



Turning Worry into Worship

Karen

*She is clothed with strength and dignity; she
can laugh at the days to come.*

—PROVERBS 31:25

J think I have the worry gene, and I'm sure I got it from my mother. She passed down to me her aqua-blue eyes, her slightly crooked smile, and her tendency to worry.

When I was a teenager, I thought it was strange that my mom couldn't go to sleep until I got home. Then I got married, became a mom, and then years later, my children became teenagers. And guess what? Now I do what my mom did: sit on the couch appearing to watch television while my mind rehearses the quickest route to the hospital.

We moms can find endless reasons to worry. Kids. Marriage. Finances. Health. Relationships. The future. If we let our thoughts run wild, we can concoct all sorts of terrible scenarios, all starting with "what if." *What if my husband gets laid off? What if my aging parent needs to live with us or move into a nursing home? What if my teen makes a bad choice? What if something is wrong with my baby's development?*

Over time I've noticed something about worry: 99 percent of my past fears never came to pass. However, I spent oodles of time fretting about them. How I wish I could redeem that time and do something productive instead! What if I had turned my worry into worship?

Contrast my attitude with the woman in Proverbs 31:25: "She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come."

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There's no weariness in her thoughts and actions. She laughed at the days to come—not in a careless sort of way, but with a confidence that came from God.

Because she wore strength and dignity due to her faith in God, she had a smile on her face and laughter in her heart when she considered the future. She trusted in God, whose faithfulness in the past assured her He would work out circumstances in the future.

God can use our tendency to worry to grow our faith. As we learn to turn our panic into fervent prayer and praise, trusting God's plan and timing, our relationship with God will be strengthened. Each time we turn worry into worship, we will find it easier to laugh at the days to come, like our Proverbs 31 sister.

God knows our future as well as He knows us. Our act of trust is to seek to know Him more as we place our future in His hands.

Oh, and to laugh a little more often.

Dear Lord, help me turn my worry into worship, believing that You are in control of the future. May I rest in Your loving arms, knowing You have my best interests at heart. In Jesus' name, Amen.

- What are your three greatest worries as a mom? List them.
- Take each of those three worries and pen a prayer to God instead.



Strong Love

Ruth

We love because he first loved us.

—1 JOHN 4:19

One thing I tell my children often is this: “I will always love you. Nothing you ever do will make me stop loving you.”

Every single time I whisper this simple phrase, I can’t help but recall God’s unending pursuit of love in my own life. I’m thankful that God did not give up on me. I didn’t obey at His first request, but God patiently pursued me, and His unconditional love eventually overcame me.

What drew me to God was not rules, but His gracious invitation for a relationship. It was His love that drew me to love Him. I knew I had fallen short and broken His law. Nobody needed to tell me I wasn’t perfect. I needed forgiveness, and I found it when I least deserved it.

The gospel informs us that our acceptance by God as His daughters is based on Jesus’ performance, not our own. It’s in the context of this loving relationship that we desire to live in obedience: “We love because he first loved us.” He took the first step. Our obedience is a response to His love.

This is precisely why our children need to be reminded of our unconditional love for them. They need first and foremost a relationship and not just a list of dos and don’ts. Rules may change behavior, but they cannot change the heart. Our children need us to pursue them patiently even when they don’t deserve it as our Father does with us.

We need to be willing to set aside the distractions and the next task

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because reaching our children's hearts requires our attention. Love slows down and listens.

Listen to your children's hearts. Listen to their fears. Listen to their dreams. Listen to their concerns. Love encourages. It spurs children on without squashing them in the process. Love inspires, casting a vision for doing better.

God's love motivates our obedience to love Him back. Instead of harsh discipline that breaks the spirit, let's remember how our Father lovingly corrects us and reminds us of His unconditional love. Let us do the same for those He has entrusted to us.

Father, thank You for the way You have loved me. Thank You for pursuing me, being patient with me, listening to me, and encouraging me. Most of all, thank You for the grace poured out toward me in Christ. Help me to love my children the way You love me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

- How would you describe God's love for you?
- Do you struggle to show that kind of love to your children? Why?
- In what ways do you most need to express love to your children right now?



The Joneses Are Overrated

Karen

I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know both how to have a little, and I know how to have a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content—whether well fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need. I am able to do all things through Him who strengthens me.

—PHILIPPIANS 4:11–13 HCSB

*P*sst . . . I have a little secret.
The Joneses are overrated.

Oh, I know we'd never think that from the way the Joneses appear, but they are not all they're cracked up to be.

In my mom's day, you only saw the Joneses a few times a week. Maybe you bumped into them on your way into church or perhaps at the PTA meeting—you know, as you were getting into your dented gray minivan while they were piling happily into their new spit-shined red Chevrolet.

Now the Joneses perpetually parade in front of our eyes nearly twenty-four hours a day. Where?

On our computer news feeds. And smartphones. On Twitter and Facebook, Pinterest and Periscope, Tumblr and Instagram. The "Look at me!" Joneses and all their profile-picture-perfect lives can tempt us to become jealous and discontent.

One day an online friend posted: "Fettuccini Alfredo, fresh beans from the garden, and my famous raspberry cheesecake. It's what's for dinner!"

A second friend's status read: "Woo-hoo! Paid off the mortgage. We're now debt-free!" And still another, "Our Ethan got student of the month!"

All of this took place while I was ordering pizza (for the second time that week!), piecing together the mortgage payment, and answering a call from the middle school vice-principal's office where my son sat, busted for an inappropriate prank.

Yes, the Joneses invade our homes and our thoughts several times a day through social media and the Internet, robbing us of contentment.

In a letter to the believers in Philippi, the apostle Paul penned Philippians 4:11–13, which says, "For I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am" (HCSB). The Greek word rendered "content" in this verse denotes more than just a throwing up of arms in reluctant acceptance. At its hub, it means "to be satisfied to the point where I am no longer disturbed or disquieted."

God has already prepared a place of contentment for us when the car breaks down, the bills are hard to pay, and "our Ethan" acts out . . . again. We find that place when we take our eyes off of our situation—and off of the screen—and fix them solely on God.

To truly embrace our circumstances, we must decide to stop pleading, "God, get me out of here!" and learn to humbly ask instead, "Lord, why have You brought me here? What are You trying to reveal to me that I would never discover if You were to suddenly pluck me out of this situation?"

We can only do this when we stop looking at the Joneses and turn our eyes to Jesus Christ, who gives us strength.

Dear Lord, forgive me for looking around and comparing myself or my circumstances to others. May I look only to You for contentment and peace. In Jesus' name, Amen.

PRESSING PAUSE

- When you look at what others post on social media, do you struggle with being content with your own life? Why or why not?
- How can asking yourself, *Lord, why have You brought me here? What are You trying to reveal to me that I would never discover if You were to suddenly pluck me out of this situation?* help you to battle discontentment?



A Place of Peace

Ruth

*“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they
will be called children of God.”*

—MATTHEW 5:9

I have four children ages six, eight, eleven, and thirteen years old, so sometimes it seems less than peaceful in my home. Every single day I scramble to spend time mothering my children, doing three to five loads of laundry, helping with schoolwork, cleaning, cooking, and balancing all of the activities we’re involved in. It seems we have just cleaned up from breakfast, and it’s already time to have lunch. Two minutes later (or so it seems) we’re thanking God for dinner.

Managing a household can be overwhelming, and it sure doesn’t seem peaceful to me. But Matthew 5:9 says, “Blessed are the peacemakers.” When I read those words, I’m reminded that I’m called to be an *instrument* of God’s peace everywhere, including in my home.

But there’s one problem—and that problem seems to be me. I often wonder, *Am I the one who creates most of the chaos that happens in our day-to-day lives?* We are called to be instruments of peace, but can’t we just as easily be instruments of chaos? Am I so focused on my own agenda at times that I can’t focus on what really matters?

Ouch. Those questions hit too close to home for me.

As a mother, I’m an instrument of peace at home with my family. God wants to use me to bring peace to my household and into my children’s lives. Oh, yes, it can be really hard! But by living intentionally, keeping

the most important things at the forefront, I find my days look and feel drastically different.

When I prepare for the day by spending time with God, studying His Word, and praying, I am at peace. Ultimately, without God, we will not have peace.

When I'm nurturing the relationship I have with my husband, I am at peace. Our babes are watching and following our relational lead. If we love each other well, we will bring an atmosphere of peace to our home.

When I'm intentional with my children, I am at peace. We are prone to distraction, but our children need our attention. They need us to squeeze them, encourage them, teach them, laugh with them, read to them, and pray with them. We create a sense of peace when we engage wholeheartedly with our children.

God wants to use us to be instruments of peace in our homes. Will you bring peace to your home today?

Jesus, You are the Prince of Peace. Come and make Your presence known in my home. Quiet my soul, right now, in this place. Reign in my heart and in my home so that this place can be defined by peace. In Jesus' name, Amen.

- ➔ What is creating chaos in your home right now?
- ➔ What can you start—or stop—doing today to bring more peace into your home?



What's in Your Hand?

Karen

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

—JOHN 13:34–35

I have a lot of talented friends. Some are crafty and can whip up a festive wreath for the front door or sew a pair of curtains that look like they are from a high-end store. I, on the other hand, don't have one drop of crafter's blood in my veins. My children know better than to ask me to sew a patch on their uniforms. I send them to their dad! If it were left up to me, I would use a hot glue gun. (Been there. Bonded that!)

Other friends I know are skilled at gardening. Their corn, peas, and zucchini burst forth from their meticulously weeded gardens. They have an abundance of healthy produce they can feed to their families. Though I do okay with flowers, herbs, and a tomato plant or two, having a vast vegetable garden to tend has never been my strong suit. So I admire those who take on such an enormous task.

Other friends are renowned for other skills. They may have keen eyes for decorating. Or they are talented with a paintbrush. Maybe they can even repair their own vehicle. So many various talents from so many women I know.

My skills lie in two areas—the kitchen and the pen. I love to cook and I love to write. So for me, I find it easy and enjoyable to bake up

a batch of homemade granola bars or to craft a poem for a friend's birthday.

We've all been blessed with unique skills and talents that serve as our signature way to create. But are these talents, hobbies, and abilities just for our own use? Could they serve a greater purpose? Yes! They can all be ways to participate in obeying Jesus' command to us in John 13:34–35. They can be tools for loving others. It all starts with a simple question: what's in your hand?

A garden trowel? What if you showed some love by taking some of your fresh veggies to your neighbors and told them how glad you are that they dwell nearby?

A wooden spoon? Maybe mix up a batch of your famous chocolate chip cookies and give them to your mail carrier as thanks for his or her faithful work.

A paintbrush? Can you paint a picture for a shut-in? Or help paint a dorm room for a new college student? Both would be helpful ways to lighten their loads and lift their spirits.

Loving others doesn't have to be hard work. Simple gestures can have powerful results. May you find natural ways to weave loving others into your busy days by using what is already in your hand.

Father, thank You for the skills, talents, and passions You have given me. Help me to recognize that they are not for me alone. Give me practical and creative ways to love others with what is already in my hand. In Jesus' name, Amen.

- ➔ How do you answer the question, "What is in your hand?"
- ➔ Brainstorm a few ways to share your unique talents with others

PRESSING PAUSE

Ask God to bring someone to mind who would be encouraged if she were to receive what you have to give.



What My Thoughts Tell Me

Ruth

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

—ROMANS 12:2

Do you ever talk to yourself? Or let me put it another way: Do your thoughts ever talk to you? Thinking is powerful. Our thoughts have a way of snowballing. What starts out as an innocent and random thought can begin to gain momentum if we aren't careful.

Take, for example, the simple thought *I'm failing*. Has that thought ever popped into your head? Maybe you're busy responding to e-mails, or you have just walked through the door from work, or perhaps you have finally tucked the kiddos in to bed. And out of nowhere, as clear as day, you hear these words come to mind: *I'm failing. I'm not good at this. There are better moms out there than me. My kids deserve better.*

The momentum begins to grow. You are not only thinking it; you are beginning to believe it.

The words that appeared out of nowhere found in your mind fertile soil to plant seeds of doubt. And so, pretty soon, the thinking leads to feeling. Not only have you thought you are a failure; you begin to feel like a failure. We all know that once you think, then feel, it isn't too long before you start to act as if those thoughts are true. You become defeated.

Replace the words and thoughts with countless others. They all work the same, don't they? They speak *to* us and *at* us. Thinking is powerful—for good and for bad.

PRESSING PAUSE

Jesus called the enemy the “father of lies.” Oddly enough, the thoughts and words of lies, condemnation, and doubt can sometimes be easier to hear than God’s words.

I think this is why the apostle Paul encouraged us, with great urgency and consistency, to renew our minds with the truth of Scripture. We have to get God’s Word in us so it shapes and guides our thoughts. We have to read it, meditate on it, and let it do its work in us so that our thinking leads us in the way that is life and truth.

We need to be transformed. Changed. Made new. And this, too, is a work of the Holy Spirit through God’s Word. Be careful of being conformed to those thoughts that do not belong to the Father—thoughts and words that are not His. He speaks life and truth.

Let God’s words in Scripture renew your mind that you might be transformed into the image of Christ.

Father, give me wisdom to discern between Your voice and the voice of the enemy. I ask You to renew me through Your life-giving Word that is truth. Let it sink deep into my heart and mind so that it will transform me into the likeness of Your Son. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

- What do you tell yourself most often?
- In what ways have you let this type of thinking defeat you?
- What recurrent thoughts do you need the truth of God’s Word to transform right now?



Benedictions

Karen

*Whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom,
and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard,
but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.*

—JAMES 1:25

Are there any parts of motherhood you feel you need to “suffer through”? Late-night feedings, odious diaper changes, and shrill cries may be taxing, even tiresome, but they are not suffering. These are doses of miracle soul-grow. The unattractive aspects of motherhood are opportunities for us to hear benedictions from the Lord.

The word *benediction* originates from two different Latin words, *bene* meaning “well” and *dicere* meaning “say.” In our language, the word is used to describe a spoken blessing. Many times in a traditional religious ceremony, a benediction is spoken at the end of the sermon as a blessing to the congregation and a charge to go forth, to put action to the teaching.

We moms can see the diapers, messes, and sleep deprivation as chances for us to hear a benediction. Why? Because these tasks of motherhood challenge us to take what we learn from the Bible and put it into practice. In the afternoon we can’t forget what God told us in the morning.

James 1:25 says, “Whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.”

We will be blessed in what we do! Not blessed long after the fact or blessed only if someone else notices. No, we can be blessed in the act of

PRESSING PAUSE

service itself! As we vacuum, as we do the laundry, as we clean up the spills, we can be blessed right there in the center of it.

In every mom's life there are challenges and suffering. Challenges are those day-to-day duties that are sometimes punctuated by difficult personalities or situational strife. Suffering happens when we encounter death, persecution for our faith, tragedy, and other acute pains.

Our service to the Lord is valuable training as we seek to become more like Christ. As we practice listening for the benediction, let's get used to recognizing the blessing.

You are cordially invited to cease viewing your motherhood services as "suffering through" but as opportunities to hear God "speaking well" (*benedicere*) to you. Mute the frustration. Press pause. Tune your ear to the benediction.

Dear heavenly Father, help me listen to the blessings that are hidden within each bump in the road. Prepare me to accept small adversities now so I can become a woman who truly praises You in all circumstances. In Jesus' name, Amen.

- How does knowing the original meaning of *benediction* affect your view of mothering?
- How can you approach your tasks and care for your children differently now that you know this?



Parenting Together

Ruth

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?

—JAMES 4:1

Though my husband and I were sitting close to each other, we were barely communicating. It wasn't because we were having a fight or didn't want to talk. We were grabbing lunch after church at one of our favorite local restaurants. The diner was busy enough, but our conversation as a family was even livelier! With four kids around the table, there was a lot of chatter and catching up to do.

If you've been married with kids for any length of time, then you know how hard it is to finish a conversation, hold a thought, or maintain order without turning into Sergeant No Fun.

For all the joy that kids bring into a marriage, they can also cause a whiplash effect for a husband and a wife—especially when it comes to parenting. As you probably already know, sometimes our parenting preferences and objectives are at odds with our other half!

Our parenting styles, preferences, and expectations can be different from those of our spouse. If we're not careful, parenting can pull us apart. That's why I love the reminder in James 4:1. It gives us a simple yet profound reason for why we have conflict: most often it comes down to what I want versus what my husband wants.

“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?”

PRESSING PAUSE

This short verse reminds us that we all have desires, but even more important to understand, we have fallen desires. By fallen, I mean desires that have (and often do) come under the influence of our sinfulness. Our sinful desires often lead to disagreements. This is true in every relationship—even in the partnership as parents.

As parents and as spouses, my husband and I may have desires and expectations that are at odds. Likewise, we can have competing desires that are outside of what God wants. Our sin not only separates us from God, but it can also separate us from each other.

Are you and your husband on the same page? Do you have conflicting ideas about parenting? I'm convinced that so many conflicts in marriage, could easily be resolved with open conversation.

Want to get beyond the conflict? Start communicating with your husband today, but do it with humility and grace.

Father, thank You for the gift of our children. Help my husband and me to parent together. Give us honesty, clarity, and humility with each other. In Jesus' name, Amen.

- About what do you and your spouse most often agree? Disagree?
- If you could change one or two things about how you and your spouse parent together, what would they be?



We Have To or We Get To?

Karen

Whatever you do, do it enthusiastically, as something done for the Lord and not for men, knowing that you will receive the reward of an inheritance from the Lord. You serve the Lord Christ.

—COLOSSIANS 3:23–24 HCSB

My life as a wife, mom, worker, daughter, neighbor, church member, and friend brings me much delight. However, my life also brings me lots of to-dos. Purchases to make. Closets to organize. Paperwork to complete. Phone calls to return. Research to be done. Pots and pans to scrub. Kids to shuttle. Parents to check on. And on and on it goes.

Sometimes when I get my list all scrawled out on paper, my mind starts looping the “poor me” soundtrack that results from just looking at my list.

Poor me . . . I have to mop the floors.

Poor me . . . I have paperwork to finish.

Poor me . . . I have to drive to get groceries.

Poor me . . . I have to take my son to practice.

Poor me . . . I have to work on the computer for a few hours to finish this project.

Poor, poor, pitiful me!

Colossians 3:23–24 addresses this “poor me” mentality by giving us a fresh perspective as we go about our work: “Whatever you do, do

it enthusiastically, as something done for the Lord and not for men” (HCSB). Three words jump up at me as I stop and ponder this verse:

1. *Whatever*: Not just the tasks I enjoy, or the work that brings me recognition, or the duties that I happen to find fun, but *whatever* I do is to be done . . .

2. *Enthusiastically*: This word is defined as “done lively and with great interest; wholeheartedly, sincerely, energetically and earnestly.” Hmm . . . I’m not so sure that describes my attitude as I tackle the “whatevers” on my to-do list. How about you?

3. *Lord*: It is the Lord Himself we serve as we enthusiastically check off our “whatevers.” Not a husband. Or kids. Not a boss or the committee chairperson. We are serving Jesus Christ Himself as we work.

How about we hit the restart button when it comes to our tasks? Let’s stop pouting. Rather, let’s reframe our attitudes Colossians 3:23-style.

I don’t *have* to clean my house. I *get* to clean my house—because I have a place to call my own, while many are homeless or displaced. And I’m serving the Lord Jesus as I clean.

I don’t *have* to fill out this team permission slip. I *get* to fill it out—because my child is healthy enough for physical activity. And I’m serving the Lord Jesus as I write.

I don’t *have* to drive to get groceries. I *get* to do this errand—because we have enough money to purchase provisions and we own a car, so I don’t have to walk. And I’m serving the Lord Jesus as I shop.

We don’t *have* to. We *get* to. And thanks be to God that we do.

Father, thank You for all the to-dos on my list. Help me always remember that I’m working for You. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

PRESSING PAUSE

→ Name one “have to” item that’s on your to-do list today. How could you turn your thoughts about this task into a thankful “I get to” statement instead?



More Than a Mom

Ruth

You died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

—COLOSSIANS 3:3–4

When kids come along, it's easy to get wrapped up in them. And by “wrapped up,” I mean your world begins to revolve around them.

To some degree, this is absolutely necessary. Kids need our time, love, affection, help, and support. They are dependent on us for a reason.

But I'm talking more about identity. Who are you? I mean, who are you really? Do you find your identity in being a mom?

People base their sense of worth, lives, callings, and joy on all sorts of things. We might find our identity in what we do, both in our successes or our failures. We can form an identity based on our possessions. We may think what we own defines who we are. And this is why motherhood can be tricky.

Motherhood is a noble and sacred calling. But motherhood can't be the primary source of our identity. We are more than moms. That's not to diminish our role as moms. But it is to remind us of our core identity in Christ, as His followers.

The apostle Paul said our life is “hidden with Christ.” In Christ, we are His daughters. This identity shapes our calling and how we pursue motherhood. Our identity in Christ is what lays a solid foundation for all that we do—in motherhood, ministry, the workplace, and more.

What is God calling you to do? Do you struggle, thinking that

motherhood has to stand in the way of what God is leading you to do? You are a mom, and motherhood is a calling. But are there other dreams and desires that God has put on your heart to pursue?

Your dreams might include starting a blog, writing a book, starting a ministry at your church, or volunteering in a community organization. God has gifted you and wired you to make a difference in the lives of others. Being a mom doesn't mean you can't pursue God's calling to serve Him in other ways.

Start dreaming. Pray hard. And if God is calling you, don't be afraid to take a step of faith.

Father, what is it You are calling me to do for You? I love being a mom. But are there other areas that You would lead me toward to make an impact for Your kingdom? Help me to remember that my identity is first and foremost in You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

- Do you ever feel like there are dreams or desires God has placed on your heart to pursue? What are they?
- What are the biggest obstacles standing in the way of your pursuing God's calling?
- What step of faith will you take to start pursuing what you think God is asking you to do?
