



# PARENTING FIRST AID

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HOPE FOR THE DISCOURAGED

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MARTY MACHOWSKI

“Marty Machowski’s Bible-saturated, gospel-shaped writing has been a blessing to my family. As a pastor, his devotionals are my go-to resource for family worship. Marty has the heart of a shepherd, the wisdom of a sage, and provides hope-filled refreshment to any parent who is weary or discouraged. *Parenting First Aid* is a wonderful book that has my highest endorsement, and I encourage you to pick up a copy today.”

**Josh Mulvihill**, Executive Director of Church and Family Ministry at Renewanation; founder of GospelShapedFamily.com

“Parents can wisely face elephant-sized challenges with youth—but best with only one forkful of wisdom at a time. Machowski’s book serves God’s wise counsel in bite-size devotionals. This is not so much about *what to do* as a parent as it is about *who to be*. The lessons are brief, interesting, and with practical instruction that you can apply immediately. If challenging parenting drains you, exasperates you, confuses you, frustrates you, these weekly meals will nurture you.”

**Rick Horne**, Author of *Get Outta My Face!: How to Reach Angry, Unmotivated Teens with Biblical Counsel* and *Get Offa My Case!: Godly Parenting of an Angry Teen*

“Many Christian parents have a rich knowledge of God’s Word, but they don’t always understand how to apply that knowledge to the parenting trials God sends their way and can find themselves in a desert of parenting worries. In *Parenting First Aid*, Machowski brings the refreshment of Scripture to that desert. I found myself in tears as the rivers of the Word flowed into some parched corners of my life.”

**Chap Bettis**, Executive Director of The Apollos Project; author of *The Disciple-Making Parent*

“Parenting is challenging work. It’s also a gift from a God and a unique opportunity to display God’s glory as we lovingly shepherd our children and teach them the gospel of Christ. Marty Machowski’s new book, *Parenting First Aid*, is a timely and encouraging reminder for parents to persevere. Every weary parent needs this book.”

**R. Albert Mohler, Jr.**, President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“If you’ve got parenting figured out, this book is not for you. For the rest of us, here is good medicine from God’s Word—not for our child’s heart, but for ours. As I read, I was repeatedly refreshed by Marty’s unblinking candor about the challenges of children and the faithfulness of God. In these pages, you’ll find wisdom for the weary and hope for the hurting.”

**Champ Thornton**, Pastor; author of *The Radical Book for Kids* and *Pass It On: A Proverbs Journal for the Next Generation*

“God has given my wife and me the privilege of parenting four children, each one adopted as an older child from backgrounds of neglect, trauma, and abuse. What a delightful gift Marty Machowski has provided for parents like us—parents for whom there are days when ‘success’ is simply surviving and loving one another to the end of the day. *Parenting First Aid* is gentle, honest, raw, and wholly centered on the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

**Timothy Paul Jones**, Author of *Family Ministry Field Guide*; C. Edwin Gheens Chair of Christian Family Ministry, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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MARTY MACHOWSKI



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## Dedication

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*I dedicate this book to my wife, Lois,  
my partner in parenting  
and best friend.*

*To Lois:*

I trust, my love, when you read these pages,  
that tears of gratitude for our Lord will fill your eyes  
as they have mine.

For only by his grace have we come this far  
and only by his grace shall we remain.





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# Introduction

A part from the first two months of sleepless nights and the time later spent working through potty training, I started out a confident parent. I read every recommended parenting book I could get my hands on and was determined to be a great dad. How difficult could parenting be? I planned to simply drive the foolishness from my children with consistent, loving discipline. I firmly believed the Bible verse that promised that if I simply trained my children up in the way they should go, they would not depart from it. You can read it for yourself in Proverbs 22:6. Being a military man, I believed effective parenting depended on effective discipline.

I remember hearing Tedd Tripp share a message at Westminster Theological Seminary around the time that his groundbreaking book, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, was released. My wife, Lois, and I were only two years into parenting at that point, and I remember thinking, *This is the piece we're missing*. Tedd's excellent teaching rightly corrected my military approach to raising our kids by the law and instead helped us to address our children's hearts. Tedd's book also injected an emphasis on grace and a critical gospel component to our parenting. But what Tripp's book could not do—what no book or method could do—was to prepare us for the trials God had

planned for us to go through. God wasn't just after the hearts of our children; he was after our hearts too.

At the time, we thought our hearts were fine. We did our best to use the wisdom gathered from the many books we read to trial-proof our parenting. So we decided early on to home-school our children, since that would give us more hours each day to disciple our kids. We regulated their intake of popular culture, not allowing them to watch a ton of television. We monitored their choice of friends, but we were not prudish. We encouraged our kids to read and didn't ban popular fiction books. Our kids participated in our church home-schooling ministry, growing up in a class of more than a dozen other homeschooled kids, so they were not isolated. We are a close family and have enjoyed adventurous times away, like camping in the wilderness. Life was simple back then: we had flip phones but no tablets. Dial-up internet ran so slowly that downloading inappropriate images was next to impossible. We held consistent family devotions—in fact, I wrote a book on family devotions. As far as we could tell, we were doing everything right to ensure that our kids would grow up to be solid, strong Christians. Many of our friends did the same.

But then it happened—God allowed a trial to upset our utopia. I remember as if it were yesterday the call from the police, asking me to pick up my eldest son at the station. Who was he arrested with? Another church kid. Though I had done many things right, God had a tender lesson in humility and dependence planned especially for me. I will never forget the encouragement the Lord gave me in the midst of those difficult days: “I don't want you parenting standing up; I want you parenting kneeling down.”

In the moments of my greatest trial, I required a bit of *Parenting First Aid*. I needed to steep my soul in the warm bath of God's Word and refocus on what truly mattered. I needed to draw near to God and rest secure in the palm of his hand,

and to be bandaged up through the comforting ministry of his Holy Spirit.

Today, raising children hasn't gotten any easier. We now have smartphones and tablets, transgender bathrooms in department stores, two hundred more TV channels, porn images downloading in an instant and text messages that disappear with no record of their existence. Parenting is a fierce battle these days, and I see more and more wounded in the fight. I hear desperate casualties crying, "Medic! Medic!" all around me.

I've written *Parenting First Aid* as a wartime medical kit for parents in the thick of the battle. I'm not talking Band-Aids and aspirin; this kit has plasma, sutures, and splints. The goal is to encourage your soul with the Scriptures, to help you gain strength to trust in a God who can capture the heart of the most rebellious son or daughter, and to help you through the most heart-rending parenting situations.

Among the greatest threats we face as believers are the lies that the devil throws at us day and night amid our troubles. It's a struggle to find fresh faith to make it through. The apostle John, describing the success of the saints in Revelation, tells us that they conquered the accuser of the brothers by "the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony" (Revelation 12:11). To help you do the same, I've included gospel-rich devotions augmented by real-life testimonies that will help you cling to hope and remind you of God's faithfulness in your parenting storm.

If you are early in your parenting journey, read this book. Utilize the Scripture it contains to strengthen your faith for the trials that are sure to come. Whether you realize it or not, parenting is a battle, and God means to prepare you to fight with faith. If you're coming to this book mid-battle, *Parenting First Aid* will help keep you in the fight, trusting God for the lives of your children. For those broken from the fight, struggling



to hold on, let me encourage you with this: there is one word that, more than any other, strengthens soldiers to keep fighting. That word is “reinforcements”! The sight of fresh troops pouring onto the battlefield to help hold the line encourages the weariest soldier to keep fighting to the finish.

Some may ask, “But what if my children never turn to God?” While Scripture doesn’t guarantee that every child of every believer will turn from their sin and trust in the Lord, it does encourage us to trust God and his power to save. In spite of our own parenting failures and our children’s rebellion, we must never give up hope that our merciful God has a plan to reach our children by his Spirit. The goal of this devotional is to strengthen you to persevere for as long as it takes for God to rescue your children. Stand strong, never give up hope, and know that God is able to save.

Each chapter begins with a creative illustration to start off the week. This is followed by three devotions. Plan to cover a chapter per week. Do the first devotion on day one, then take time the next day to consider the questions and assignments that follow. So, if you read the assigned Scripture passage and commentary from the first devotion on Monday, take time Tuesday to answer the questions. Read the next passage and commentary on Wednesday and answer the questions on Thursday. Repeat this pattern on Friday and Saturday and read “Real Life” story on Sunday, day seven. This slower, more contemplative pace gives you a full week of material. You can, of course, go through the material at a faster pace and read a new Bible passage each day. If you take it slow, the twenty chapters will take four or five months to finish. If you read a new passage each day, you will finish in two months. Keep a journal as you go and use it to write out your answers to the questions and assignments. If you also write out your prayers for your children, you’ll have a wonderful record of God’s faithfulness as he answers.

## Introduction

The Spirit of God working through the Word is ready to reinforce our efforts. So take the next few months and soak in the encouragement of God's Word. Draw your confidence not from your own ability to parent, but from God's ability to save, his power to transform, and his willingness to help. Your reinforcements have arrived and you couldn't have a stronger Partner in the battle!



## CHAPTER 1

# God Planned Your Family

## Psalm 139

### **Introduction to the Week**

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No matter what you are going through as a parent, you are not alone. God is with you. Most Christian parents believe this, and yet trials that weigh upon us can cause us to doubt. We do well when life is running smoothly, but when we face a trial that doesn't go away, it tests the strength of our trust in God. We thought God was there to help us, but when our prayers seem to go unanswered, we are not so sure. The Enemy is all too eager to whisper his lies in times of doubt to discourage us—"God is not with you. He is not in control, and you are on your own." Our doubts and the temptations of the devil draw our gaze away from God and onto our present challenges. We fight back with renewed prayer, but if our trials persist, we can buckle under their weight and succumb to the hopeless conclusion that we are alone in our struggle. God has done all that he can but is powerless to help us, or worse: he doesn't care.

How do we combat this problem and regain the high ground of faith? The answer is simple: we must fight lies with the truth of God's Word. Now, that may sound like the "proper" Christian answer to the problem, but the fact is that

it's the only answer. If you are tempted to think, *I've tried it before and it didn't work*, dive in and give it another try.

God is our only hope and our only help, and he's written a book full of encouragements to bandage our parenting soul. There is no better place to begin than in the book of Psalms. David, the writer of most of the psalms, experienced great trials in his life and wrote many of them as his cry to God for help. During one of his struggles, David cried out to God with the words of Psalm 139, sharing fundamental truths that are preserved for us to read. They serve as an anchor for our parenting souls. God is always present, he is in complete control, and he alone can deliver us.

## Day One

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### God Is with You

O LORD, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.

Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the

light about me be night,” even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you. (Psalm 139:1–12)

## Ponder Anew

Soak in the reality that God is with you. He knows everything about your current situation. Not only that, God knows everything about everyone, all at the same time. God is interacting with the thoughts and intentions of every one of the more than seven billion people on the earth, all at the same time. Scripture tells us that his understanding is infinite (Psalm 147:5). He searches all hearts and knows the intent of our thoughts (1 Chronicles 28:9), and has numbered the very hairs of our heads (Matthew 10:30).

If you ask them, most Christians will assent to the belief that God is omnipresent (that is, he is fully present everywhere, all the time). But secretly, they doubt God’s presence in one place—their own life. “God is everywhere else, but not with me.” We have the audacity to say that God is everywhere but then doubt that he is present with us in our trial. Isn’t it crazy how our sinful pride works? Satan is ever eager to sow his temptations in the field of our doubts.

The place to begin winning the war against our pride and Satan’s lies is to review the truth of the psalmist and *believe*. Put your faith in God and breathe the free air again. Let the dark clouds of despair lift from around you; dare to believe that God is present and that he loves and cares for you. David isn’t describing a distant, uncaring God. Instead, we see the tenderness of God as our parent, watching over our shoulder, hemming us in so that we do not stumble into dangers greater than we can handle.

The truth, “Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether,” is echoed by Jesus when he

taught the disciples how to pray. Jesus told them not to be like the Gentiles who “heap up empty phrases,” for your “Father knows what you need before you ask him” (Matthew 6:7–8). From there Jesus goes on to teach his disciples the Lord’s Prayer. One of its most amazing features is its shortness. God is near his children and we can be confident that he hears our simplest prayers.

While we lift up our children to God in prayer day by day, a prayer for help in time of need can be as short as “Deliver me from evil and supply my daily bread.” God knows what you need because he is with you in your struggle, patiently waiting for you to call upon him.

## Bring It Home

- Which truth in Psalm 139:1–12 is hardest for you to believe—that God is all-present, that he knows your situation, or that he cares for you?
- What is most encouraging to you from this psalm?
- Reread Psalm 139:1–12 out loud as your prayer to God. As you read each phrase, make it your own and purpose to believe it in your heart.

## Day Two

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### God Is in Complete Control

For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book

were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.  
(Psalm 139:13–16)

## Ponder Anew

Life began for each of our children at conception. You may think that I am referring to the exact moment of fertilization—the moment God began knitting together each our children within the womb. But that is not the conception to which the psalmist refers. He takes us back much further. Life began for each of our children in the mind of God, when he conceived of them and recorded their days in his book. God is so powerful that his determination of the future conception of a child results in that child's certain future. There has never been a single child that God determined to create that he failed to deliver. So, when you hear someone say that life begins at conception, remember that life began in the mind of God when, in his sovereign control, he planned each of our days and the days of every one of our children.

Still, it can be difficult to discern what God is doing with our lives. Many of our days don't seem well-planned at all. When life's trials crash in, it feels very much as though God has lost control of his broken world. But he has not lost control. We see things from the perspective of our temporal reality and we are influenced by our present needs. But God is not limited to our reality. He knows the end from the beginning. He uses the trials and difficulties to shape us like clay on a potter's wheel.

There is much we can learn about God's handiwork by watching a potter slam his clay down upon the wedging table, crushing it. Then, after slicing the clay and stacking the two pieces, he thrusts it down, so that the two are crushed together again. Over and over he repeats the process to ensure that the



clay's moisture content, color, and texture are uniform. Why is this apparent violence done to the clay? To prepare it for a second, greater trial of fire that it must endure to become a useful vessel, strong and finely decorated with a glossy glaze, reflecting the beauty of its creator. So too does God work the trials of our lives for his greater purpose, that we too might reflect his glory.

The apostle Peter, who was well acquainted with trials, said, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you" (1 Peter 4:12). Peter said that our present trials are necessary "so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:7).

As parents, we loathe life's trials. We rightly seek to safeguard our children. We childproof our homes and encourage them to wear helmets when they ride their bicycles. But no helmet can protect them from sinful hearts bent on destroying themselves, nor can we childproof their entire universe to hold back every serious life threat. Difficult trials that are hard even to mention—a sudden illness, abuse by a friend or family member, a marriage breakup that leaves your children caught between two households, a strong-willed child who grows up to reject your instruction and run away, the list of hardships goes on and on. Yet we must not fear. Whether you are currently enduring a difficult trial or you are trying to prepare yourself for a possible future challenge, Psalm 139 is like gold in those situations. If we remember that God is in control and that every one of your children's days were known to God before one of them came to be, we can find rest in the midst of the storm. It surely has its appointed end.

Knowing that God is in control may not lessen the trial. But it can give us the confidence to pray. If you are going through a

trial, cry out to God for help, knowing that he is the Sovereign Lord over all. If you are reading this and you are not yet in a trial, ask God to help you when the next one comes along.

## Bring It Home

- How can we find comfort in knowing that God planned every one of our days and they are written in his book?
- How have you seen God use the trials of your life for your good? How have they shaped you?
- How can Peter's encouragement in 1 Peter encourage us when we find ourselves in a fiery trial? (Answer the question and then look up Peter's encouragement in 1 Peter 1:8–9.)

## Day Three

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### God Is Our Deliverer

How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!  
How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them,  
they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still  
with you.

Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God! O  
men of blood, depart from me! They speak against  
you with malicious intent; your enemies take your  
name in vain. Do I not hate those who hate you, O  
LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against  
you? I hate them with complete hatred; I count  
them my enemies.

Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try  
me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any  
grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting! (Psalm 139:17–24)

## Ponder Anew

To this point, we've discussed God's complete control over all things. We've touched upon some of God's most amazing attributes. God is omniscient (all-knowing); he knows all of our days—in fact, he knows every day of every person who ever lived and he saw those days before he created the world. We also reviewed his omnipotence (his unlimited power) as revealed in his ability to execute his plan. His plan never fails and he can work even fiery trials for our good. That leads us to the conclusion that he must be omnipresent (all-present everywhere) for he works across the world in everyone's lives at the same time. Isn't it good to know that we do not need to take turns to access God? It is not David alone who has a unique hotline to heaven. God can help you too.

If the idea that you have access to the almighty, omniscient, omnipresent Creator of the universe is difficult to comprehend, you are not alone! That is David's response too. We saw it first in verse 6, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it." And now we see it again in verse 17, "How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand." We can no sooner count the sand than fully comprehend our God. But aren't you glad that your God is that big—too big to comprehend, bigger than your problems?

After admitting that God is beyond his ability to understand, David turns the corner and cries out to his all-powerful God for deliverance. It is enough to know that he is bigger than our trials; our difficulties are not beyond his capacity to transform. With these words, "Oh that you would slay the wicked" (v. 19), David called upon God to war against the evil at work in the trials of his life. What a joy to be able to call upon the same unfathomable God, who is all-knowing, all-present, and all-powerful to deliver us from the evil that presses

in. Elsewhere, David prayed, “Arise, O LORD! Save me, O my God! For you strike all my enemies on the cheek; you break the teeth of the wicked” (Psalm 3:7). That is a great prayer to add to your daily prayer list!

It is important to remember that David doesn't have a personal vendetta against a particular person. He appeals to the heart of God to judge the evil that stands against God's purpose. David writes in Psalm 69:9, “Zeal for your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me.” When we as parents discern the evil and wickedness pressing against our children, we can look to David's prayer as a model for our own and call out to God to move, knowing that he is a holy God who will judge and punish sin (Romans 1:18) and bring all wickedness to an end (Malachi 4:1–3).

Finally, David invites God to search his heart (Psalm 139:23). He bows his knee to his all-powerful God. When he humbly says, “Lead me,” David surrendered any argument against God and admitted his need for God's help in his fight. There is no more precious outcome to a trial than when it brings us to a place of surrender and trust in our good and gracious God. A newborn child may fight against his mother's breast and may need at times to be forced to open his mouth, only to discover that this intrusion into his personal space is meant to supply the nutrition he needs. But oh how satisfied he becomes with a full belly of fresh milk! In the same way, God uses trials to teach us to depend on him, a topic we'll return to frequently in these devotions.

So by faith, we surrender to our God—a God so vast and mighty that we might sooner count the grains of sand than plumb the depths of his nature or fully understand his plan for our lives. But by faith we trust, knowing that God is good, and all that he brings us is for our good. We, like David, bow our knee and pray, “Lead me in the way everlasting.”

## Bring It Home

- Where is it most difficult for you to trust God right now?
- Who are the enemies you need God to conquer?
- Cry out to God in prayer and ask him to search your heart, to show you any areas of sin that stand in the way of his plan for your life. Ask him to lead you in the way everlasting.

## Real Life

---

My wife, Lois, came from a family of six children. I grew up with two brothers and two sisters, a sibling group of five. So it was natural that we both wanted a larger family. Lois was twenty-seven when we got married, which made us eager to start trying for children within a year of our wedding. A year later, with no baby announcement to offer our eager parents, we began to wonder if something was wrong. Several trips to the doctor and a battery of tests failed to uncover a single problem. That seemed like good news but it couldn't erase our doubts. If there was nothing medically wrong, why couldn't we conceive? Only God knew.

We buckled down in prayer and, while doing so, received the distinct impression that we were supposed to pray for twins. Lois's grandmother gave birth to twins, and they say twins skip a generation. But more than that, it felt like God commissioned us to ask for two. Still, it became increasingly difficult for my wife to share the news, "My period came today." She did so through tears. We counted days, took her temperature, charted data, and sought to time things just right, but without success for three long years.

It wasn't easy celebrating our friends' baby announcements, baby showers, and baby pictures. It was particularly challenging for Lois, who was tempted to think it was her fault. She clung

to the stories in Scripture of God healing the barren woman, and we just kept praying, “God, give us twins.”

Then one day Lois’s period was late, and I was off to the drugstore to purchase a pregnancy test. Somewhere in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania (we were tent camping), a double pink line appeared in the stick’s oval window. We rejoiced, and Lois called the doctor to set up an appointment for an eight-week ultrasound. Since we had taken so long to conceive, the doctor wanted to get a look at our “pregnancy” to ensure it was a “healthy one.” Now that my wife was expecting, a whole new set of fears flooded my mind. *What if the baby isn’t healthy? What if the doctor can’t find a heartbeat? What if it’s not twins?*

Ever since the first thought came to pray for twins, Lois and I had faithfully asked God for two. In an accountability group with my fellow pastors, we filled out a sheet with our prayer requests and life goals. Each month under “family” I wrote, “Pray for twins.” So as we drove to our appointment, I began a conversation. “We need to be grateful if the doctor tells us we are only having one.” Lois agreed and we prepared our hearts for the strange disappointment of hearing the doctor say “your baby” singular.

After we checked in, the doctor ushered us into the ultrasound room. The technician had not yet arrived but our doctor, eager to get started, sat down next to my wife and turned on the machine. Within a few seconds, an image popped up of a blinking white dot in the middle of an inch-long oval. “There it is, a healthy pregnancy,” the doctor announced with a smile on his face. Lois and I both silently prayed, “Thank you for the one.”

Just then the technician burst through the door and protested as she observed the doctor in her chair. “Hey, what are you doing? You are doing my job. I guess I’m not needed anymore!”

“No, no, I only turned the machine on,” the doctor replied. “You’re the only one who can focus this thing and get the measurements.” The woman moved the wand around, tweaked a few knobs and soon a second oval appeared on the screen next to the first.

“This is why you need me,” the tech reported, pointing at the screen. “You’re not having one, you are having two.” Instantly, Lois and I erupted in excitement, our rejoicing changing from a silent “Thank you for the one,” to shouting, “We’re having twins, we’re having twins!” As we both celebrated out loud, the doctor and the tech confused our rejoicing for hysterics and began to assure us that everything would be okay. “Plenty of people have had twins and survived. You are going to be okay,” they said to calm us.

After we quieted down and explained the reason for our celebration, we left for home, filled with joy. At that moment, we felt blessed by the gift of twins, but our journey raising those two kids wasn’t always easy. The challenges we faced helped us appreciate that we were not parenting alone. God was helping us build our house.