GROWING THE RELATIONSHIPS YOU NEED TO

BE THE MOM YOU WANT TO BE

Don't Mom Alone

Heather MacFadyen

"Motherhood is one of the most rewarding jobs on earth, but it can also be very isolating. *Don't Mom Alone* is a vision to do motherhood with your people! It is a practical guide that will help you find those teammates in the exciting mission of mothering."

Jennie Allen, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Get Out of Your Head* and founder and visionary of IF:Gathering

"Heather MacFadyen is the mom friend you've been looking for your entire life. She's not going to make you feel like you're behind or like you're messing it up—but she's also not going to try to pacify your fears, desires, or vision for your family. She's a kind leader, an amazing writer, and a faithful friend. This book is a gift from God to us, and I cannot suggest it enough!"

Jess Connolly, author of *You Are the Girl for the Job* and *Breaking Free from Body Shame*

"As a counselor to kids and families for almost three decades, I believe we've never walked through a season where moms feel more exhausted, more defeated, and more isolated than today. For years, I have been deeply grateful for Heather MacFadyen's voice. I've spoken with moms all over the country who have learned and laughed and grown with her through her podcast. I'm so grateful that voice is now in written form. And I'm so grateful for the truth that she shares in the words of her book, *Don't Mom Alone*. I believe this book will help you feel more known, more hopeful, freer to be honest, and certainly less alone in your courageous and transformative journey as a mom."

Sissy Goff, MEd, LPC-MHSP, director of child and adolescent counseling at Daystar Counseling Ministries, speaker, and author of *Raising Worry-Free Girls*

"Heather is the friend you need in your parenting corner who isn't afraid to join you in the trenches and offer encouragement and

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hope. Wise, warm, and relatable, Heather will guide you to truth every step of the way. *Don't Mom Alone* is the book for moms that you want to get for yourself and your best friend!"

Alli Worthington, business coach and bestselling author of *Standing Strong*

"With deep insight, sympathy, and a healthy dose of humor, Heather puts her finger on the heartbeat of motherhood with grace and wisdom. She leads her readers to breathe in peace as they learn to leave the burden of motherhood in the hands of the One who companions them lovingly through their journey."

Sally Clarkson, bestselling author, host of the *At Home with Sally* podcast, and mother and best friend of four adult children

"Whether you have a newborn or a couple dozen grown children, every mother needs to read this book. From the priceless freedom found in chapter 1, Heather gently lifts the unnecessary burdens we carry, wraps her arms around our shoulders, and reminds us that we are never alone in this journey of motherhood. With vulnerability and laugh-out-loud humor, Heather shares practical wisdom and insight to help us trade lies for truth and isolation for connection. If you've ever wondered how to find the village that's supposed to help raise your child, this book is the map that will make sure you don't mom alone."

Kat Lee, author of *Hello Mornings* and founder of HelloMornings.org

"For as long as I've known Heather, she has been inviting parents into community. An honest, life-giving community that is likely to involve laughter and tears, conversation and challenge, help and hope. This book is an extension of the rich community she has long created. The deeper you get into the pages of this work, the less alone you will feel and the more grace you will begin to

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extend to yourself. I want both of those things for every parent I spend time with in my counseling practice."

David Thomas, therapist and coauthor of bestsellers *Wild Things* and *Are My Kids on Track?*

"Heather's creative energy, grace, challenges, insights, and humanness leap off every page of this journey through real-life parenting. She weaves the bigness of God's grace and the richness of God's truth into everything from a thirty-foot-high bathroom accident at the museum to the grief of losing her father. Through it all, she draws on the wisdom of the Bible and her many mentors (she really doesn't mom alone!) to remind us of truth that connects us to each other, to God, and to our privileged calling as parents. Two thumbs up!"

Lynne and Jim Jackson, cofounders of Connected Families

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For my dad,
who left this earth before he could
read his favorite author's first book.
Thank you, Pops, for making it easy
to believe in a heavenly Father's love.
And for instilling purpose in my motherhood
with regular reminders
that the world needs more godly men.
Miss you tons,
Your Heather-bean

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Foreword

There was a time when many of us would have lived in neighborhoods full of people who really knew each other. Homes were not just individual houses but instead were houses surrounded by a community of other homes. Families were in those homes. And holding those families together were mothers who primarily worked at home—cooking, cleaning, minding small children, and taking care of the business of the household.

They did this together.

At any given time, a mother could walk out her front door and knock on her neighbor's door for tea and conversation. She could work in her yard and talk to her neighbor over the fence or maybe walk across the street to get a cup of sugar. Moms physically and functionally experienced life together.

Many years have come and gone since the days when most mothers had the opportunity to know this kind of "together life." The majority of moms in America work outside the home, and most know very few, if any, of their neighbors. What does this mean for moms who used to know community in the places where they lived and spent much of their time?

It means they often feel as if they are doing motherhood alone.

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Becoming a mom gives us the opportunity to know great love, but it also gives many of us the opportunity to feel isolated, overwhelmed, and lonely. With each year, our children grow from one season of development to the next, which means mothers are constantly stepping into new territory. Not only do we have to grow to parent our children, but we also have to learn to balance our responsibilities, our dreams, and the care we give to all the people we love. With the constant change and growth of our kids, many of us feel like we don't know what we're doing or whether we are doing it well.

Motherhood is a beautiful gift. However, the aspiration to be that rock for our children brings with it a heavy weight. Motherhood is work. It requires the giving of time and energy over the long haul. And when we have to carry the load of the motherhood journey by ourselves, the weight becomes greater.

I'm so grateful for my friend Heather MacFadyen and her awareness and sensitivity to this reality. For years, Heather has not only known about the need moms today have for community, encouragement, and practical help; she has done something about it. Through her podcast, Heather has shared her own wisdom and then gone one step further to bring in educators, therapists, psychologists, pastors, and seasoned parents to labor alongside her in her passion to serve moms well. Heather has served her audience by bringing messages that moms everywhere could listen to as they rocked children, mopped floors, commuted to and from work, went on their morning runs, or pushed strollers on their afternoon walks.

Now Heather brings years of her own parenting wisdom coupled with years of wisdom gained from hosting her podcast right here to the pages of this book.

Don't Mom Alone is your invitation to learn from mothers past who have mothered well and to stand with mothers present who seek to do the same. You are a mom who takes the role of motherhood seriously, and you want to be intentional in the journey of

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pouring into people. You are the mother *your* children need, and while there is only one of you—you are not standing alone.

And you don't have to mom alone either.

Welcome to your opportunity to be part of a "together kind of life." As you read these pages, you will know what it takes to engage in relationships that will help you be the mom you want to be. You will also begin to believe you really are part of a community of women who understand the beauty of motherhood and who are aiming to do it well.

Chrystal Evans Hurst, speaker, host of *Chrystal's Chronicles* podcast, and author of *She's Still There*

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Preface

I don't like "mom" books.

It takes having a horrible day and hitting rock bottom to pick up a book on mothering.

Then when I do? After a few pages I set the book down on my bedside table. Throw my head back on the pillow as my mind fills with all the ways I fell short of the "good mom" mark that day.

Instead of feeling understood, I feel scolded. Layers of "should" piled on my shoulders.

I want you to know that I've had lots of bad parenting moments. I still have four children living under my roof. And I haven't a clue what it takes to turn out a decent human. Because for every formula I've been handed, I've found outlier kiddos whom the formula doesn't fit.

You'd also think I'd be more adept at building community if I was going to write a book about it. But I'm not inherently a team player. Going it alone is much more appealing. If I let other moms see my mess, then I can't keep up an image of perfection. If I admit that I need help, I show that I'm not enough to parent four boys. And what if my boys misbehave and others see the failure and reject me?

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These isolating ideas have kept me from the relationships I need to be the mom I want to be. According to former US Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy, isolation (a physical state) differs from loneliness (a subjective feeling). Of course, the number and type of relationships required to feel less lonely vary from person to person. He also noted that "isolation is considered a risk factor for loneliness simply because you are more likely to feel lonely if you rarely interact with others."[1] I don't think I'm the only one who'd prefer to isolate rather than lean on the village. Our modern American culture tends toward individualism rather than community living. Because of that, so many of us are carrying the heavy burden of mothering alone.

So instead of handing you a formula on how to be a competent mom (psst, it doesn't exist), I'm going to walk with you to address these isolating ideas and help you trade them for connecting truths. We'll start by dealing with internal lies, helping you to trust God more in your day-to-day challenges. Honestly, that may involve intentional solitude, which is very different from isolation. But it can be important for the healing necessary to engage others.

Once we've done the inner work, we'll move on to the people around you—friends, mentors, spouses—focusing on how to connect with them in healthy ways to get the support you need. Lastly, we'll tackle the four most common parenting challenges moms reach out to me for help with. I'll share wisdom from mentors in the areas of calm parenting, connected discipline, challenging children, and effective discipleship, because being the mom you want to be includes having meaningful relationships with your kids.

At the end of each chapter, you'll find questions to work through on your own, or even better, work through with a group of moms. Along the way I'll share my "Titanic" (avoid the iceberg ahead) stories and favorite resources. At the very end of the book you'll find a QR code you can scan to follow a link to my site. There you can listen to referenced or related podcast episodes for each chapter.

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Perhaps, like me, you let the fears of rejection, pain, and failure keep you from taking a risk and being vulnerable. Or maybe you simply don't know how to add those relationships into an already full life. At the start of each chapter, you'll find short testimonials from moms who understand the struggle to choose connection over isolation.

The hope is not just to sit in the ditch with you but to give you a hand up, a way out. My friends say I'm a "reframer." I take their situation and bring perspective, faith, and hope. I want to do the same for you. Let's move from transparency to transformation. Because as my kids are becoming adults, I'm becoming a mom. Learning right alongside them. I need just as much patience and grace for my own maturation process as they do. Maybe you need that reminder too.

You wouldn't expect a newborn to walk out of the womb. Free yourself from the expectations that you will know exactly what to do in every scenario. Take each stage as it comes. When you don't know what to do, ask someone for help or perspective. Consider what you value and how it impacts your next step. Lastly, trust that God's power to redeem your mistakes is bigger than your power to destroy your children.

Are you ready to move forward? Take my hand; let's do this together and not mom alone.

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SECTION ONE

Empowered by God

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one

Let Him Be a Jerk

> I have felt most isolated when there has been a concerning problem with one of my kids. I felt shame. Maybe people would think it was something we as parents did or didn't do.
>
> —Tia

Guilty tears slid down my cheek.

My crime? Not letting my son be a jerk.

Let me explain.

I'd worked up the courage to take my two-year-old and newborn to the local arboretum. If you're picturing a peaceful garden experience, let me adjust that for you. The Dallas Arboretum in the fall is a madhouse. From crowded parking to walking a billion feet to arrive at the pecan orchard. I'm sweating a little just remembering the insanity.

Why would I subject myself to this rigmarole? To capture the perfect "kids in the pumpkin patch" picture, of course.

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In only two years of motherhood, I had decided this would be our tradition. Come hell or high water, my kids would wear orange and sit on scratchy hay in front of a pile of pumpkins. They would look right at the camera. And be happy about it. Cuz that's what "good moms" do!

Last year, I'd invited mom friends to join me in attempting this feat. But adding another baby to the mix this year created a bit of complexity to coordinating schedules. I'd convinced myself it would be better if I just went by myself. Of course, I'd prepared for my mission, including remembering pre-pumped breast milk in a bottle.

As fate would have it, a large group of my church friends and their kiddos were also at the arboretum for a MOPS outing. I hadn't yet entered the Mothers of Preschoolers community, but I was intrigued.

Groups of moms wandered through hay bales looking for the perfect spot to plop their precious blessings. I saw mentors holding babies or offering to include the new mom in the pumpkin picture. One mom chased her three-year-old while her friend stood guard over the now-abandoned stroller.

With perfect fall weather, my boys dressed adorably, and nap time quickly approaching, I needed to stay focused on my goal. Just as I started to unstrap the baby, he wailed with the "I need to eat or I'm gonna die" scream. In classic multiple-kid style, my toddler added to the cacophony with his own grumpy complaints.

Preoccupied with the two-kid shuffle, I hadn't noticed that a mentor from my church approached my chaos. In a perfect British accent, she offered her help. And, of course, I told her I was "fine." (Narrator: Heather was far from fine.) Fortunately, she persisted and asked, "Does the toddler have a snack?"

A snack! Yes, that's it. The boy just needed a snack.

Balancing the bottle under my chin and cradling the newborn, I dug into the giant diaper bag desperate to show this mentor that as a "good mom" I had indeed packed a snack. She sweetly offered

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the snack to my oldest. To which he rudely responded with a harrumph, turning his head and body away from her.

I was horrified. How could my precious son respond with such disdain? And to a British woman, no less!

That's when I resorted to my go-to coping mechanisms of correction and excuses. "Quade, be kind!" Then, turning to the British woman, "I'm so sorry. He's ready for his nap and is overwhelmed by the crowd, and I think he may be teething." (Okay, maybe I didn't use teething this time, but it always was a good fallback excuse.)

The next part of the story is forever etched in my memory.

She looked me dead in the eyes and said (again with the accent), "Why as mothers do we feel like we need to apologize for our children? If he wants to be a jerk, let him be a jerk" (mic drop).

All I could do was cry.

Not happy, grateful tears for her transformational insight (which would stick with me fifteen years later). Nope. In my new mom state, I couldn't absorb her sage advice because I felt critiqued. Motherhood had become the focus of all my time, energy, and identity. So when an older mom pointed out a flaw in my approach, I took it as a direct assault.

In reality her correction wasn't directed toward my actions but highlighted the error in my thinking. I wrongly believed my son's emotional state and physical actions were my responsibility to control. When I offered an apology ("I'm sorry; he needs a nap.") it was because I felt responsible for his wrong attitude and behavior. If he was bad, I was bad. The umbilical cord remained metaphorically attached.

Now I *was* guilty of not letting my son be a jerk. But I wasn't guilty for his grumpy response. I had unnecessarily burdened myself with the idea that he would have behaved better if I had trained him differently. Or he would have been kinder if I had set him up for success with more sleep/snacks/etc. My actions directly contributed to his poor response.

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In 1986, Melody Beattie wrote the trailblazing book *Codependent No More*. While written to help those in toxic relationships with addicts, her insights hit a little close to home when it came to my mothering. This quote basically sums up why I cried with the British woman:

> We don't have to take other people's behaviors as reflections of our self-worth. We don't have to be embarrassed if someone we love chooses to behave inappropriately. It's normal to react that way, but we don't have to continue to feel embarrassed and less than if someone else continues to behave inappropriately. Each person is responsible for his or her behavior.[1]

Of course I may get embarrassed by someone else's actions every now and then. The problem arises when I habitually believe others can't be held responsible for themselves. So often we are taught to be responsible for other people but not to be responsible for ourselves. This is compounded in motherhood. My energy shifted from controlling myself to being consumed with my child. It makes sense this happens. Codependency naturally sets in when a parent is required to care for an infant. Between middle-of-the-night feedings, constant diaper changes, and immobility, a newborn is totally dependent on someone else. As parents we often squelch our own desires in order to meet a child's needs.

Please understand that taking care of a child's needs is not rescuing or a problem. But in early motherhood I felt like my child's happy, content emotional state was an indicator of not only my performance as a mom but also my value and worth as a human. Like Beattie writes, "We don't feel lovable, so we settle for being needed."[2]

Bearing the weight of responsibility for my child's happiness and how he turns out is too much. Often I choose to carry that burden from a desire to be needed because I don't believe outside of that role I am lovable. The term "mom guilt" gets thrown around a

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lot. What I felt was closer to "mom shame." In my understanding, "guilt" is the feeling after doing something wrong. "Shame" is feeling "I am wrong." It's the difference between doing and being.

A grumpy child communicated to me that I was wrong. In response I bent over backward to keep my kids happy. The problem is the more kids you have, the harder this becomes. Until you finally take the advice of the British woman to "let him be a jerk" or eventually hit your limit. In my case, I chose the second option, which you can read more about in chapter 5.

But Can't My Kid Really Fail?

Perhaps you're fully aware that you can't make your child happy. But you're struggling a bit with the idea to "let him be a jerk." Am I (and a British woman) really suggesting we let kids run amok and be horrible human beings? No correction? No discipline? No care for what kind of adult he or she becomes? Absolutely not what I'm implying. Children need love, care, correction, and healthy boundaries. The key is that I can offer those things and release the responsibility of how my child behaves and who she or he becomes. Unfortunately, for many reasons this choice isn't easy.

I once heard a mentor speak to a group of type A moms, and she told us how she only started talking to moms about parenting after her children were grown and she knew she had not failed. While I respect her waiting to impart wisdom until her children were grown, I have a problem with her last phrase. By saying she "had not failed," she communicated to a room full of try-hard moms that they *could* fail.

While you and I try to shirk the responsibility for our child's emotional state and behavior, comments like this keep drawing that connection. Like the stereotypical psychologist's question: "Tell me about your mother." Or how we respond to a tragic public shooting. What's one of your first thoughts? Be honest. I usually want to know the shooter's story. Who are their parents?

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What went wrong to produce a human who could do something so horrific?

I believe God has given us a responsibility to love our children well. To model grace, teach truth, and train love. But because of Adam and Eve in the garden, they are born sinners. Like Jennie Allen once said, "Don't pray your kids out of trouble. They'll get in trouble. Pray they get caught. Then let them feel all the trouble. You aren't trying to raise kids that don't sin. You are trying to raise kids that know they need God. So getting caught is the goal. Don't be shocked. Don't protect them from consequences."[3]

I agree 100 percent. I can't keep my children from failure. And I don't believe if they "fail" (whatever that means), they are beyond God's ability to redeem and use them. What if my boys need a "train wreck with grace" (my pastor's words) to truly grasp God's love?

My friend Tricia Goyer, who is an author of more than seventy books, encourages writers on how to balance life as a writer and mom. She has three grown biological children and six adopted children. Her past includes an abortion when she was fifteen years old. Her first son was born when she was seventeen, and the father left her.

Did her parents fail because of her teenage pregnancy? Was her life beyond God's restoration and His ability to use her to minister to others? I don't believe so. Her story only strengthened her faith, her ministry, and her passion for others to know Christ.

Another friend, Stacy, a vibrant woman of faith, has a history of drug use and rehab. On her flight to a Christian blogging conference she sat next to a seventeen-year-old boy. She was hoping to meet some women heading to the conference, but God had different plans.

Prompted by the Spirit and given her "failed" past, she asked the boy, "Do you like rap?" He responded, "Yah." Stacy boldly said, "Well, I'm a rapper." Right there on a plane she shared her broken story in a rap. Then he shared his. He had just come out

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of rehab and was going to live with his aunt. Because of her history and experience she was able to warn him to be on guard for more temptation.

You see, after she came out of rehab her family moved to a new city to get a fresh start. The first time she went out of the house alone, a man named Leon walked up to her and asked, "Do you know where I can get high?" In that moment of temptation, she spiraled down again. So she warned this seventeen-year-old recovering drug addict to "watch out for Leons." Advice that could save his life. Advice she was able to give only because she had been a "failure." I also imagine how God uses others to fill in the space we, as parents, can't fill. Stacy became a voice of reason for this boy, perhaps an answer to his parents' prayers.

Didn't God's perfect Son look like a "failure" as He hung on the cross? But we would not have access to God or be promised eternal life if Jesus had not carried the weight and shame of humanity's brokenness and failures. Any sin or failing in our own or our children's lives—past, present, future—was nailed to the cross. Yes, consequences are real. We experience pain and grief with the loss of dreams we hold for our kids. But our hope isn't found in a successful child; it is found in a faithful God. When I believe the lie that I am fully responsible for my child's outcome, I miss out on deeper dependence on Jesus.

Important, but Not Essential

Thankfully the connection between parenting and how our kids turn out doesn't have to be negative. In the book of Exodus, Moses's mom, Jochebed, devised a genius plan to save his life. "Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: 'Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live'" (Exod. 1:22). She hid Moses for three months. Then when he couldn't be hidden any longer (aka, babbling baby), she placed him in a fancy tar-lined basket, paid attention to when Pharaoh's daughter

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bathed, and set up her daughter in the reeds to offer care for the baby.

> Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?"
>
> "Yes, go," she answered. So the girl went and got the baby's mother. Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you." So the woman took the baby and nursed him. When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. (Exod. 2:7–10)

What did I tell you—genius! Not only did she keep her baby alive, she got paid to do it!

So, was Jochebed important in the outcome of Moses's life? Absolutely!

Based on the culture of the time, children were nursed until around five years of age. What I find valuable is how influential those five years were for Moses. He spent the rest of his childhood in a palace where idol worship reigned. Yet, after fleeing for his life, he recognized Yahweh in the burning bush. He dedicated his life to serving the One True God and helping free God's chosen people.

This dedication to a Hebrew God came from only five years with his Jewish mother. Those little years mattered! Mothering babies, toddlers, preschoolers matters.

Consider another biblical icon: Samuel. In 1 Samuel 1:11, his mother, Hannah, pleaded for a child. She promised, if given one, she would give that child back to God. God answered her prayer with the birth of Samuel. She kept her promise by allowing him to live in the temple with the priest Eli. But only after she had finished nursing him (again, about five years of a faithful mom loving her son). And we read that Samuel lived a life dedicated to the service of the Lord. He heard God's voice and prophesied to the people. He listened to God in choosing King David—a vital detail in God's bigger story.

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Never underestimate the value of cuddling with your babies. Meeting their physical, emotional, and social needs. Realizing that the concept of love begins in your home. And no other person you minister to on this planet will know you more intimately than your children. You are so important.

But I can't stop there because I know my friend Kat Lee's story. She has an incredible ministry helping women create a habit of waking up a little bit earlier to plan their day, move their bodies, and spend time with God. I'm one of those women.

Her work pulled me out of a dark season of motherhood. Back then, every morning I rolled out of bed right as my husband left for work. I grumbled in the kitchen as three little boys pleaded for a second breakfast. The remainder of the day felt like a constant bombardment of responding to needs. I found myself completely burnt out and miserable in the exact role I'd always wanted.

That's when Kat (and God) entered the story. Through her Hello Mornings ministry and personal encouragement, I started waking up just five minutes earlier than my kids.[4] Read a verse, said a prayer, did a push-up (don't judge), and looked at my calendar. The small habit grew into a well of refreshment. God began to download His thoughts on my mothering experience. I started to write out those truths on a blog that I called *God Centered Mom*. It was the start of a ministry He had in store for me. A ministry that wouldn't have happened if it weren't for Kat.

Here's why I bring up my friend. Her mom passed away when Kat was a baby. Her desire to help women came from her own season of worn-out motherhood. A fact that surprised her, since she desperately wanted to be the mom she never had. She knew the importance of a mother's role. That void mattered. But her mom wasn't essential to Kat being used by God for His purposes. God had good plans set aside in advance for Kat to do. He wasn't surprised that she would live a life without her biological mother.

That is the tension we hold in order to walk in freedom as moms. My friend Jennie Cunnion said it this way in her *Mom Set Free*

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Bible study: "I am significant in my kids' lives but I am not sovereign, God is."[5]

My Part, God's Part

During those morning moments in God's Word inspired by Kat, I started a simple practice. While reading a verse I paid attention to any commands or invitations and any mention of God's promises or character. I noted that the command or invitation is my responsibility. The promise or revelation of God's character lets me know His response. I'd underline my part in one color and God's part in another color. What surprised me was how often "my part" was more about my heart and faith. And how God took care of the bigger responsibilities—like future outcomes.

Here are some examples:

> "Let the one who boasts boast about this:
> that they have the understanding to know me,
> that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness,
> justice and righteousness on earth,
> for in these I delight," declares the Lord. (Jer. 9:24)

My part: to understand and know God, that He is "I AM" (Yahweh).

His part: to exercise kindness, justice, and righteousness.

> For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

My part: to believe in God's Son, Jesus.

His part: to love the world, to give His only Son, to provide eternal life.

> I waited patiently for the LORD;
> he turned to me and heard my cry.

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> He lifted me out of the slimy pit,
> out of the mud and mire;
> he set my feet on a rock
> and gave me a firm place to stand. (Ps. 40:1–2)

My part: to wait patiently and cry out.

His part: to turn to me, hear me, lift me out of a pit/mud/mire, set my feet on a rock, and give me a firm place to stand.

Doesn't it feel better to do your part and let God do His? In doing so, you and I can release the "mom shame" of being unlovable or unworthy if a kid behaves badly. And it doesn't stop there. Turns out we can drop some of the "mom guilt" too.

Dr. John Townsend tells the story of how at a speaking event a mom asked the question, "How much of what my child becomes is my fault?" He and his coauthor, Dr. Henry Cloud (both licensed psychologists), looked at each other and decided to play a little game. They went to separate sides of the stage and each wrote on a piece of paper what percentage a child was responsible and what percentage a parent contributed to a child's outcome. When they turned the pieces of paper around, they had written the same numbers.

What do you think they wrote? Zero percent kid, 100 percent mom? Fifty/fifty? Did they agree with what I've presented here?

(Drumroll, please.)

Based on their clinical anecdotal evidence, they both felt a child was 70 percent responsible and a mom contributed 30 percent. Thirty percent! My mentor Diane used to tell me, "If I take credit for the good, I have to take credit for the bad." Turns out we can take credit for 30 percent of the bad and the good. But, of course, there's a catch.

Marketer John Wanamaker famously said, "Half the money I spend on advertising is wasted; the trouble is I don't know which half."[6] Therein lies the rub. I may be only 30 percent responsible, but I don't know which 30 percent. Thankfully I do know that God is willing to fill in the gaps if I let Him.

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Instead of believing the isolating idea that I'm fully responsible for how my kids turn out and my value and identity are wrapped up in their outcome, I'm choosing to connect with God by remembering I'm important but not essential. Focusing on my part—to love, guide, connect with my kids—and letting Him do His part—to fulfill the purposes He has ordained in advance. Believing that God is fully capable to redeem and restore my kids. If He chooses not to do so this side of heaven, I can trust that He loves them more than I can imagine. By not blaming Him or myself, but instead turning to God, I can find comfort grieving *with* Him. Then I can move forward in the purposes He planned in advance for me to do. And let my kid be a jerk.

Isolating Idea

I am fully responsible for my child's outcome.

Connecting Truth

I am important but not essential in God's plan for my child.

Discussion Questions

1. Share about a time when you have tied your child's performance to your ability as a mom.
2. In what ways do you bear the burden of your child's happiness? How does that impact other relationships?

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3. Have you ever considered how as mothers we are important but not essential to the plans God has set in advance for our kids?
4. Waking up a few minutes before my kids was transformational for me. What is a small habit you can start today to remember God's truth of who you are and who He is?
5. Read Ephesians 2:8–10 and consider what part of this verse is yours and what part is God's.

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