

NAVIGATING LIFE WITH ADULT CHILDREN

STORIES TO EQUIP AND
ENCOURAGE

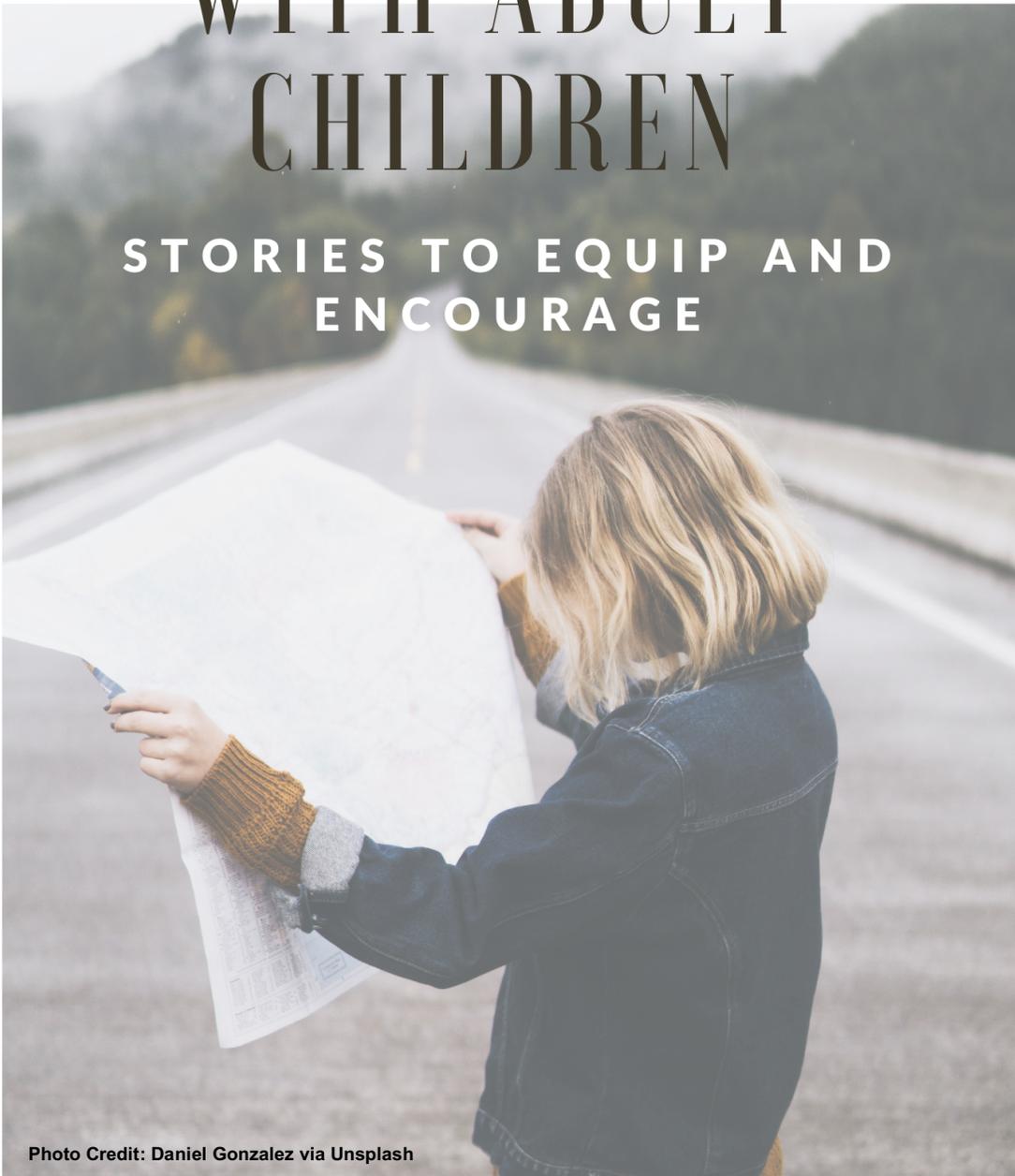


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**Edited by Sue Fulmore
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Introduction

Dear Moms of Adult Children,

We want you to know that we see you, we understand some of the wrestling within your heart you may be feeling as you loosen the cords that tie your children to yourself and allow them to fly freely into their future.

We know some of the very real fears you may be facing, and the grief you may be feeling. We also know this can be a time of great joy and excitement as your offspring take steps toward independence and living the life God has for them.

There will, no doubt, be times we feel we have failed our kids, and times when we wonder if we are up to the task of letting go while simultaneously helping them navigate this time in their lives. May we have the wisdom to offer extravagant grace to ourselves and to our adult children as together we learn what it means to be in this stage.

We wrote this resource to encourage you in this particular season of life. We want to share our stories of solidarity in this season, and offer some of the wisdom and tips we have gleaned along the way. Some of us have walked this road for many years already and some of us are only now entering into it.

At the bottom of each entry is the contributor's information. If you find that someone's story resonates with you, please consider following them on social media or signing up for their newsletter. This is a huge encouragement for writers as we seek to get our words out into the world and make an impact on the lives of others.

If you have found this helpful, we would love it if you would send your friends our way.

May you be strengthened in the place you find yourself today, whether that is celebrating or grieving or somewhere in between. May you be granted the wisdom, discernment, strength, courage, and faith you require to live this day to the fullest and to be a support and encouragement to the grown kids who will always need to know you are for them.

Thanks for reading!

Sue Fulmore
Editor
www.suefulmore.com

Psalm Of A Failed Mother

Martha Brady

We all feel like we fail our children at times in their lives, particularly when they are adults. This exercise was helpful to me as I was grieving my failure to be there for my daughter in her time of extreme need. It helped me see my failure through God's eyes. I also realized the importance of believing God and my daughter when they say they forgive me.

*Oh GOD! When I saw that sweet new baby
I wanted to be the best mother to her
I wanted to kiss away every hurt
I wanted to be present for her in every situation
Where she might need my help
I wanted her to know how wonderful she was
And how beautifully she had been made.*

*But in the brokenness of life, I wasn't able to do that.
Too many times.*

*I wasn't able to care for her in the ways I wanted.
Sometimes, it was because I had a job.
Sometimes, it was because I didn't prioritize her enough.
Sometimes, I was just too humanly frail.*

*I didn't want it to be that way.
I didn't want to be human.
I wanted to be powerful and strong...all the time.
I wanted to be loving and caring...all the time.
But I wasn't.*

*There were times I was just plain selfish.
There were times I was in pain...physical and emotional.
There were times I just didn't have enough to give.*

*It is still difficult to excuse myself...and I shouldn't.
I feel that I'm trying to let myself off the hook.
But the worst time was when she was in pain
Going through the biggest pain of her life.
I was losing my husband to strokes and dementia.
I wanted to give more,
But I was barely able to get out of bed some days.
I'm sure she was in the same situation...
Only she had to work and care for children.*

*I did realize she had a sister and friends who were caring for her.
She had others in the church who were caring for her too.
I had to let that be enough until I was able
To become more able to care for her.*

I didn't want to be weak, but I was.

I was challenged to ask myself the following 3 questions as I worked through this struggle. These questions moved me forward and gave me hope.

1. What is GOD's truth to me?

I have asked myself this question over and over again.
Especially at night as I allowed regret to take over my mind.

All I could think of were the accusing words.
Then God showed me this truth.

*"Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you
For I am the Lord your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.
Because you are precious in my eyes,
and honored, and I love you,"*

Isaiah 43:1-4 ESV

These are all things I would have said to her...
And He is saying them to me!
She has told me she is not angry with me.
But I find it difficult to accept that to be true.
Yes, there will be other conversations to follow up...
There have been.

But if I am unable to accept her forgiveness,
I need to hear GOD's voice here...and believe Him.

*Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon,
"Do you see this woman?
I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet,
but she has wet my feet with her tears
and wiped them with her hair.
You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in
she has not ceased to kiss my feet.
You did not anoint my head with oil,
but she has anointed my feet with ointment.
Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much.
But he who is forgiven little, loves little."
And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."*

Luke 7:44-48 ESV

2. What do I need to ask GOD?

Why do I feel the need to be a great mother over glorifying You and enjoying you forever? Being a good mom was an idol.

I did not feel that was a guiding rule in my life, but yet, I do remember deciding that I was not going to be like my own mother in certain ways. She wasn't really a bad mother, but she had many limits for sure. I need to ask for God to help me forgive my own mother for her failures and shortcomings. Often, she was not able to be what I needed her to be for me for some of the reasons I wasn't able to be there for my daughter recently. She struggled under many aspects of living in a broken world just as I do.

"Forgive me for not believing my daughter when she said she was not angry with me. I'm giving her my negative emotions that she may not have. Her expectations of me may not be the same as my expectations of me are...or the expectations of my mother were."

3. What do I need to tell community?

If you belong to Christ, your "good momness" does not earn you any extra points. You live in a broken world. There will be days when you will not be a good mom. There will be other days when you will be.

Don't strive to be Jesus to your child. Help her learn to go to Jesus when you fail. He is the one she needs to lean on, not perfect mom or perfect dad.

Perfect mom or dad will not be able to meet the needs of your child like Jesus can. He can meet her spiritual needs and He will be there to help her long after you are gone.

Yes, apologize to your child when you fail. But point her to Jesus, the One who will not fail her.

This exercise was recommended to me as I was grieving my failure to be there for my daughter in her time of need. It starts with writing the Psalm as a prayer to God, our Heavenly Father, in whatever format you desire. Then follow it with the 3 questions. You will be surprised to find how helpful it is to write out the problem, regret, sin, struggle, you are dealing with in God's presence.

Martha Brady writes at her blog MarthaGrimmBrady.com. She writes about hope for women who are lonely & discouraged, as well as caregiving tips. She is a retired RN and part-time caregiver to her husband, a retired pastor. He has had 4 strokes since 2015. They have 3 grown daughters & 7 grands.

Holding On While Letting Go

Jessica Van Roekel

Dear Mama, I know how time has flown. Your baby boy towers over you and you wonder when he grew so fast. I know. Your baby girl, who struggled for her first breaths, makes yours catch as you watch her grow into her beauty and you praise God for her life. I know how you wish you could time travel to when they snuggled close when a storm rattled the windows. I know. Because my heart aches with both joy and pain as I watch my children let go of my hand to walk on their own. My hand hangs limp and empty at my side. Or is it?

My four kids grew up on five acres in the middle of the United States. We didn't have much traffic on our gravel road, so they didn't learn to look both ways before crossing the street. Instead, they learned to watch for tractor tires that loomed above them and to always make sure their hand stayed in mine. They didn't learn about strange dogs, but they learned to be wary of nocturnal animals in the daytime. Always they ran to grab my hand as they pointed at the skunk waddling through the grass. When they had another run-in with rusty metal, they took my hand. And I held tight to theirs.

My husband and I taught them to work hard and take pride in their efforts. They learned to think through problems and come up with solutions. Their minds grew strong and their imagination took flight. Many imaginary worlds became reality in our hedgerow as they built forts with scraps from the junk pile. Beyond the hedge lay danger as corn stalks grew tight and tall. They knew the hedge was as far as they could go. And always they ran back to hold my hand.

From the time they were tiny, we took the hands of our children and led them to our friend, Jesus. We began with Bible Storybooks and Sunday School sing-along tapes. We wove the Lord's grand story of love and salvation into our everyday lives. Each one gave their hearts to Jesus at a young age. Once they learned to read, they received a "grown-up" Bible to pursue a personal relationship with him. Over the years as they've grown into their faith, we discussed their questions and shared personal insights with each other. Our hearts held one another.

I've held tight to their hands as their bodies grew, their minds gained knowledge, and their hearts opened wide to the Lord. But I'm in the transition of letting go, and, if I'm perfectly honest, my heart quivers like a hummingbird's wing. I know the letting go has to happen because it would be a little weird if my adult and teenage children still related to me as they did when they were young. But the letting go is hard and scary and exciting and sad all at the same time.

I'm not sure I know how to do this part of parenting well. My hand grasps for theirs as they travel paths of possible danger. I try to warn them, but it's like they can't hear me. I'm afraid that instead of my kids seeing the loving mom of their younger years, they see a desperate woman clawing for them to come back before they get hurt. I find myself feeling a little lost and my hand empty as I watch with worried eyes the steps they take. Will they make it around the curve? Do they see the storm clouds up ahead? Will their companions hinder or help them along the way?

I twist my fingers and fidget with my nails as I watch them pull away. Everything is changing. I tangle myself up in "what ifs" and regrets (oh the regrets) and bite my lip till it bleeds, as I wonder what my role is now. I feel God taking my hand in His as I let go of theirs

He reminds me that these kids I call mine, are really His. He guided me through teaching and training them in physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual safety. He gave me creative ways to teach each one the importance of respect, obedience, and responsibility. He helped me navigate the terrible twos, thick-headed threes, and the roller-coaster ride of the teen years.

God loves them more than I could ever imagine. He loves them in a perfect way, unlike my imperfect mothering. Knowing this fills me with peace in spite of my angst. When I hold onto God's hand while letting go of theirs, I will know when to speak and when to keep my mouth shut. My trust will grow as I step back and let God take the lead in their lives. My faith will be strengthened as I pray my kids through their trials as they walk through the transition to grown-up land. He will guide me through letting go, but I need to keep my hand in his.

I can't say I've mastered living it. I'm very much in the middle of the transition. And like all middles there are times when it feels like an easy ride and other times it feels like we're careening out of control. Like all kids, my four have differing personalities, strengths, and weaknesses. Some bloom late and others bloom early. It keeps me on my toes, and frankly, my toes are tired.

I have hopes and dreams for my kids, but I'm afraid too. I know what I would like for them, but they have their own journey to navigate. And my involvement has to evolve. Their world no longer spins around me (as it should be). I must let go of them so they can hold onto God. And the only way I can do that is to hold tight to him. Dear Mama, let's remember that when we let go of our kids' hands, God takes theirs and leads them just as he leads us.

Prayer for Grown Up Kids

Lord, Thank-you for these kids of mine. You love them better and more completely than I ever could. You know them better than I do because they are your workmanship. Guide them. Let them seek your kingdom and righteousness. Keep them on the path you have for them even if it is one that frightens me. Help me to keep my mouth shut and my heart open. Nurture their hearts with your tenderness and kindness. Help them see you and to hang onto you as they embark on the adventure of life. Direct their steps so they become reflections of your glory. Guide them to guard their hearts and to go to you for guidance. Hold their hand in yours and keep them close to your heart.

In Jesus' name, Amen

Five Tips for the Mama in Transition

- Lean towards your kids, but hold onto God
- Instead of being the leader of their journey with God, you are now a co-adventurer in the Great Adventure of pursuing a life with God.
- You cannot be your kids' Holy Spirit.
- If you don't let go, you hinder their ability to hear God's direction for their life.
- Pray, pray, pray and then trust, trust, trust.

Jessica is a worship leader, speaker, and writer who writes at www.welcomegrace.com giving hope-filled inspiration for internal hurts in the light of God's transforming grace. She believes that through Christ our personal histories don't have to define our present or determine our future. Jessica lives in a rural setting with her husband and family. You can connect with her at Instagram: [jessica.vanroekel](https://www.instagram.com/jessica.vanroekel) and Facebook: Jessica Van Roekel

Giving Grace

Robin McCarty

I used to joke that I'd take toddlers over teens any day of the week and twice on Sunday. When children are small, no is no. If you tell them to move and they don't, you just pick them up and move them. Sure, it's hard and tiring and all that but you are the unquestioned authority, and you have all the power.

Then one day they learn the word "No" and just like that, they claim a little power of their own. It can be a constant power struggle, or it can be a journey where you are helping them learn to navigate their autonomy in ever increasing ways as they grow.

This is never truer than when they become brand new adults. The calendar bestows adulthood over them like a flowery garb of independence, and they want to take it for a spin. I mean we get that, right? We all can remember how it felt feeling grown-up and wanting to flex it a little. But the reality is more complex and sometimes you just have to learn the hard way.

Our oldest, for example, needed to rebound. He had left home to be on his own during his second year of college, at just 19, and after a year it all went sideways. He knew we thought he had moved out prematurely, but we held our tongues and let him try. It took a couple weeks for him to come fully clean about how badly things had gone.

Those roommates who didn't sign the lease, left him holding the bag. It took every penny to finish the lease and he was now moved out and sleeping on a friend's couch. The career field he had been planning for years was not nearly as appealing as he imagined, and he didn't want to go back the next semester. His wrecked car was vandalized to the point of being a total loss. He lost his job. And he broke up with his girlfriend. He was feeling pretty low.

He didn't want us to know. He had never failed at anything and his spirit had taken more damage than his Volkswagen Jetta. He was avoiding me and my calls. When we did talk, I wasn't getting straight answers and I admit I played a "Mom card".

As we talked, I said, "I am coming to pick you up and we're going to lunch, it's not negotiable. Get ready I'll be there in 15 minutes." I didn't ask, I didn't coax or play coy. I'd been allowing him to dance around the situation long enough. I was done.

I don't know if I can adequately convey to you how my heart sank as he climbed into the car. My fearless boy was broken. My daredevil, do good, help anyone, go-getter was a shell of the young man I raised. I fought back the tears, but I lost. Seeing me cry only broke him more. He began to cry, and I had to pull over. I hugged him but not for too long. Long enough for him, but not for me.

I knew what I had to do.

Every one of my kids is different. Each of them needs a completely different version of me. What speaks to one does NOT speak to the others.

I looked at him and said, "So did you break like a crap-ton of mirrors or run over a bunch of black cats or something because the universe is dealing you a sh- sandwich huh?"

I don't curse very often, so when I do, it's kind of significant and for this kid, he thinks it's hilarious. The other two will give me a chiding – "Mom!" But he cracked a smile and laughed, "Pretty much, I guess I must have."

"Well, either that or God was trying to close some doors for you and send you in a different direction and being subtle wasn't working so He slammed them... H A R D."

"Yes, He did." He replied, chin in his chest.

"I'm starving let's eat." I said, and I headed to his favorite restaurant.

The way to this boy's heart is through his stomach and steak is the express train. I took him for a fine meal, and we talked and laughed and caught up, really caught up.

There is great assurance in having a safety net in your parents. And while he appreciated it, part of him didn't imagine he would ever need it. I think he was waiting for criticisms or for me to say I "told you so." I never did. We never went backwards.

We packed up his things and moved him home that afternoon. He got a new job that week, used our cars and a few weeks later bought a used truck. After a year of working, saving and resetting, I showed him a school in Chicago that I thought might be a good fit. He had a new serious girlfriend and was coming at all the decisions from a new place of experience and appreciation for his opportunities.

We offered him grace. We showed him respect. We gave support and space to reset and he did.

Today he is a Biomedical Engineer with my husband's company. Happily married 6 years to that serious girlfriend he found during his reset. They have a beautiful little girl, own a home and have a great life.

He needed to find his own way and we had to stand back and allow him to make some mistakes. I will never forget that day when I picked him up. Broken and beaten down by life, lost and not knowing where to turn.

As I think on it, I realize this is precisely how our Father in Heaven parents us, with grace. He lets us make our own choices. He offers counsel and guidance if we seek it, but He will let us exercise our will until we exhaust ourselves.

When we are broken, when our friends desert us, when we feel lost and alone, He lovingly collects and restores us if we allow Him. He doesn't beat us up for our mistakes, He washes them away and trusts that we will learn from them.

Robin McCarty is a blogger and life/parent coach at One Blue Branch. She is an entrepreneur and host of the podcast Branching Out with Robin. She speaks at retreats and conferences on marriage, parenting, and overcoming adversity. She has worked as a freelance writer for 25 years and finds her joy in her husband, children and grandchildren. She writes at www.onebluebranch.com

How I Discovered Caring For Myself Is Caring For My Grown Kids

Susan Lawson

The year my husband and I celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary, we had a watershed event. In the midst of giving away our oldest daughter in marriage to a man my husband deemed remarkably unworthy, I came face-to-face with the reality that alcoholism had taken up residency in our lives. Despite both of us - being adult children of alcoholics - promising early on it never would have a place in our lives, it had crept in. In twelve-step programs it is said that alcohol is "cunning, baffling, powerful." Indeed, it is. Looking back and reflecting why this moment in time was the catalyst for change, I believe the nature of this family disease led to the choice our daughter made and the intense reaction it prompted in my husband. Like frogs in the pot, it boiled up around us without our awareness. It didn't look the same in our marriage and family as it did in either of our childhood homes. But there were enough signs to point in that direction.

With that revelation, my eyes were open to a radically different perspective for our life. I suddenly became aware of the pain we had been causing our children and the legacy we would leave them if we didn't change the course we were on. My husband and I both sought help in twelve-step programs.

My constant plea was, "How do I help our children?" The answer consistently remained, "Help yourself first and they will get better." It was very difficult to accept that by helping myself first it would make a difference in their lives. It seemed counterintuitive to put myself first when my heart was breaking for the familiar pain they were surely enduring. But we listened to that advice.

In twelve-step programs, "slogans" are often used as a tool for recovery. It seems too simple an idea that the frequent repetition and recollection of a few little words strung together to represent a much larger concept could have much of an impact on our relationships. But they are often the most powerful of all the habits we can develop. Scripture has a lot to say about the power of words, they have the power of life and death. Among the many twelve-step tools, slogans provide memorable life-giving words to keep us on track to a healthier way of life.

We each continued to learn and use the tools of the program to work on our own recovery. For my part, "detachment with love" became a daily reminder, my first and most frequently used personal slogan. Learning to discern the difference between care-giving and care-taking, taking responsibility for myself and allowing others to take responsibility for themselves, was, in fact, one of the most loving things I could do for everyone involved. This kind of detachment didn't mean I withheld love or affection for others, it meant I loved them, unconditionally, and allowed them to experience the consequences of their choices, good and bad.

Using such tools saved our lives and enriched our marriage beyond our wildest imagination. The children witnessed the profound changes happening in us and, as they watched us learn to communicate differently, take responsibility for ourselves, and establish healthy boundaries, they began to get better too.

Although we no longer attend meetings, we both continue to embrace the program tools and philosophy. We take seriously the daily practice of the things we learned in the years we attended

meetings, and we have long come to recognize that these tools are applicable to everyone. The young adults and teens who lived through that transformation were, and continue to be, reminded frequently of the value of the lessons and use of the tools.

The slogans take powerful spiritual practices and reduce them to small nuggets of guidance and encouragement to live each day to the best of our ability with joy and serenity. They often reflect the messages of Proverbs in modern language and address contemporary circumstances. There is a variety to choose from and each is useful to anyone seeking practical ways to maintain healthy relationships, as well as their own overall emotional health. No addiction required.

Learning how to establish and maintain healthy boundaries, how to take responsibility for our choices, behavior, and happiness are good and healthy habits. Perhaps cliché, slogans offer a wealth of wisdom for managing every aspect of our lives including surrender to the “god of our understanding” - because accepting that we are not in control and trusting the One who is may be the most important tool we can offer our children - at any age or stage.

Modeling the use of such tools has had a most profound impact on our lives and continues to do so, and I would encourage every parent to explore the concepts of twelve-step programs and use them in their own lives. What a gift it is to be a living example of how to approach every circumstance with wisdom and love, acknowledging our own imperfections and need for help. To let our children see us embracing these habits and hear us share the ideas that guide our attitudes and behaviors so they will have something to reach for and cling to when they encounter their own inevitable need to put them to use. They are far more than a list of tips; they are a way of thinking and living with purpose. They are an anchor that keeps us from drifting where we don't want to go.

Susan is a life-long stay-at-home wife, mother, and grandmother. Her days are spent in service to her family and friends as she strives to simply live out the two greatest commandments; love God and love people. She is a writer, storyteller, and blogger at Simply Susan. You can find her musings at keepitsimplesusan.com



**God grant me the serenity to accept
the things I cannot change; courage
to change the things I can; and
wisdom to know the difference.**

Living one day at a time; enjoying one
moment at a time; accepting hardships
as the pathway to peace; taking, as He
did, this sinful world as it is, not as I
would have it; trusting that He will
make all things right if I surrender to
His Will; that I may be reasonably
happy in this life and supremely happy
with Him forever in the next.

Amen

Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971)



Recognize God's Peace In The Challenges

Karole Wolfe

“The key to being happy is knowing you have the power to choose what to accept and what to let go.”

A friend shared this quote with me many years ago, not long after I had come to the realization that my daughter was on the autism spectrum. I don't know who said it, but these words impacted me greatly, because I had chosen to bear a weight for her, in this diagnosis, that I could have just as easily not chosen.

A Little Background

She was 14, attending a public middle school and up to this point, parenting my daughter was not, in any way, like the way I had parented her older brother. I understood that each child is different, especially since there are seven years between them. The obvious differences of gender and the fact that my son had practically been an only child, and then my daughter becoming an only child after her brother was off to college and out of her life by age 11. I will not lay out the scenario that led us to her diagnosis, because, in all respects, to look at her, to talk with her, to see her test scores, and by the measure of society, my daughter is “normal.” She is a beautiful creation of God, who now deals with the struggle, daily, that she has to work doubly hard to maintain the normal that she pulled off so well, until she was not able to anymore.

For most parents, the steps to parenting our children to adulthood slow after middle school and shift from teaching them basics to educating them in the nuances of navigating the adult world they are entering. They are no longer sheltered by the family and home they have grown up in, and need to learn how to apply the principles, faith, and morals that have been taught. If you have a child on the spectrum, you know that parenting that child is very hands-on, tuned-in and can require a hyper-helicopter mode. Life suddenly takes on a new outlook and the amount of energy needed is often draining. The parent of a child on the spectrum does not get the luxury of “slowing down.” The hand-holding, the reminders, the constant encouragement and knowledge that the milestones are harder to reach, continue into adulthood as they face challenges that seem too big to conquer. For these children, the transition to adult life looms large, not only for their parents, but to the child who knows they should be thinking about life after high school or tackling driver's ed, but find those thoughts overwhelming and fear inducing.

Parenting Your Adult Child on the Autism Spectrum

As we all are unique, each child on the spectrum has an individual set of challenges and struggles. As parents, we know their strengths and weaknesses and we faithfully continue to help them find their passions by creating opportunities for them to explore and expand their interests. You may have done this in their formative years, however, autistic adults continuously strive to find their lane, to feel comfortable in their skin. In my experience, gently and subtly offering introductions to avenues of potential niches through my daughter's interests, has helped her explore her options in a way that allows her to address the challenges on her timetable. I cannot stress enough that relaxing the timeline is important, as well as encouraging the confidence you see them gain.

You've heard the term "it takes a village" or "don't be an island." I know both of those statements can have negative connotations; however, we do know the value of other voices speaking life into our children. We find out quickly when they become independent thinkers and begin choosing friends, that our children sometimes leave us (parents) in the dust, for "new blood." We expose our children to grandparents, aunts, uncles, teachers, and coaches. All have an impact on our child, positively or negatively. And yes, we must scrutinize these choices for our child's safety. As they become young adults and begin to encounter college professors, peers, bosses, mentors, their sphere of influencers grows significantly. Beyond having confidence in what you have taught them about relationships, pray for those they will encounter on their journey as an adult. Pray for them to measure the integrity of those around them. Encourage and foster relationships you know are impacting them in a positive way. In addition, those on the spectrum can easily be exploited or taken advantage of emotionally and physically. Vigilant eyes and ears or a gentle voice may be warranted when they need guidance in a situation.

It is important to remember that God chose you to parent your child. It is an act of grace, free and unconditional, to be elected for this journey as a parent (1 Peter 1:2). For many years I was compelled by the false belief that I had to present myself as a worthy parent to God. The list of all of my efforts to understand my child's challenges and help her cope in life were laid on the altar of "this is what I have done with the responsibility you've given me in X child." I had laid extreme guilt on myself where there should have been none. I had convinced myself that this child was my job, to the point of utter exhaustion in attempts to research and gain knowledge on a subject that, seemingly, God had already given me. He had already equipped me with everything I needed when I came to be on this earth. Have you felt at times that what you need is already there, but scrounge around "for confirmation," or better yet, distractions to steal you away from the instilled knowledge there?

I had realized, after many years of frustration and agonizing over my call as a parent, that all I needed was what the Father had given me and continues to give to me: grace, love, mercy, patience, and compassion. I began meditating on the Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), and found that the fruit of **peace** was the one I needed most. I challenge you to ponder these words also.

Remember, dear parent of a challenged young adult, to:

Surround yourself with support, to find the time and knowledge you need to sustain your journey and to support your adult child when necessary;
Surround yourself with compassion, to ease your frustrations and better understand your adult child's decisions;
Surround yourself with the Fruit of the Spirit to help you manage your interactions with your adult child;
Surround yourself with grace and apply generously with your child;
Surround yourself, and your child, with prayer.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Galatians 5:22-23

Prayer

Father, you know our stories and our challenges. You knew each day of our lives before they came to be, and we are hopeful in knowing that You can use our pain for your purposes. Help us to have courage and wisdom to reach our grown children. Lay on their hearts the right path to take and a desire to seek the wondrous things you have already given them. When we don't know what to do, will you guide us to lay our concerns at your feet, and show us how to love and gently guide as appropriate? Our road as a parent is always changing, and even though at times it is difficult, there is joy. We will not be discouraged. We know You desire great things for your children. Thank You for being with us. Do in us, a great work, You, who can do all things. In the powerful name of Jesus, I pray. Amen

Karole Lynne Wolfe is the mother of two young adults. She recently began her second career as an entrepreneur and enjoys sewing, writing, reading (voraciously), traveling and any beach she can find. She is a lifelong resident of Maryland and lives there with her husband, one young adult child and one Havapoo pup.

A Season For Everything: Learning To Trust When It's Time To Let Go

Janine Dilger

"...Commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

~Deuteronomy 6:6-9

I've spent a lot of my children's lives talking. As a writer, I have a propensity towards wordiness, and though journalism school taught me to use them efficiently and concisely, my natural tendency is to ramble on.

When they're babies, it's our words that help our children acquire language. I often carried on what felt like a continuous narrative to my daughters in their highchairs, boosters, strollers and car seats: cooing and intoning compassion, delight and correction. Naming objects and colors, counting items in a row. Describing things and circumstances, and when they became toddlers, answering endless whys and how-comes. All the while, instilling in them understanding of the world around them, of God, of me, and their relationship with and to these things.

As my children grew, so did the dynamics of our interactions. The weight of my words shifted and changed through their elementary years and expanded again in those middle school days of challenging boundaries, testing my limits, and discovering the power of their own words—and their ability to build up or to tear down.

There were years where my words had to be measured and concise; I called it "parenting in 30-second sound bites" because teenagers just aren't interested in hearing you go on and on (Cue the eyeball roll).

There were years where my words felt frenzied because I knew the day was coming when my daughters would be moving into adulthood and I could see that my opportunities to speak into their lives were diminishing.

Once our children are adults, the dynamic shifts again. Another mother, whom I greatly admire, wisely calls it the transition from "manager" to "consultant." When our children become adults, stepping out of the role of overseer and boss should be a perfectly natural transition. And yet, in many ways it feels perilous.

When I dropped my oldest daughter at university in a strange city thousands of kilometers away from our home, I questioned all of my choices and actions over the previous 18 years. Did I say enough? Did I do enough? In all of my talking, did I manage to instill the knowledge she'd need to thrive as an adult in her own right?

Of course, none of that mattered, because I was getting on a plane and heading back home.

In that moment, I had to choose to trust.

I had to trust the job I had done raising her to that point. Was I a perfect mother? Absolutely not. More than once I remarked to my eldest daughter that all of her firsts were also mine. First babies toss you into the deep end of parenting and few manage to make it to shore without a life preserver. Few things in life are as humbling as parenting, but we do the best we can with what we know and the tools we have, and God honors that.

I had to trust my daughter. Though still lacking in worldly experience, she was (and still is) a smart and savvy kid. While she was growing up, I might have tried to save her from making all the same mistakes I made as a youth, but human nature dictates that she was destined to make her own. The most impactful thing I can do as her mom is to raise her knowing that I trust her, and she can trust me in return, no matter what circumstances she finds herself in.

I had to trust my Heavenly Father. What better role model to emulate in my parenting than our loving and generous God. Psalm 139 reminds me that my daughters are fearfully and wonderfully made—all their days were written in His book before even one of them came to be. If I believe this then I can be confident that He sees them, and He's got them—whether they're under my roof or on the other side of the country.

While I love my adult children to bits, I believe there is an element of distance all parents need to establish once our kids leave home. It doesn't mean we aren't still emotionally connected, but we have to let go of the need to control and, instead, trust them to take the reins, even while we are loosening our grip. We need to put down the microphone (or, in my case, the megaphone), step off our soapbox and acknowledge that our speaking role is done. It's time to focus on listening.

In my newly minted role as "consultant," my job looks different than it once did. I need to understand that it's a supporting role—one that is loving and encouraging, not meddling or insinuating. And, if my daughters happen to ask for my opinion, I can still offer sound advice and wise counsel. But I also know that they may choose to take or leave it and I need to be ok with that too.

Lord, thank you for helping me loosen my grip on the reins of my daughters' lives. Thank you for the confidence I have knowing that they remain in the capable and loving hands of a Heavenly Father who loves them more than their earthly mother ever could. Thank you that, even as my words to them are less prescriptive, the words you speak into and over their lives are timeless and without end.

"Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it."

~Proverbs 22:6 (NLT)

Janine is a freelance writer and editor in Calgary, Canada. She has four daughters ranging in age from 15 to 31 and a head full of silver hair to prove it. Because of this, she holds fast to the sentiment in Proverbs 16:31, "Gray hair is a crown of wisdom; it is gained by living a godly life." When she's not wrestling with words on the page or nattering incessantly to her husband and children, you can find her walking the neighbourhoods, parks and pathways of her city soaking in the beauty of creation. She writes at JanineDilger.com and at IG at [jdilger](https://www.instagram.com/jdilger)

Learning To Listen

LeAnn Caseria

“So, what’d you think?” I asked while biting my tongue, keeping my eyes on the winding road. The sun’s glare shines in my eyes and I’m already looking for the next drive-through coffee stand, craving the clarity of caffeine. It’s mid-morning in Eastern Washington, the setting for this long-awaited “College Road Trip” with my son Dusty, and I am finding some parts of this trip much more difficult than I thought. It’s mostly the part about “keeping my mouth shut” that was becoming a real challenge. Knowing this could be the case, I’d made up a few talking points, in case me not giving my opinion became a problem...phrases like,

“So, what’d you think? “

“It’s a pretty campus...”

“Did you like the dorms?”

I’d never realized how hard it is to carry on a conversation with someone, without giving your opinion, until this trip. It was a great testing ground for my self-control, as we drove on that highway almost fifteen years ago. It was a pivotal time for me as a mother as my eldest son was faced his first big decision as a young adult.

Which college was the best one for him? Dusty loved to run, wanted to compete in college, so location was important, knowing the hours he would spend training on local trails. He was considering a career in an Engineering field...some of the schools had highly rated Engineering departments, many offered sports scholarships.

Yes, my husband and I had shared our thoughts...carefully. Finances, majors, locations, scholarships...all controlled the narrative, but the final decision was not ours...not our story, not our journey, not our life to live. And as much as I’d like to control the outcome, it was not our decision to make.

I knew our boys. Raising three very different sons, I had learned so much. Yes, I had definite opinions on what type of school would be a good fit for our eldest son, my first to leave the nest...my testing ground for being the parent of a young adult. But...oh, the patience it was taking. Moments of joy and minor terror as we visited each campus, attempting to see into the future. Would he make friends here? Big State school? Is it a safe campus?

I definitely had thoughts...oh boy, did !! Friends had been down this path before. Knowing that I’d need advice, I’d reached out to a few older, wiser mom friends. They had formed this “You are the loving chauffer for this trip” mantra I was carrying. “This is not your choice” replayed in my mind, refocusing my brain.

Jumping ahead, to last week, I’d asked friends for their thoughts on “parenting adult children.” Seeking input from some amazing moms, accomplished gals, strong, smart and wise, they included a published author, music teacher, artist and businesswomen...one is currently preparing for a TED talk. From homeschooling, balancing work and parenting children with health challenges, these gals have faced just about anything life can throw at you.

Their advice -

-One shared her struggles. Her oldest, sweet daughter spoke up, standing her ground, setting boundaries, gaining confidence to make changes that we both needed. Now, she enjoys calling me weekly, where she does most of the talking! *"I have become a good listener."*

-Another said, "It is encouraging, prayer and *mostly listening*, my in-laws were great examples. I learned a lot from them."

-More thoughts, "Much of parenting adults involves saying NOTHING. Knowing *when* to keep our mouths shut, as much as knowing *what NOT to say*. Don't offer your opinion, unless they ask for it (and wait for a yes!)"

-Others shared the wisdom of in-laws..." I just LOVE them, knowing that they prayed for us daily. They are such *good listeners!* I am learning that it involves me *saying very little* and giving it to God."

- One shared words that have stuck with her, making her think. From Crosby, Stills and Nash, "Don't you ever ask them why, if they told you, you would cry, so just look at them and sigh, and know that they love you"

Reading their responses, I was surprised at the importance of listening.

Last week, my husband and I were back in Eastern Washington, joining Dusty and his wife Emily for dinner. It's been years since he'd changed his mind on the big State school he'd considered for years, turned down an athletic scholarship at another school, (even after countless calls and incentive offers from their coach). After that weekend, I watched his thoughts change, turning down other offers, he surprisingly chose a smaller, liberal Arts Christian college that didn't even offer athletic scholarships. There, he made life-long friends, competed Nationally in Track and Cross Country, chose a challenging major leading to a career as a mechanical engineer and began a friendship with a lovely lady who would become his bride seven years later.

Fifteen years ago, driving away from the College that I felt in my heart was a great fit for my son, I kept quiet, trusting in the wisdom of the young man beside me. My journey of parenting young adults was just beginning and letting go is hard. As our children grow, so do we. I've tried to learn from my mistakes, forgiving myself as I grow in self-control and faith. Control to keep my mouth shut, and faith in the God who loves them.

LeAnn is married with three grown sons, two daughters-in-law and two adorable grandsons that make her smile. When her head is not in a book, she works in a library. Blogging about better sleep for her family business is her side hustle. She finds life amazingly beautiful and sometimes hard. You can find her on IG at stayinguprightwithleann

No Strings Attached

Sue Fulmore

When the telephone rings during normal sleeping hours you know it is never good news.

We were awakened early on Saturday morning, long before we planned to get up, by the harsh ringing of the phone.

“I think I’m having a heart attack” were the first words out of our 16-year-old daughter’s mouth.

Calling at the beginning of her opening shift at the local McDonald’s she haltingly told us of her symptoms. Difficulty breathing, the feeling that an elephant was sitting on her chest, upper back pain and the odd sensation that bubble wrap was popping in her lungs when she tried to breathe. She would drive the one block to the hospital and could we meet her there?

I can barely recall those moments. I have no memory of getting dressed and into the car or the drive to the hospital. I do remember the fear that gripped me, the desperate prayers with hardly any words which bounced around in my head along with the questions.

For years now, we had felt the long drawn out losing of our daughter as she sought to find her own way in the world. This first child of ours, who from day one was as stubborn and independent as they come, was slipping away from our grasp. She was rebelling, as teens are wont to do, pushing back at the rules and values of our family. I saw the gap widening between what we had envisioned for her and all that she was choosing. Our hearts had been wrung repeatedly over her choices and growing alienation.

We questioned if we had made a mistake in letting her get a job so young. What influences has she been exposed to? What older voices were informing her choices? Did she have the strength to decide for herself or would she give in to the pressure to fit in at all costs?

So, this pre-dawn call only served to heighten my fear of losing this daughter forever. I was terrified that it was too late to repair our relationship.

The past few years had been difficult. I was having my share of midlife physiological changes as well as re-examining my role now that my children were growing up. This daughter of mine was finding every way possible to test the waters, to see how far she could go in pushing the limits of our conservative home environment. I wanted to be loving and understanding and be part of her journey toward adulthood but I felt as though a wall had been erected and I was no longer welcome.

As we navigated this health journey, (it turned out to be a spontaneous pneumothorax requiring a few hospital stays and eventually lung surgery to correct), I wrestled with how to repair what had been broken in our relationship.

This feeling of being cut off from my own child was devastating, and helped me realize what was truly important. I decided that nothing was going to get in the way of my love for her. My insistence that she live according to my rules and values had only served to alienate. I began to see how I

treated other people's kids with greater acceptance, curiosity, and unconditional support than my own. My love had always been there but it was tainted by my own need for her to turn out "right".

We know from childhood development studies that a child's character is formed in the early years, so that by the time they reach grade 1 their values have been ingrained. We had trained both our children in the ways we thought were wise and healthy. They knew right from wrong, how to treat other people, how to be responsible and work hard, they knew the God my husband and myself believed in. Now it was time to allow them the freedom to explore what their future would look like. It was also now the time that my husband and I trusted that God would continue the parenting and teaching in ways we could not.

There are times, many times in fact, that I do not agree with their choices but I have determined to love them in and through everything. This commitment to love above all else has helped me navigate many difficult changes over the years. This is really the only requirement we have as Christians – to love as Jesus loves.

I am slowly learning that the way Jesus loves is very different from the way I love. His love is unconditional, not based on any merit or actions of my own. He sees, hears, understands and wants to be with me no matter how messy my life. He is not waiting for me to get cleaned up or make good decisions. He comes to be with me and love me no matter what. Once in a while I catch a glimpse of this kind of love in myself, but mostly my love is full of my insecurities, fears, and clinging to my plans for our family.

In some of His last words to His disciples, Jesus laid it out, "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). There could be no better way to teach my grown kids about God and His ways than to love them the way Jesus loves them.

As my children have grown and left home to pursue their education and careers, I have seen how our relationships improved when I put love first. Of course, I want what is best for them, but who is to say that I know what that is? Love with no strings attached allows me to be curious, to celebrate the person they are becoming. It is almost as if I took off the parent hat and switched it for a cheerleader hat.

Just recently one daughter called to express her gratitude that I had switched my mode of parenting. She feels loved and supported and celebrated, and I am so grateful. I have not been a perfect parent by any measure, but if my girls know they have someone always in their corner, I consider it a job well done.

Sue Fulmore is a widely published freelance writer and speaker, seeking to use words to awaken mind and soul to the realities of the present. Like a prospector panning for gold, she uses her pen to uncover beauty and truth hidden just below the surface of our lives. She is the mother of two adult daughters and lives in sunny Alberta, Canada with her retired husband, plant babies, and robust shoe collection. You can find her on IG at [suefulmore](#), Fb at [sue.fulmore](#) and at www.suefulmore.com.

“What Is Mine To Do?”

Katie Kibbe

Rested and relaxed from yoga, I picked up my phone. 3 missed calls and phrases like, WHERE RU and CALL ME, splayed across a picture of our cute puppy. The dichotomy of cute and all caps accelerated my heart rate.

All of the calm I had worked so hard to achieve evaporated in seconds.

My mind turned to recriminations about what a bad mother I was for not having my phone with me at all times. You're probably familiar with this drill. After all, we are the first generation of mothers who are expected to be available 24-7 to solve each and every one of our offspring's problems.

If being available 24-7 is the right thing to do, why does it end up making us feel like such failures?

“Where there's smoke, there's fire”. It's hard to know what is a fire drill and what is an actual fire. Maybe the modern equivalent is, “Where there's texts and missed calls, there's a crisis.”

It seems perfectly reasonable to treat every one of these instances as if it were an actual fire until you know differently. When the texts and calls are coming from one of your darling children when they are in high school, your crisis radar kicks into high alert. It's just what a good mother does.

And we are so good at being The Fixer. It has taken us years to gain these skills. We tuned our ears to discern each individual child's cry. We learned their pain tolerances, too. Fixing small problems was so gratifying. We doubled our efforts as they grew older trying to maintain favorite fixer status. Everyone else was doing the same thing so we don't notice the consequences until it became time for the child to leave home. That's when the panic really set in.

Breaking the Fix-It habit may be one of the toughest things you'll ever do. But, breaking this habit allows our children to become the people God intended them to be. Transitioning out of the Fixer role requires a delicate touch. It must be done intentionally, gradually, and always with love.

As my children were leaving home to attend college/university, I knew I needed to stop fixing everything and teach them how to rely upon themselves. I took on the role of Adulting Consultant. I learned to balance what I knew about my children with knowing what they would face in the real world. Instead of fixing, I taught them to find solutions.

One question became my lifesaver in the process: “What is mine to do?”

This phrase became a filter for each crisis that arose. I asked it of myself first and then turned the question on the child. I wanted to raise children who could say, like St. Francis did on his deathbed, “I have done what was mine to do.” Figuring out what was mine and helping the children figure out what was theirs now allows me to pick up my phone unafraid of losing my hard-won peace.

A storyteller at heart, Katie loves to connect women with their own stories, help them create action plans to gain clarity, and unlock creativity. She and her husband live in Ohio with Maggie the labradoodle, waiting for their young-adult children to return with their laundry. You can find her at: Website: www.katiekibbe.com and at Instagram at [katie_kibbe](https://www.instagram.com/katie_kibbe)

Tips For Staying Connected For The Long-Distance Mom

Sue Fulmore

Send a letter

Yes, I mean an old-school, send through the postal service letter or card. This lets them know you are thinking of them and every time they look at the card, they will be reminded that you love them.

Get Connected on Houseparty

This fun app allows you to talk and see each other, and play some fun games. Sometimes there is not much news to catch up on, but you can have some fun together using this app.

Be intentional with phone call check-ins

Put it on your calendar to call your kid at least once per week. Set a time aside so you can both schedule it and show up for each other. Maybe plan to talk over dinner, or make a after dinner glass of wine date.

Text your silly memes or inspirational quotes or just say “good morning” to let them know you are thinking of them.

We like to share our the latest from The Onion or cute cat videos to brighten their day. It’s always fun to share clips from movies or shows you have watched together, Sponge Bob classic moments are some of our favourites.



The Spiritual Practice Of Letting Go

Cathy Leyland

My dad was a journalist early in his career and often referred to lessons learned at the School of Hard Knocks in the University of Life. There's no entrance exam! You simply start in the deep end and find your way from there. Parenting is a lot like that. The syllabus changes often, and without notice.

When the bottom fell out of our marriage following my husband's liver transplant, navigating my grief in front of two attentive teenagers was stressful and exposing. In the four years our marriage unravelled, there were times when I could set healthy boundaries (not over-share), and other times where the pain leaked out and I said things I shouldn't have. Pretending to hold it all together was beyond me. I didn't know at the time that my vulnerability would be their greatest teacher.

Going back to school to study spiritual formation was key to my healing. In my studies, I learned some life-giving spiritual disciplines; among them was the discipline of *letting go*. I learned that *letting go* happens in stages. Grieving does too. Some things are in our power to release while others get ripped right out of our arms. My marriage fell into the latter. When it happened, I was stunned and incapacitated. For a long time I could do nothing but cry my heart out and beg God to fix it. Four years of counselling and mountains of prayer, didn't change my husband's mind. I finally had to *let go* of what I couldn't hold onto.

In *letting go* of what I couldn't control, I learned some deep truths. *Letting go* is an act of trust in God's goodness and sovereignty. Trusting God includes respecting individuals (made in His image) for their uniqueness and separateness, and affirming their right to make their own choices. Though I didn't like my husband's choices, they were his to make. The same is true for my children. They are not extensions of me and this requires me to regard them with healthy detachment. They were gifts from the start, received with gratitude and raised in the admonition of the Lord. They are grown now with partners of their own, and though they have made choices different than how they were raised, I accept and respect them for the unique humans they are. This has been transformational for all of us. They have said my love and acceptance of who they are, in spite of their choices, has given them confidence. I like to think of it as roots and wings. It is my joy that they want to connect and enjoy coming home. Trusting God loves them more than I ever could and pursues them with His unwavering love, has made all the difference.

In the past eight years as I have practiced spiritual direction, I am cultivating the art of deep listening. This has transferred to my children who know they always have a captive audience in their mother. Listening with interest and asking questions with genuine curiosity, validates their worth. I've noticed they, in turn, have become good listeners. What's also proven life-giving to our relationships is admitting when I'm out of line. When I'm made aware of my errors, not only do I apologize but I invite further dialogue. I do this for their sake so they can say what's on their mind, but also for my own peacemaker's need for true harmony. Being intentional in this way prevents casual apologies and sweeping things under the rug.

Thirty years ago, when my firstborn was just a toddler, someone gently admonished me with these words: "Your kids don't need a perfect mommy. They need a mommy who knows her imperfections and will admit them. How will they ever know their need for God unless you show them yours."

Letting Go, Author unknown

To *let go* does not mean to stop caring, it means I can't do it for someone else.

To *let go* is not to cut myself off, it's the realization I can't control another.

To *let go* is not to enable, but to allow learning from natural consequences.

To *let go* is to admit powerlessness, which means the outcome is not in my hands.

To *let go* is not to try to change or blame another, it's to make the most of myself.

To *let go* is not to care for, but to care about.

To *let go* is not to fix, but to be supportive.

To *let go* is not to judge, but to allow another to be a human being.

To *let go* is not to be in the middle arranging the outcomes, but to allow others to affect their own destinies.

To *let go* is not to be protective, it's to permit another to face reality.

To *let go* is not to deny, but to accept.

To *let go* it not to nag, scold or argue, but instead to search out my own shortcomings, and correct them.

To *let go* is not to adjust everything to my desires but to take each day as it comes, and cherish myself in it.

To *let go* is not to criticize and regulate anybody but to try to become what I dream I can be.

To *let go* is not to regret the past, but to grow and live for the future.

To *let go* is to fear less, and love more.

Cathy Leyland is a spiritual director and budding writer. Creative communication, encouragement and faith are her spiritual gifts. She helps others listen for God's voice and appreciate their uniqueness in Christ. She enjoys sharing from the heart, listening between the lines and asking good questions. Though a native of New Orleans, Cathy has lived in Canada for 32 years. She is a retired career coach and lives on the water in Vancouver with John, her husband of six years. You can read more of Cathy's words on her website - Reflections on the Water, at cathyfortleyland.com.

Parenting for the Long Haul

Terry Covey

Dreams of Perfect Parenting

All of us begin our parenting journey hoping to be the best parents possible.

If we grew up in a happy home, we plan to do things the way our parents did; we expect all will go well. If life was a bit messy, we imagine we'll handle things better than our parents, train our kids better, or have kids that aren't like "those kids" we know! None of us sets out to mess up in our parenting role.

Well, my friend, you may be in for a surprise! Sorry to burst your bubble, but in the season of parenting where we launch them into adulthood, "happily ever after" is mostly found in fairy tales. I'm not saying there won't be blessings, laughter, and joy as our kids grow up.

But, reality comes sneaking up on us and it's best if we are a little prepared! 😊

It's easy to think life will be roses and sunshine when the dirty work of parenting has passed. The nose and bottom wiping, the child and character training, plus — we'll finally sleep through the night and be able to do whatever we want! Right?

Well, getting to those days of blissful freedom, comes with a lot of transition. It often takes some wrestling to figure out our new roles as parents of adults!

Designed By God

Hang in there with me. It's not as bad as it might sound. You may have two children with easygoing personalities and this transition will be a piece of cake. In my case, I have ten kids and every type of personality there is! For some of them, it was truly easy — but for others, it was a wild ride!

You see, each child is designed by God to be just the person God intended — not who we intended!

I know, that's a hard one to swallow for some mommas. **But learning to rely on God, leaning into Him to help us discern what each child needs from us as adults, will make the journey a whole lot smoother.**

Some moms just can't let go. Believe it or not, some kids don't mind that! They love the easy road: coming over for a free meal, having someone help with their problems, or even do their laundry! But if you have an "independent thinker" (that's what I politely call myself!), they may have different plans for adulthood. They're up for the challenge of life without parents involved. They prefer to be left alone to figure things out — and they may not want to visit every week (or month - or year!). I'm sorry. 😊

Reminders for Your Journey

So here are a few tips from someone who's parented adults for 22 years and watched kids leave home for the last 14 years.

- Some will set different parameters in your relationship than others.
- Some will want you to be part of their life, some won't.
- Some will only want a part of you. They don't want the real and raw stuff, while others will want to know you and accept all of you. And you will need to adapt.

Honestly, this actually isn't much different than when our kids were young. But here's where it can get sticky — this time, they are adults and you'll have to learn to play by their rules now!

You no longer set the standards or the rules. That's one thing I learned early on, and the lessons were uncomfortable! **My life only got busier because I was no longer creating the schedule.** I had to live by their schedule and adjust my life just as much as they did when they were young — an interesting twist on the relationship.

It may be unsettling when one child sets a boundary or expectation you're not comfortable with. **Be willing to have the hard conversations and get things on the table whenever possible.** You each need to hear what the other is thinking and feeling.

When my parents moved to our state to live near our family, the first thing we did was sit down to hear what each person expected of the relationship and what boundaries we had for our own family. Ask each other, "What would frustrate you if we did x, y, or z?" This was the best thing we ever did to keep the relationship healthy throughout the years.

Here Comes the Bride

One aspect we often romanticize in the "happy ever after" scenario is when our kids get married. Visions of wedding bells, flower girls, and the bridal march come to mind! Wedding planning can be such fun — and we picture life calming down and returning to normal after the big day. But things change greatly when they marry.

Here's the scoop — what was normal for your single son or daughter may be off-limits for their new spouse — whether it's a holiday tradition, scheduling family events, certain foods, or fun. You name it. **These new family members come with new habits, personalities, and comfort levels!**

Your family's idea of fun or an endearing term may mean something completely different to their spouse. Be patient as they learn your family's traditions. My son-in-law heard us call my husband a "nerd" and thought it was demeaning. He didn't know our family history of this being a term of endearment in our family!

Be prepared to do things a bit differently as you adjust to their routine and life. This doesn't mean always doing things outside your comfort zone or that you don't agree with. **But be prepared for some pushback and consider how you'll respond ahead of time.** Better prepared than surprised when you're smack in the middle of it.

A few tips to prepare for life with adult kids:

- Trust must be earned on both sides. **Give it time.**
- You'll get hurt — They don't know what it feels like to be in your shoes. **Forgive anyway.**
- You'll mess up — expect it. **Ask forgiveness and move on.**
- They'll do things you won't agree with. Love anyway. Remember those things you did that irked your parents?!
- Accept the new ideas, freedom, and quirks that come with adult kids. They're becoming who they were created to be (and will be) long after you're gone. **Learn to enjoy the process.**
- Sometimes this season comes with fear while we watch from a distance as our kids make some scary decisions. **Intercede with a kind suggestion when necessary.** And back it up with prayer!

If there's one habit that having adult kids has grown in me, it's my habit of prayer. We've always known God cares about our kids even more than we do. Now is our chance to watch the unfolding of the amazing things He has planned for them! Praise to our Father, our best example of a loving parent!

And that's how our parenting journey can be the best it can be! Enjoy the ride!

Terry Covey loves all things family. She has ten children and more grandchildren every year! She's passionate about encouraging women to live into all they were created to be. After a fulfilling 30 years homeschooling her kids, Life Coaching has become her second career! You can find her over at livingabovethenoise.com and Instagram [@livingabovethenoise](https://www.instagram.com/livingabovethenoise).

A Treasured Individual

Pam Truax

I was a young woman newly pregnant and I had just started feeling the kicks of new life growing within me. I was so excited! That movement helped me to imagine all the different possibilities, the snuggles that would surely come, hearing the first giggle, the first word, watching the first steps.

These little kicks and flutters made things so real for me and I wanted my husband to share in this experience. One day my husband was next to me and I said, "Quick! Now! He is kicking!" Of course, the moment his hand was on my belly the movement stopped. I was frustrated. Why isn't this little one moving now? What can I do to make him move? Oh, right... nothing. It was a big lesson to learn before I even laid eyes on this person, this individual who, even though he was growing inside of ME, was his own person, beloved and created by God. He would have his own ideas and plans and make his own way in the world.

It would be many years before I learned that lesson, but that was the day it started. On Mother's Day a few years later, I was given a pamphlet which contained a prayer I have cherished and consistently prayed over the years. The author of the pamphlet quotes a prayer found in a letter from a young Puritan man named Forbes Robinson...

"I want you to be one of the best men that ever lived--to see God and to reveal him to men. This is the burden of my prayers. My whole being goes out in passionate entreaty to God that he will give me what I ask. I am sure he will, for the request is after his own heart.

I do not pray that you may succeed in life or "get on" in this world. I seldom ever pray that you may love me better, or that I may see you oftener in this or any other world--much as I crave this.

But I ask, I implore, that Christ may be formed in you, that you may be made not in any likeness suggested by my imagination, but in the image of God-- that you may realize not my, but His ideal-- however much that ideal may bewilder me, however little I may recognize it when it is created.

I hate the thought that out of love for me you should accept my presentation, my feeble ideal, of the Christ. I want God to reveal His Son to you independently of men, to give you a firsthand knowledge of Him whom I am only beginning to see."

And so, like Mr. Robinson, I pray for my children; adult, independent, individual, and treasured. May you grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ and move far beyond what I can envision for you. In this mixed-up world, may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

And for my reader:

May you uncouple your identity from that of your children.

May you love and treasure them through all stages, whether or not you see eye to eye.

May you express that love unconditionally as often as you have the chance.

May you rejoice in who they become.

Pam Truax has followed the Lord Jesus since her teen years. Through many hard losses, she anchored her life in Christ and now firmly believes that hope is found while walking with him. She writes at gatheringenough.com in order to encourage those along the path who wrestle with hard things.

All The Mothers We've Been

Jenni Lisa Howard

"We must never forget any part of ourselves ... all the ages that we have been," writes Madeleine L'Engle in *Walking on Water: Reflections on Art and Faith*. These beautiful and powerful words, I think, could also apply to motherhood: we are all the mothers we have been.

Amidst all the wisdom and oft-quoted advice about giving our children wings and roots, one of the hardest parts of letting them 'grow and go' is a sense of loss that's hard to put your finger on. It's not, I think, simply about 'losing' the children who suddenly got taller, broader and funnier when we weren't looking. Besides, my Italian heritage refuses to accept any suggestion of the concept of 'letting go' (just ask my 'babies'—they're resigned to this fact.)

There's a sense, also, of leaving behind different stages of motherhood—ones that seem to have zipped past in the click of a Lego brick, a shake of a Christmas stocking or the flip of a sleepover pancake.

Who hasn't walked past a family photo or scrolled through their camera roll and time-travelled, instantly, back to a time which felt like just yesterday? One that you could almost reach out and touch right now? Also, how is that, while they're sleeping, the most mature teen or twenty-something, even, somehow suddenly looks seven years old again?

Motherhood has its milestones—it's just that, most times, we don't realize we passed them until later on.

When older children first leave home for an extended period, all the quips about how we'll find ourselves missing the clutter and the chaos—along with the daily round-up of old coffee mugs, snacks and laundry—turn out to be true. As I write this, our eldest is home for a stretch and, let me tell you, I've never been happier to step over stacks of college books, online Urban Outfitters returns and to play hunt-the-abandoned-Earl Grey-and-toast.

Like other college mothers I know, when my daughter sets off for uni again, I find the first day or two after she leaves— the "off ramps" as I call them—the toughest. One of the cats stages a lie-in protest on her bed, externalizing what the rest of the house is feeling. Something I've found that helps? Straightening up her room while she's on the road—not that she leaves it in chaos—not at all—but doing my Italian mama "sweep" (again, I can't help myself, it's hardwired in my DNA) is a distraction.

It's a way I can mother her in that moment.

It's easy to forget that the "off ramps" are hard for our children, too. As I tidy, I'll find things that she forgot to pack—a book, or maybe a sweater or favorite scrunchie. I'll gather them up, ready to pop into a future care package. That name itself says it all—I'm pretty sure the making and sending of them has as much to do with caring for the mother's heart as does for the recipient's.

For my girl's twenty-first birthday, which, due to the restrictions of lockdown here in the UK, we couldn't be together for as a family, it was weird, hard but also so much fun arranging for a cake

(half rocky-road, half double chocolate brownie) to be collected from her favorite coffee shop and number balloons to be delivered.

It was the first birthday on which I couldn't lay out all her gifts the night before, but I did curl all my love into every iridescent ribbon as I wrapped them (last minute, as it has been since her first birthday. (Apparently, some things don't change).

That's how being a mother looked this year, on this birthday.

As L'Engle might put it, all the mothers we have been—each stage of the motherhood—can never be taken from us. They have brought us here to this moment, and the way we are called to mother our grown-up children today (whilst, perhaps, still mothering their younger siblings. My son might tell you he gets hugged a little too hard and too often, but I couldn't possibly comment).

Hard as it is to imagine, God willing, these, too, are the times that we will look back on one day and feel nostalgic about, too.

Motherhood is a constantly changing, ever adapting gift—from the moment we find out that we are carrying the miracle of life, or from the moment we carry a child home through the gift of adoption or become a stepmother. Or the day we are asked to be a Godmother.

In the many, extraordinary and wonderful forms it takes, it is forever moving—and everything that's said about children growing so fast and changing could be said for mothers, too.

We've been all those mothers. Let's celebrate them.

As those further along the road did for us, let's encourage other mothers in the same way. Stand with them, reassure them and pray for them—even if we're only a few steps ahead. Just the other week, my friend Heather told me to treasure these back-and-forth college years, which, too, are going fast.

Trust me, I'm listening.

Looking back on it, being a mother right now feels a lot like being the one who encouraged a nervous four-year-old into her reception class for her first day at school.

Friends, by the grace of God, let's honor the spirit of L'Engle's words and celebrate all the mothers we have been, the mothers we are today, and the mothers we hope to become.

A freelance writer (formerly Telegraph, Times, Marie Claire, Vogue and more) Jenni Lisa Howard writes and interviews others about faith, family, belonging and all it means to be home. You can find her at jennilisahoward.com and on IG at [jenni_lisa_howard](https://www.instagram.com/jenni_lisa_howard).