you become a mom, nobody warns you about a brand-new door that opens up in your brain. It’s not a cute, Chip-and-Joanna-Gaines farmhouse door. It’s a dark, foreboding door that you never walk through intentionally but that pulls you in anyway. It’s the door of the “What-ifs.” *What if I’m not cut out for this? What if I’m not doing this right? What if something goes wrong?*

One Thursday night in March of 2018, one of my what-ifs came true. My baby stopped breathing. I recognized the seizure immediately and called 911. My twenty-month-old son turned blue, and time stood still. “Hurry. Hurry,” I heard myself saying into the phone.

I have walked this path before. Another one of my sons also had a febrile seizure at the same age. When babies’ fevers spike too quickly, their little bodies can’t handle it. Febrile seizures are terrifying, but in the end they are harmless. They indicate a serious infection, but the seizures themselves leave no lasting damage.

As my baby’s breathing returned to normal and he lay limp on the couch, the paramedics walked me through what was next. We had to get him to the doctor right away to find out what was giving him such a high fever. Thirty minutes later we were sitting across from the doctor getting the results: strep throat. The infection set in so quickly that he didn’t have any symptoms before the seizure hit. He got his medication, his fever calmed down, and we were soon back in our own home.

Once all five kids were tucked into bed and the house was quiet, I finally took my first breath of the evening. *This is it*, I thought. *Now I can fall apart*. There had been no time to process what was happening during the event. Now I was left alone with my own thoughts . . . and that dreaded door.

The first time we experienced a febrile seizure, I walked through the door of the what-ifs for days. What if he hadn't started breathing again? What if it had been more serious? What if . . . what if. . . . It was hard to be thankful for my healthy baby when I was suddenly struck by the fragility of life. Things could change so quickly. How could I enjoy my baby knowing that it could all end at any second? New worries took the place of what should have been joyful relief.

But this second febrile seizure was different for me. When it was all over, I saw two clear choices in front of me: have a meltdown and freak out about all the things that could have gone wrong, or praise God for keeping my baby safe that night. I could live through all the terrible scenarios that *hadn't* happened, or I could thank God for another day to enjoy my baby.

In Melissa Kruger's Bible study on Philippians, *In All Things*, she tells about a near-death experience she had. She walked away from a car accident that should have killed her. Her reaction to the event revolutionized my thinking on worry versus gratefulness. "When we know we've been rescued, we look at everything in a different light, don't we?" she writes. "I came home and hugged my husband and children a little tighter, ate my dinner with a deeper enjoyment, and experienced an overwhelming sense of gratitude. My thankfulness overflowed into joy, even in the most mundane of tasks."

Wait. I thought that trials were supposed to sober us up. I thought that being anxious was just being realistic. Melissa's response shows the exact opposite. Close calls remind us that

we are not in control—and that’s a good thing. They remind us that this world is not our home—and that’s a good thing. Close calls don’t say to us, “Watch your back. God is ready to pull the rug out from under you at any moment.” They say to us, “God is in control. You will walk through what he ordains for you to walk through—nothing more, nothing less. He is on the throne, and he is good.”

Are the what-ifs stealing the joy from your motherhood today? My sister Rachel, in her article “A Surrender That Is Safe,” says that we worry because we don’t want to be surprised by pain. We buy the lie that “I need to worry in order to prepare myself for the future.”

When I laid my baby down after the events of that Thursday night, my heart was filled with joy. I looked at the door of the what-ifs, and I closed it. I felt a tremendous sense of gratitude in their place—as well as freedom to enjoy my son. I have no idea how long I will get to enjoy each one of my kids. But I do know that the what-ifs don’t prepare me for trials in the future. They only rob me of joy in the present.

The only way to close the door to the what-ifs is to walk through the door of gratitude instead. Trade each what-if for a praise. Replace the unknowns with the knowns. Thank God for something that you *know* to be true. When what-ifs cloud my thinking, here are a few of my favorite truths to cling to:

- Everything could change in a moment, but I know that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8).
- I don’t know what tomorrow holds, but “I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth” (Job 19:25).
- I cannot control the future, but I know that “in his hand

are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also” (Ps. 95:4)

- I don’t know how I will bear future trials, but I know that “he knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold” (Job 23:10).

Comfort in Painful Realities

Much of our anxiety is over things that haven’t actually happened. It’s produced only in our minds. But sometimes it does stem from real events. What do we do when our worries are not hypothetical—when we’re walking through real pain and heart-ache? Where does our comfort come from?

If you’ve experienced a close call with your kids, you know how it feels to tuck them in at the end of the day and say, “That was close. At least everyone is safe and healthy.” But sometimes we can’t say that. Sometimes we walk through painful trials with our kids and they’re not “okay.” It gives us an amazing opportunity to push our hope past “At least . . .” and further and deeper into something much more real.

Before we suffer, our hope is pretty shallow. “At least I have milk I can use in my coffee, even though I’m out of half and half. Whew.” Then a trial pushes us a little deeper. “At least I have AAA, even though I’m stranded on a busy highway. Whew.” The more our comforts and securities are stripped away, the deeper we dig to cling to something real and important. “The earthquake destroyed our home, but at least the kids are okay.” We tend to boil our “At leasts” down to health and loved ones—which are truly great blessings indeed. But sometimes God allows even those precious securities to be moved just out of our reach. And he teaches us a new depth of hope in the process.

My mom met Bev in college. They instantly bonded over

their involvement in Campus Crusade for Christ. They attended the same college Bible study, where they both met their husbands. Together they would embark on the exciting new adventure of raising families.

But Bev's journey soon took a very different turn from my mom's. In 1986 my mom and Bev both had babies. My mom gave birth to my sister—a healthy baby girl. Bev had a daughter, too—but something was wrong. Little Kristie was born with a rare muscle condition.

As Kristie grew, her family's life revolved around her. It had to. Bev and her husband Mike had to do things in order to protect Kristie that “normal” families didn't have to do. They had to forgo party invitations and regular outings, because even the smallest sickness was deadly to Kristie. Her weakened immune system could not protect her. Their money and time went to hospital stays instead of family vacations.

When Kristie was three years old, she caught an illness. Her body, weakened by her muscle condition, could not fight the illness. After five weeks in a coma, Kristie passed away. In a letter that Bev wrote to Kristie after she died, she said, “Dear Kristie, . . . Nearly daily you said, ‘Some day I will walk.’ ‘Some day I will dance.’ ‘Some day I will fly like Peter Pan.’ That some day is here, honey, and we are so happy for you.”

In her book for families of special-needs children, *A Never-Give-Up Heart*, Bev talks about a comment from another parent that she will never forget. When Kristie was born, another mom of a special-needs child told Bev, “This is hard, but it's not the end of the world.” Bev said that that statement was not necessarily true. It was the end of “a certain kind of world—a world where everything is perfect and ‘normal.’ . . . It was the end of a certain kind of world that we had dreamed of. But there is another world, one that I would have never chosen,

but that has proven to be . . . more fulfilling, meaningful, and in some ways, more wonderful, than any I would have ever imagined.”

There might come a time when our individual “worlds,” as we know them, end. But that is not necessarily a bad thing. It does not mean that we are alone or abandoned. Whatever new world we find ourselves in, we can be confident that God created it for us. He created it for our good and his glory, and he will be with us. In the darkest days of caring for Kristie and then grieving for her, Bev learned a depth of grace that she had never known. God’s strength and mercy sustained her when her hopes and dreams were destroyed. He did not take away the pain or the trial, but he showed her a new kind of beauty—the beauty of choosing joy.

Before Kristie passed away, Bev had another baby. He was a strong, healthy baby boy. A couple of years after Kristie passed away, Bev became pregnant again. “Finally,” she thought. “God will bring me the healthy daughter I’ve always dreamed of.” Not only was Bradley not a girl, but he was also not healthy. He had the same muscle condition as Kristie.

Bev and Mike got to enjoy eighteen years with their son before he joined his sister in heaven. In those years, Brad was often the strong one when his parents were weak. One day, reflecting on the concept of hope, Brad wrote, “Hope is very meaningful to me because it makes me optimistic and reminds me of my relationship with Christ, who is my salvation. . . . There is always hope no matter what happens.”

When I think about Bev and her children, I remember this hope. Although her kids’ bodies were weak and crooked, their outlook on life was shaped by faith. Both Kristie and Brad couldn’t wait to meet Jesus. They made everyone around them want to meet him, too.

It's a great reminder to me that my kids' bodies are temporary. Whether they are healthy or not healthy, their bodies were not made to last. Psalm 103:15–16 says,

As for man, his days are like grass;
he flourishes like a flower of the field;
for the wind passes over it, and it is gone,
and its place knows it no more.

I read that passage as a teenager and was very depressed by it. But now that passage gives me great comfort. It reminds me not to hold on too tightly to things that I can't keep anyway. We should pour into caring for our kids' bodies, but we should also pour into caring for their hearts. That's the part that does not pass away. God created our hearts to last forever (see Eccl. 3:11). You won't share endless, pain-free days with your kids here. But you might be worshipping with them for eternity, where God will "wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore" (Rev. 21:4).

Maybe you are a mom reading this book who has lost a child. The emotional pain is physically palpable. A dear friend told me that her heart literally ached when she lost her baby. She also told me that, because the pain ran deep, it created a deep path for God's truth in her heart. And her most encouraging words to me, just a few years after her loss, were "Healing does come."

Healing will come at different times for different people and in different ways. If you are currently living with loss, or living with a special-needs child or a child battling an illness, you are not alone. God is "near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit" (Ps. 34:18).

I love that I can read the same passage of Scripture hundreds

of times and still see something new. Suffering often causes things to jump off the page that I didn't see before. During a particularly dark time in my life, I read Psalm 62 and saw a word that I hadn't noticed before: *alone*.

For God *alone* my soul waits in silence;
from him comes my salvation.
He *alone* is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress; I shall not be greatly shaken. (Ps. 62:1-2)

There is no other comfort that compares to God. There is no rock, no salvation, and no fortress apart from him. As much as I want to build my life around the safety of my kids, a comfortable house, my husband, and financial security, none of those things will hold me. Only God will hold me and keep me from being shaken. Suffering causes us to narrow down our hope to the only thing that stands.

What Other Moms Are Saying

I love meditating on the fact that God is eternal. I can pray for eternal results, such as salvation for my kids, in the midst of my time-bound efforts to feed them and clothe them. That thought is life-changing for me! (Laura)

Practically, I think it's so important to teach our kids who safe and unsafe strangers are. Teach them to identify store employees, police officers, or moms with young kids if they ever need help. (Janet)

When my son was three, he was diagnosed with sensory processing disorder and ADD. My biggest stress-relief in caring for

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him has been prayer, as well as listening to my motherhood instinct. God gave me that instinct, and I find that I care for my son best when I listen to it. (Theresa)

Trusting God with my kids' physical safety is part of teaching them how to be adults *before* they actually become adults! I have to let go a little and let them have freedoms, even if it is hard for me. (Mary Lee)

I talk openly with my seven-year-old about some of the dangers of this world. I remind her to stand by her faith because, no matter what, we have God with us. The fact that I can't protect her from everything is a chance for me to point her to Christ. (Christel)

I was a tomboy when I was little, and my parents let me do whatever my brothers were doing. I fell out of the tree in our backyard, and I crashed my bike straight into a parked car. When I start to feel overprotective, I remember that bumps and bruises are part of life. (Rachel)

Reflection

1. What does the difference between caring and idolizing look like for you personally?
2. Read the following passage. How do these verses give us perspective on placing our hope in our kids' physical safety? "Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience" (Rom. 8:24–25).
3. First Peter 5:7 says, "[Cast] all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you." What is your greatest care right