

A Mother's Trust

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by Carolyn Mahaney

A woman came up to me at a party last week, and after we chatted for a minute, she said: "My friend told me about something she heard you say once, and I wondered if it was true."

I knew where she was going. I get this question with curious regularity.

"Did you say that your biggest regret as a mother was that you didn't trust God more?"

Yes, I told her, it's true. I wish I had trusted God more.

As I wrote in our book *Girl Talk*:

"For every fearful peek into the future, I wish I had looked to Christ instead. For each imaginary trouble conjured up, I wish I had recalled the specific, unfailing faithfulness of God. In place of dismay and dread, I wish I had exhibited hope and joy. I wish I had approached mothering like the preacher Charles Spurgeon approached his job: 'forecasting victory, not foreboding defeat.'"

What mothering fears have you battled lately? Whether you are pregnant with your first child or trying to steer your youngest child through the teenage years, temptations to fear (or to its opposite: self reliance) litter the mothering landscape.

Here at *girltalk* we're beginning a new series: A Mother's Trust. To be honest, we're doing this for ourselves as much as for you. But we hope it serves you to listen in as we preach God's truth to our souls.

Effective Mothering

by Carolyn Mahaney

Faith toward God is the foundation of effective mothering. Success as a mother doesn't begin with hard work or sound principles or consistent discipline (although those are all vital components!). It begins with God: His character, His faithfulness, His promises, His sovereignty. And as our understanding of these truths increases, so will our faith for mothering. But if our practices (no matter

how useful) aren't motivated by faith, they will be fruitless.

The Bible says that without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). Fear is sin. And as my husband has often graciously reminded me – God is not sympathetic to my unbelief. Why? Because fear, worry, and unbelief say to God that we don't really believe He is 'merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness' (Psalm 86:15). We are calling God a liar.

Even in the most trying situations with our children, we have much more incentive to trust than to fear, much more cause for peace and joy than despair. That's because, as Christians, we have the hope of the gospel.

(re-printed from *Girl Talk: Mother-Daughter Conversations on Biblical Womanhood*)

Anything Frightening

by Carolyn Mahaney

Back to my conversation at the party...After chatting a few more minutes, my friend asked me another question: "Do you think fear is a unique temptation to women?"

"Yes, I do," I replied. Scripture seems to bear witness to this. While all Christians are frequently urged to trust God, women are specifically exhorted in 1 Peter 3:6: "do not fear anything that is frightening."

I love Scripture's honesty! It admits right upfront that there's stuff that is frightening. In fact, Scripture often predicts we will face much trouble and hardship in this life.

And nowhere is this more true than with our children. Where else in life do we have more significant responsibility (eternal souls), face such daunting challenges (sinful heart, hostile world), and feel so inadequate and ineffective?

But we are not to fear anything that is frightening. We are to trust in God.

Trusting God is not a one-time decision or something we can accomplish in a thirty-day challenge. We will have to fight to trust. Some days we must fight hourly, even on a moment-by-moment basis. Like raising children, growing in trust is a life-long effort.

But we are not alone. We have the Holy Spirit inside of us to guide us into all truth. We have our Sovereign Father ruling wisely and graciously over all. We have our Savior's righteousness to run to when we fail.

Many things are frightening, but we have many *more* reasons to trust God than to fear.

Anything Frightening

by Carolyn Mahaney

Mothers, we have the gospel: we need not fear. And yet we do. A lot.

Our mothering fears are conceived with our children. We see two little blue lines, and we are tempted to worry. We worry about eating something bad, lifting something heavy, sleeping in the wrong position.

Then our baby is born, and we fret about her life outside the womb—her eating, sleeping, talking, walking, developmental progress.

Our child starts school and we fear he will never finish. Will he make friends, make good grades, make something of himself? No sooner does high school start and we begin to worry about college.

We worry about our children's health, their education, their friends, and above all, the state of their souls.

But once our children leave home, get a job, get married--*then* we can stop worrying, right?

Not so fast. Instead of leaving with our children, new worries move in. In my case, I now have 16 people (including sons-in-law and grandchildren) to worry about instead of four!

And the world in which my grandchildren are growing up seems much scarier than the one in which I raised my children.

Mothers, we will never out-grow our need to trust God for our children.

But neither will we ever outgrow the faithfulness of God: *“the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children”* (Ps. 103:17).

No Grace for “What If?”

by Carolyn Mahaney

What do our mothering fears have in common? They are all in our imagination.

Our fertile minds generate countless scenarios whereby one calamity or another befalls our children: *What if my son rebels when he hits the teenage years? What if my daughter doesn't want to be my friend when she grows up? What if my son gets in a car accident? What if my daughter is diagnosed with leukemia?*

After thirty-four years of mothering, I've discovered that most of the bad things I imagined never actually came true. But there have been other trials—ones I never anticipated.

That's why Elisabeth Elliot's wise advice has been invaluable to me in fighting fear: "There is no grace for your imagination."

God does not sprinkle grace over every path my fear takes. He does not rush in with support and encouragement for every doomsday scenario I can imagine.

No, instead He warns me to stay off those paths: "Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil" (Ps. 37:8).

There is no grace for our imagination. That's why our fearful imaginings produce bad fruit: anxiety, lack of joy, futile attempts to control.

There is no grace for our imagination. But God does promise sufficient, abundant grace for every *real* moment of our lives. That's why the Proverbs 31 woman can "laugh at the future in contrast with being worried or fearful about it" (ESV Study Bible note on Pr. 31:25)

There is no grace for our imagination. But there will be grace for our mothering future--the moment it arrives.

Sufficient for Today

by Carolyn Mahaney

There is not grace for our imagination. But there *is* grace for today's mothering trials. Not tomorrow's imaginary trouble or next year's envisaged problems. Just for today.

That's why Jesus tells us: "[D]o not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble" (Matt. 6:34) Moms of all people know this to be true: each day really does have sufficient trouble without adding tomorrow's worries!

But for today's sufficient trouble there is God's more than sufficient grace: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9). "As your days" it says in Deuteronomy, "so shall your strength be" (33: 25).

What's more, for the Christian mother, goodness and mercy are behind every moment of today's trouble. Our trouble isn't meaningless. God is pursuing us with goodness and mercy *today* and all the days of our lives (Ps. 23:6).

"Courage, dear friend" encourages Charles Spurgeon, "The Lord, *the ever-merciful*, has appointed every moment of sorrow and pang of suffering. If He ordains the number ten, it can never rise to eleven, nor should you desire that it shrink to nine" (emphasis mine).

God is busy working today's trouble for our good. So do not worry about tomorrow but look to Him today.

At Our Wits' End

by Nicole Whitacre

"I cried to thee, O Lord." Ps. 30:8

"Prayer is the unfailing resource of the anxious mother," to paraphrase Charles Spurgeon:

"If they are driven to their wits' end, they may still go to the mercy-seat....Let us never forget to pray, and let us never doubt the success of prayer... Mirth and carnal amusements are a sorry prescription for a mind distracted and despairing. Prayer will succeed where all else fails."

We are often "at our wits' end" with our children. We feel like we've tried everything and we don't know what else to do. So we worry: *Will my toddler never stop throwing temper tantrums? Will my teenager ever open up to me again? Will my children ever turn to Christ?*

But instead of worrying, we are to cry to the Lord on behalf of our children. We must not forget to pray. And we must believe that prayer works: it will succeed where all our mothering efforts fail.

What worries do you need to bring to the mercy-seat today?

"They...were at their wits' end. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress." Ps. 107:27, 28

Prayer Works

by Nicole Whitacre

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”
(Philippians 4:6-7 ESV)

For the anxious mother, God has provided a solution in His Word.

It is **simple**: Pray. Give Thanks. Repeat.

It covers **all of life**: Don't be anxious about ANYTHING. Pray about EVERYTHING.

And it comes with a **promise**: God's peace will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Yet I sometimes treat prayer as if it doesn't work. I do this by *not* praying or thanking but by worrying instead.

“I've tried praying before,” I excuse myself, “and God's answer was different than what I asked for. So what's the use?” Or, “I tried praying and didn't feel more peaceful. I must not be doing it right.”

But the peace of God is more than a flimsy feeling of peace. It is a *knowing*, a *settled confidence* in the sovereign goodness of God that will guard against all anxious feelings.

As we pray and give thanks IN EVERYTHING, our trust in God deepens and His peace pervades our lives. Anxious thoughts don't have the same sticking power, and eventually, they go away.

So lately I've been trying to simply obey God's Word in Philippians 4. I still have a lot to learn about prayer, but I can tell you this: my faith, peace and gratefulness to God have grown, and my temptation to anxiety has decreased.

Scripture is true, and as anxious mothers, we would do well to believe and obey.

Daughters of Sarah

by Nicole Whitacre

“[T]ake the...sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.” Ephesians 6:17-18

To fight fear we are to “[pray](#) at all times.” But we have another weapon in our arsenal: the promises of God. We are to wield the Word against the onslaught of

mothering fears.

We are to "take" the Word of God and use it. To do this, we need to have it nearby. This means we need to be daily reading the Word and consistently meditating on it.

And we need to pull out the promises and put them into action. We have to pick up the sword and fight. A sword must be swung in order to deliver a blow.

We have a legacy of faithful, fear-fighting women to follow: "*And you are [Sarah's] children if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.*" 1 Peter 3:6

John Piper [writes](#): "[T]he daughters of Sarah fight the anxiety that rises in their hearts. They wage war on fear, and they defeat it with the promises of God."

Let's be daughters of Sarah and fight our mothering fears with the promises of God.

Battling Anxiety with Promises

by Nicole Whitacre

Recently [Justin Taylor](#) posted the following from [John Piper](#). It is worth re-posting here in its entirety:

* When I am anxious about some risky new venture or meeting, I battle unbelief with the promise: "Fear not for I am with you, be not dismayed for I am your God; I will help you, I will strengthen you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand" (Isaiah 41:10).

* When I am anxious about my ministry being useless and empty, I fight unbelief with the promise, "So shall my word that goes forth from my mouth; it will not come back to me empty but accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:11).

* When I am anxious about being too weak to do my work, I battle unbelief with the promise of Christ, "My grace is sufficient for you, my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9), and "As your days so shall your strength be" (Deuteronomy 33:25).

* When I am anxious about decisions I have to make about the future, I battle unbelief with the promise, "I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you" (Psalm 32:8).

* When I am anxious about facing opponents, I battle unbelief with the

promise, "If God is for us who can be against us!" (Romans 8:31).

* When I am anxious about being sick, I battle unbelief with the promise that "tribulation works patience, and patience approvedness, and approvedness hope, and hope does not make us ashamed" (Romans 5:3-5).

* When I am anxious about getting old, I battle unbelief with the promise, "Even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save" (Isaiah 46:4).

* When I am anxious about dying, I battle unbelief with the promise that "none of us lives to himself and none of us dies to himself; if we live we live to the Lord and if we die we die to the Lord. So whether we live or die we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and rose again: that he might be Lord both of the dead and the living" (Romans 14:9-11).

* When I am anxious that I may make shipwreck of faith and fall away from God, I battle unbelief with the promise, "He who began a good work in you will complete it unto the day of Christ" (Philippians 1:6). "He who calls you is faithful. He will do it" (1 Thessalonians 5:23). "He is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25).

Prayer and Promises

by Nicole Whitacre

When fear for our children grips us, we often look for something "new" to help us deal with it. But instead, we must rely on the true and the tried strategies from God's Word. They are:

Prayer: "...do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."
(Philippians 4:6)

AND

Promises: "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."
(Romans 10:17)

Saints throughout the centuries have leaned on God's promises and called out to Him in prayer. And each and every time, they have found Him to be faithful. "I sought the Lord," David tells us, "and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears" (Psalm 34:4).

So let's follow the example of David and that "great cloud of witnesses." Let's seek

God through constant prayer, and in the space of His promises, let's park our souls.

Fear-Fighting Counsel

by Nicole Whitacre

"Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself?" Martyn Lloyd-Jones

This is revolutionary, biblical, fear-fighting counsel for mothers. And it comes in two parts:

1. Stop listening to yourself
2. Start speaking to yourself

First, we must stop listening to our fears. We must not give them any "air time."

The critical moment is when a fearful thought first strikes our soul: *"What if _____ happens to my child?"* or *"What if my child never _____?"*

If we listen--even for a moment, if we give this fear any attention, consider its potential, wonder at its source, soon we begin to believe it might be true. The more we ponder this possibility, the more believable the fear becomes. Soon it is joined by other, more fearsome, thoughts; and before we know it, we're overwhelmed by hopelessness and dread.

A wise pastor once gave me this advice: "If any thought robs you of peace, it is an enemy of your soul; give it no recognition."

Give it *no recognition*. Ignore it. Disregard it. Close your ears to it. *Pay it no mind*.

We must not yield the floor to fear. We must filibuster our fears by speaking truth to our souls.

To Tell the Truth

by Nicole Whitacre

One reason we shouldn't listen to our fears is because they lie. Fear not only fails to accurately predict the future, it also tells lies about the Word and the character of God.

Fear says: God won't come through for you and your children. God doesn't care about the nitty-gritty problems of your relationship. You've messed things up

too badly this time. Your child's problem is too big. They are too far gone. There is no hope.

Fear dares to suggest a future without God. Fear challenges the sovereignty of God, questions His wisdom, doubts His love and mercy, defies His Word.

"But my fears *feel* so real." I once complained to a wise pastor's wife. "I know" she replied, "They wouldn't be good lies if they didn't feel true."

Which is why we must never rely on our feelings as a litmus test for truth. "I am determined" said Mr. Spurgeon, "that if all my senses contradict God, I would rather deny every one of them than believe that God could lie."

Every time we are tempted to fear, we have a choice. We must choose between believing our own fickle, sinful, "sense" or God's faithful, righteous Word. If we trust our fears, we are calling God a liar.

That's one very good reason to stop listening to ourselves.

Tell Your Soul

by Nicole Whitacre

We pick up our series on fear with the second half of Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones' counsel. We must not listen to ourselves, but we must also fill that space by speaking to ourselves.

Dr. Lloyd Jones explains:

"Our fears are due to our failure to stir up--failure to think, failure to take ourselves in hand. You find yourself looking to the future and then you begin to imagine things and you say: 'I wonder what is going to happen?' And then, your imagination runs away with you. You are gripped by the thing...this thing overwhelms you and down you go. Now the first thing you have to do is to take a firm grip of yourself, to pull yourself up, to stir up yourself, to take yourself in hand and to speak to yourself."

"Talk to yourself *out loud*, if you have to" a pastor once advised me in the midst of one of my particularly intense battles with fear. So if you ever catch me muttering to myself, you'll know why.

And what exactly should we say to ourselves?

"Faith reminds itself of what the Scripture calls 'the exceeding great and precious promises' says Lloyd Jones. "Faith says: 'I cannot believe that He who has brought me so far is going to let me down at this point. It is impossible, it would

be inconsistent with the character of God.' So faith, having refused to be controlled by circumstances [or feelings!], reminds itself of what it believes and what it knows."

Tell your soul--out loud if you have to--what it *believes* and what it *knows*.

Firm to the End

by Nicole Whitacre

Sometimes, when battling fear, I am unable to effectively speak truth to myself. I try, but it just doesn't stick. In such cases, I need others to talk to me. So I tell them about my fears and ask them to speak appropriate biblical truth to those fears.

God anticipates our need for community in fighting unbelief: *"Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end"* (Heb 3:13-14).

I need those who "have come to share in Christ" to help me "hold [my] original confidence firm to the end."

It isn't always easy to confess fear. We might fear what others will think of our fear! We might not want to appear weak. But in the very act of asking for help, we are opening the door of humility through which God promises His grace will always come rushing in (James 4:6).

So if you feel as if you are losing your battle against fear today, enlist an ally in the fight. Ask a friend who "shares in Christ" to help you hold fast to gospel truth.

Good Friends

by Janelle Bradshaw

Last Thursday, Nicole us to enlist our friends as allies in our fight against fear. Great advice. I have benefited more times than I can remember from friends speaking truth into my life.

But sometimes those trusted friends may not be available or maybe they are getting a little tired of saying the same things to us over and over. That's probably how my friends feel! There is another group of friends that should be consulted daily in our fight for faith—books and sermons!

Books that are rich in truth of who God is, and sermons that faithfully declare God's Word should be among our best friends. And hey, and the great thing is, they are never busy or unavailable! I have a few books and messages that I have read and listened to dozens of times in my battle against fear and unbelief. A few of our favorites are:

Spiritual Depression by Martyn Lloyd Jones,

Running Scared by Ed Welch

Trusting God by Jerry Bridges

Beside Still Waters by Charles Spurgeon (you can look up fear or anxiety in the index)

Sweet and Bitter Providence by John Piper

A Shelter in the Time of Storm by Paul Tripp

“Be Humble, Be Alert” sermon by Rick Gamache

“Antidote to Unbelief” sermon by Mike Bullmore

“The Troubled Soul” sermon by CJ Mahaney

So if you find yourself battling fear today, pick up a book or listen to a sermon. Your soul is sure to be strengthened!

A Good Laugh

by Nicole Whitacre

In addition to tuning out our fears and turning up the volume on truth, we must fight fear with laughter. Sound ridiculous, even a little irreverent?

Irreverence is precisely the point. We must not dignify our fears--sin-generated, false predictions of a graceless and God-less future--by giving them the attention and obedience due only to God and His Word. Laughing at our fears is entirely appropriate, because up against God's promises they not only look, but actually are, ridiculous.

The Proverbs 31 woman doesn't take herself, or her fears, too seriously: "She laughs at the future in contrast with being worried or fearful about it" (ESV Study Bible note, Pr. 31:25). This may sound flippant or naive if we don't already know her to be a woman of diligence, wisdom, and strength. She trusts God, and so she laughs.

"One of Satan's great lies is that God—and goodness—is joyless and humorless," explains Randy Alcorn:

"In fact, it's Satan who's humorless. Sin didn't bring him joy; it forever stripped him of joy. In contrast, envision Jesus with his disciples. If you cannot picture Jesus teasing them and laughing with them, you need to reevaluate your theology of Creation and Incarnation. We need a biblical theology of humor that prepares us for an eternity of celebration, spontaneous laughter, and overflowing joy."

Laughter, *not* fear-filled wonderings, will properly prepare us for our future: our immediate future and our eternal future full of celebration and overflowing joy.

So thank God for His promises today and "laugh at the days to come."

Learning to Trust

by Nicole Whitacre

Recently, I heard a story about a woman who was gripped by fear in the middle of a dangerous storm. She got on her knees and asked God to help her trust Him, and instantly her fears vanished. She got up from her knees, got into bed, and fell asleep. Just like that.

"I wish that would happen to me more often!" I thought. But I don't usually *feel* less fearful the instant I pray or read Scripture. And then I worry that I'm doing something wrong or (mistakenly) assume that God's solution for anxiety "isn't working."

But my fearful feelings don't mean that God hasn't answered my prayers. Instead, as Elisabeth Elliot explains, "[God] wants us to learn to use our weapons."

He wants me to learn to persevere in prayer, he wants me to form habits of casting cares (1 Pet. 5:7) and befriending faithfulness (Ps. 37:3). He wants me to become proficient at speaking truth to myself. He wants me to learn to trust Him, even when I don't feel like it.

So if you think God has abandoned you in your fight against fear, think again. The ongoing fight isn't a sign that He's forgotten you, but that He's teaching you to trust.

The Next Thing

by Nicole Whitacre

There's at least one more weapon we must learn to wield in our fight against fear: obedience.

We fight fear, not only with prayer and promises, but with action that declares to God and everyone else: "I will not let this fear dictate my life."

This advice comes from Elisabeth Elliot (again) in the form of an old poem (emphasis mine):

“Many a questioning, **many a fear,**
Many a doubt, hath its quieting here.
Moment my moment, let down from Heaven,
Time, opportunity, guidance, are given.
Fear not tomorrows, Child of the King,
Trust them with Jesus, ‘DO THE NEXT THING.’
Do it immediately; do it with prayer;
Do it reliantly, casting all care;
Do it with reverence, tracing His Hand
Who placed it before thee with earnest command.
Stayed on Omnipotence, safe 'neath His wing,
Leave all resultings, ‘DO THE NEXT THING.’”

--author unknown

As an act of faith, I must pray, "Lord, I believe you are going to deliver me from this fear. I am asking for your help. I am going to keep asking for your help. I am going to keep speaking truth. But in the meantime, I'm going to do what you've called me to do."

Then I have to get off the couch and do it. Something. Anything. The next thing.

So what's your *next thing*? It might be to simply get out of bed and take a shower. It might be to get in the car and drive the carpool. It might be to go talk to your teenager or be consistent to teach your toddler to come "right away, all the way, and with a happy heart."

Whatever your mothering fear, cast it on the Lord and do the next thing. And, as JC Ryle encourages parents: "It is in the going forward that God will meet you."

When I Don't Feel Like It

by Nicole Whitacre

Sometimes I struggle with feeling guilty that I don't *feel* like doing the next thing. Even though I have repented from fear and anxiety (and will keep repenting and talking to myself) the feelings of fear still linger. *But aren't we supposed to do our work with joy and gladness as unto the Lord? How can I glorify God in my work if I still feel anxious?* I wonder. So just as I pull one foot out of the ditch of fear, the other one falls into the pothole of condemnation.

But there is a firm and level path for us in God's Word, which John Piper points out in this meditation on Psalm 126:5-6 called "Talking to Your Tears" He's counseling people who are sad and suffering, but I think it also applies to those of us who feel anxious:

So here's the lesson: When there are simple, straightforward jobs to be done, and you are full of sadness, and tears are flowing easily, go ahead and do the jobs with tears. Be realistic. Say to your tears: "Tears, I feel you. You make me want to quit life. But there is a field to be sown (dishes to be washed, car to be fixed, sermon to be written). I know you will wet my face several times today, but I have work to do and you will just have to go with me. I intend to take the bag of seeds and sow. If you come along then you will just have to wet the rows."

Even if we sow in tears (or fears) we will one day reap with joy. Read the entire meditation and then do the next thing--whether you feel like it or not.