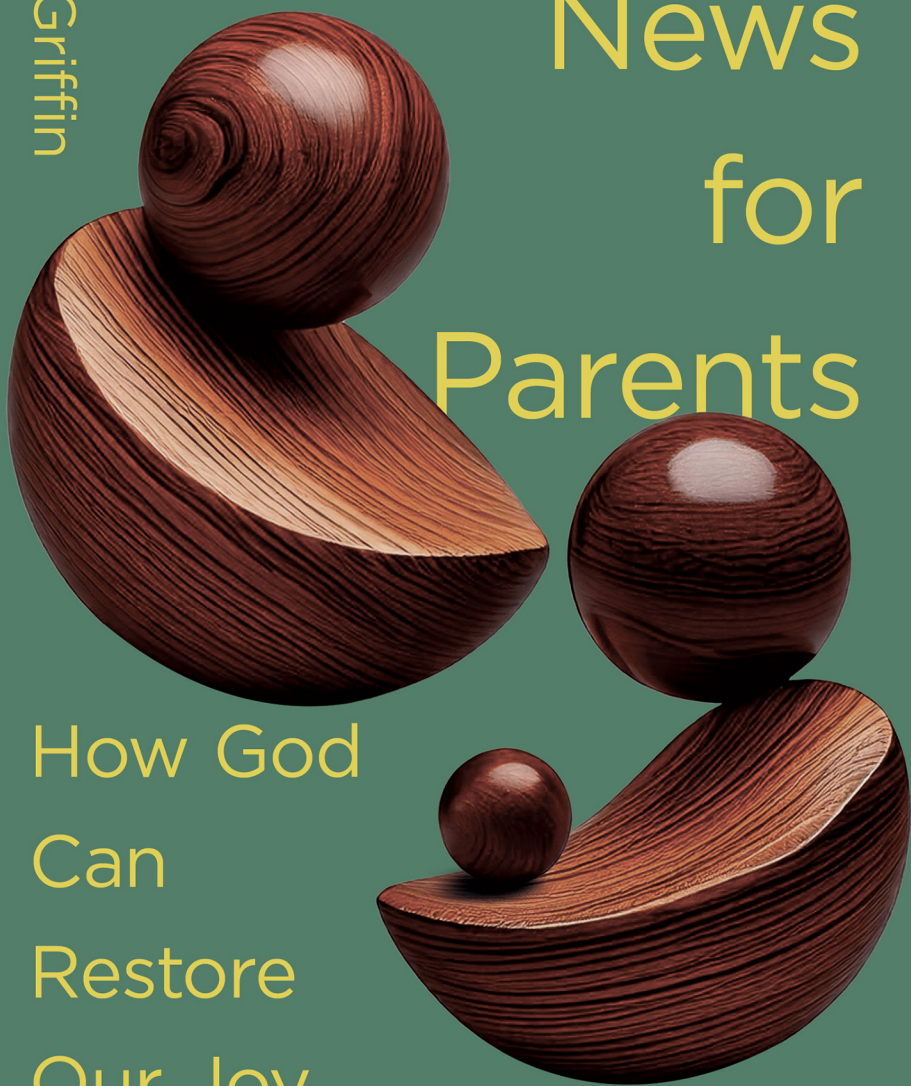


Adam Griffin

Good News for Parents

How God
Can
Restore
Our Joy
and Relieve
Our Burdens



“The absolute last thing that most parents need is more pressure. That’s why I’m so glad that Adam Griffin wrote something different—a book full of grace and relief for parents. I trust his voice to encourage families by helping them see how much their faith can bless them and their God can unburden them.”

Matt Chandler, Lead Pastor, The Village Church, Flower Mound, Texas

“*Good News for Parents* offers wise remedies for the inevitable fears parents face. This book is not a list of *how-tos* but a biblical vision of *how God* provides the guidance we need. Through a careful explanation of the fruit of the Spirit, enriched with poems and prayers, Adam Griffin helps us relax and trust Christ with the results of our parenting. His message is clear: We are not the center of it all—Jesus is. And that is truly good news for every parent!”

Ray and Jani Ortlund, President and Executive Vice President, Renewal Ministries

“In *Good News for Parents*, Adam Griffin offers relief for those stuck in a loop of self-sufficient striving to ‘ace’ the parenting test and the shame that comes from inevitably falling short. Griffin intentionally avoids formulas, techniques, and checklists in order to point readers to something much better: a Spirit-empowered, gospel-saturated parenthood flowing out of parents’ identity as beloved children of God. I recommend this book for moms and dads in need of gospel refreshment!”

Caroline Cobb, singer-songwriter; author, *Advent for Exiles*

“There is no shortage of good advice for parents, and Adam Griffin has offered some of the best out there. But in this book we don’t just get something helpful; we receive something better: good news for parents. Good news for faithful parents, good news for failing parents, good news for fatigued parents—good news for us all.”

Kyle Worley, Pastor, Mosaic Church, Richardson, Texas; author, *Home with God: Our Union with Christ*; Cohost, *Knowing Faith* podcast

“In *Good News for Parents*, Adam Griffin takes us on a gospel-centered journey, rich with Scripture and story, revealing how God can transform both the parent and the very atmosphere of the home! Using the fruit of the Spirit from the book of Galatians, Griffin helps us see how a house filled with stress, despair, and anxiety can be changed into a home full of unending love, joy, peace, and—dare I say—the very presence of God himself! What follower of Jesus wouldn’t want that?”

Phil and Diane Comer, Cofounders, Intentional Parents International

“There is real grace on every page of this book. If you, like me, are a parent who veers between feeling proud, complacent, overwhelmed, and crushed, this realistic yet hope-filled book will root you in the goodness of Jesus and show you how his Spirit really does enable you to be the parent you’d like to be. Chapter by chapter, Griffin showed me how to be a better dad, but even more than that, he showed me how to enjoy having a perfect Father.”

Carl Laferton, author, *The Garden, the Curtain, and the Cross* and *God’s Big Promises Bible Storybook*

“After reading this book, I have a word to describe it that I’ve never used for a parenting book: *refreshing*. Sometimes books on parenting make me anxious, or I come away feeling less confident. Not this one! Adam Griffin is a great writer and storyteller, and his book is practical, insightful, and authentic. Griffin is a pastor who gives us a biblical but not ‘preachy’ way to look at our most important role.”

Jim Burns, Founder, HomeWord; author, *A Student’s Guide to Sexual Integrity* and *Doing Life with Your Adult Children*

“I was literally clapping my hands as I read this book, applauding the way it provides grace-filled, Holy Spirit–focused encouragement for parents! What an incredible relief to know that we have both the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit and the gift of grace to carry us as we raise our children to follow Jesus. This is an incredible resource for young parents to provide them with a Christ-centered vision for their parenting journey. I am confident that you will be empowered as you apply these profound truths to your parenting.”

Jason Houser, Founder, Seeds Kids Worship; coauthor, *Dedicated: Training Your Children to Trust and Follow Jesus*

“*Good News for Parents* offers relief to parents struggling with anxiety and shame by ushering them into the rest the gospel provides. Adam Griffin helps moms and dads apply the gospel to various parenting challenges, empowering readers to parent as though they really have been saved by grace. This book is a breath of fresh air!”

Hunter Beless, author; Founder, Journeywomen Ministries

Good News for Parents

Good News for Parents

*How God Can Restore Our Joy
and Relieve Our Burdens*

Adam Griffin

 **CROSSWAY®**
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

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This work is dedicated to our many dear friends who struggle with how they feel about their parenting. This is for all the discouraged, the overwhelmed, and the exhausted moms and dads my wife and I talk to all the time. We love you. You are more cherished and secure in the arms of God than you could know.

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MY WIFE, CHELSEA, and our three boys should be the first to be acknowledged. If there's anything worth reading here, it is probably something I learned from watching my wife follow Jesus and lead our kids so well. As for our boys, I know it often feels as if they endure added, unfair scrutiny because I talk so much to other people about parenting, and for that, Oscar, Gus, and Theodore deserve some significant acknowledgment (and some ice cream). I am an unusual dad trying to raise uncommon kids, and that doesn't make their life any easier. Sons, thank you for putting up with so much and being a non-stop blessing to me.

Much of this book was written over two separate week-long writing vacations and a series of Friday mornings off from pastoring. Glossers and Masons, I am so grateful for the space to write that you provided at your beautiful lake house. Paige and Tyler, so much of this book came from the time you afforded me there. I'm truly indebted and grateful.

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On my Friday mornings off from my regular pastoring duties at Eastside Community Church, I often slid down to my favorite neighborhood coffeeshop, Civil Pour, to write. If any part of this book seems particularly upbeat, it was probably written after downing one of their delicious hot mochas. I'm grateful for their cheery staff, who would show genuine interest in how writing was going (and even let me sneak in before opening sometimes).

Though he's not alive to read this acknowledgment, Charles Haddon Spurgeon has often been an inspiration to me as a pastor, preacher, author, and father. Each chapter is prefaced by a hymn I found in *Spurgeon's Hymnal* or the "Songs and Hymns" from his *Home Worship and the Use of the Bible in the Home*. I reread these hymns many times while trying to get my heart and mind in the right place to write each chapter.

To the elders and staff of Eastside, who encourage me to write, humble me as a leader, care for me as a man, and bless me beyond words, I could not be more thankful. Our ministry together is a true gift.

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And lastly, I want to acknowledge you, readers. It's for you that I write. I hope this blesses you. I want these words to be more than true. I want them to be helpful.



God bless our home forever,
And all our loved ones there!
May no unkindness sever
The hearts so true and fair!

O, may its light so loving
Shine brightly 'mid the dark,
To lure from sin and roving
Our sad, world-weary bark!

Home, home; sweet, sweet home!
God bless our home forever,
Sweet heav'n is mirrored there!

God bless our home where nightly
We sing our songs of praise!
May joy be shining brightly
Within it all our days!

Tho' death may seek to sever
Our golden links of love,
O, may we meet forever
In yonder home above!

Home, home; sweet, sweet home!
God bless our home forever,
Sweet heav'n is mirrored there!

HARRISON MILLARD
"God Bless Our Home Forever" (1872)

Introduction

A Gospel Book for Parents

I WANT TO BE SURROUNDED by little admirers. I wish my kids woke up every day grateful that I am their dad, even proud of me. I wish I went to bed every night with a smile on my face, reflecting on how I had added one more stone to the ever-expanding castle of my parental triumphs. I want to be a brilliant father and an admirable husband more than I want just about anything. With all that commendable desire built up in my heart, it is awfully frustrating that I'm the recurring source of problems in my own house.

Both my activity and passivity, my absence and my presence, can frustrate my family, and that frustrates me even more. I have all the good intentions I can handle, but I stall out with the follow-through. I sit near my kids, wishing I knew how to better engage them, and then when they try to engage me, I struggle to give them the full attention they are looking for. I even fly by the seat of my pants on spiritual leadership. I need help. But sadly, the wisdom I find that should be helpful often fosters even more discouragement. Even the best-intentioned advice can get on my nerves, as it makes me fixate on my blunders. The pursuit of getting better leaves me feeling worse.

There are an astonishing number of books about how to be a better parent. Odds are you've probably read some of them. I'm sure that

a lot of what's out there is fantastic and filled with helpful insights. Sometimes when we get stuck, we need books that tell us how and why to do this and how and why not to do that—law books for parents, so to speak.

But this is not a how-to parenting book. It doesn't clash with most of those that are, but it is different. It is far more gospel than law. I am not a perfect dad, and I'm not a clinician with a PhD, ready to solve all your challenges with clever new methods.¹ What I am is a fellow parent and Christ follower, a father and a pastor with a lot to say to discouraged parents. I see them all the time, and I am no stranger to my own personal brand of downheartedness. I'm an empathizing fellow sufferer who has found great relief in the arms of God, and I know so many parents who are starving for that same comfort.

You probably know what it's like to read a how-to parenting book because you want to improve, and sadly, instead of finishing a book feeling encouraged and empowered, you feel as if the bar got even higher, the job got even harder, and you are an even bigger disappointment than you thought. Finishing some books can leave you feeling as if you need more help than when you started. How do you balance all these systems, liturgies, strategies, and new techniques? Someone is trying to offer you wisdom, but all you see is your mistakes, and all you hear is accusatory criticism. The more you take in and the more you understand, the worse off you seemingly are. I've been there too. I know how that feels.

Some of the parents who picked up the book I cowrote with Matt Chandler, *Family Discipleship* (Crossway, 2020), read it and felt inspired and equipped to make disciples in their home, which was the whole

1 All the issues we discuss in this book are addressed from a scriptural and pastoral perspective. I believe that this can be beneficial to any reader, especially to those who trust in Christ. I recognize, however, that many of the issues discussed in this book may touch on a matter that is so chronic or significant for the reader that it would be best for that individual to consult a counselor or doctor as well as his or her local pastor. Please receive the words of this book in the spirit in which they were written—from a pastor and fellow stumbling sinner who wants to bless you with God's grace, not a clinician trying to diagnose you from afar or a cynic trying to undermine your medical professional's plan of care.

goal of writing it. But others who read it walked away feeling only more like a failure. And I felt burdened to make sure that parents also hear clearly how the gospel of grace fits with the duty of discipleship.

I wanted to write this book so that I could offer you something unconventional in a parenting book—something I believe parents need desperately. Something that will help you be able to hear what it takes to honor God while attempting to be a great parent and not feel overwhelmed by it. We will miss out on so much if we are so anxious, so stressed, or so discouraged that we can't receive guidance without feeling more lost.

As I said, this is not a how-to resource for you. It's a "how God" book. How God sets you free. How God relieves your burdens. How God grows your faith. How God offers you peace. How God casts off what so easily entangles. How God made a way for you to be fully forgiven for your shortcomings and empowers you for what he has called you to do in your home. You don't need just a list of more *recommendations*. I want to offer you some *relief*.

Don't Eat Dirt, and Don't Waste the Grace

I want to show you how our God blesses parents with faith. He gives rest to exhausted parents. He forgives sinful parents. He comforts afflicted parents. He loves rejected parents. Our God humbles proud parents. He restores failed parents. He is near to brokenhearted parents. Our God is a refuge to desperate parents.

This book is for all the parents who mess up—for those who are wrestling with regrets. This is for the self-torturing perfectionist and the self-justifying slacker, the self-deprecating mother and the self-righteous father. It's for the mom who worries and the dad who fears. This is for the ones who can't find joy because they're too busy dreading the endless list of what-ifs and hypothetical worst-case scenarios. This is a book for the overwhelmed—for the family that wants to be better, do better, and feel better. In other words, this book is for you, and this book is for me.

There are a lot of books that offer us advice. That's great. We need it. But when you keep pumping your mind full of suggestions and yet keep messing up, it can be demoralizing. In addition to more counsel, we could all use some more comfort. I can testify that as a father, I need the thrill of grace as much as I need the benefit of guidance. I could teach you some parenting tips, but what good are they if your heart is not secure in Christ? We could teach your kids to obey, but what good is it ultimately if your heart and their heart don't belong to God? With Jesus and because of Jesus, I want you to be able to hear parenting wisdom and have your confidence reinforced, not shattered. In short, I am writing to you about the grace of God in the gospel so that you can experience how Jesus sets parents free.

Yes, the gospel certainly applies to our soul's freedom from damnation, but that's not all. Believing that God is for you and not against you affects every aspect of your everyday life, not just life after death.

If the hardship you face is because of a diagnosis, a defiant child, a stressful work situation, fatigue, or someone else's sin—really for whatever reason you are facing challenges—our God's gentle heart and his burden-lifting help provide the relief that your family needs. Psalm 34:19 says, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all." There is nothing that our God cannot comfort you in and lead you through.

With Christ, your home can be marked less and less by shame, exhaustion, despair, and anxiety, and because you walk in step with the Spirit, it can be marked more and more by gospel fruit like freedom, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The fruit of the Spirit brings relief to a parent in need. Thus, the rest of what you read in this book is organized around this beautiful fruit.

I am not writing to manipulate you into feeling better about yourself. I actually want to help you get stronger. On this side of heaven, the fruit of the Spirit may not *eliminate* all your shame, anxiety, despair,

or exhaustion, but in Christ, it will *alleviate* it. That is my goal in writing to you—to relieve your pain, torment, challenges, and struggles. Until Christ takes all of it away, let us seek the present relief available in the power of God.

As parents, we have tried to find relief in so many deficient sources. Coping with our challenges without Christ is like eating dirt to alleviate hunger—you may stave off your growling stomach, but you have not found a remedy to what’s killing you. So many of us are starving for relief, but for some reason we have not turned to the true source of relief in a way that actually helps.

Christian parents, if I may be so bold, allow me to reintroduce you to the profound grace of God. I know you need it. You know you need it. This grace will embolden and encourage you. It will breathe life into you and into the way you lead your home.

A Dangerous Book

A book about freedom and forgiveness can be dangerous. People love to use grace as permission to keep sinning. With so much bad parenting in this world, how can we dare speak to parents of grace and not fear that it will lead to rationalizing or excusing sin in their homes?

Before we jump into these grace-filled chapters, let’s make sure we are on the same page about sin. I want to be abundantly clear: Grace is not about taking sin lightly or looking down on God’s law. It has nothing to do with condoning or minimizing immorality. In fact, it is the severity and seriousness of sin that makes grace so great. If sin were not so serious, then God’s grace would be of little consequence. It is the very severity of our depravity that makes God’s mercy so spectacular.

Grace is a gift to us in Christ, but obedience to God is not irrelevant. God’s guidance is a gift to us too, and because we love and trust him, we lament disobedience. We have a godly grief. Grace, mercy, and freedom do not mean that sin won’t grieve us as parents. There are godly ways we mourn our kids’ sins as well as our own. Just like our kids, we lie, we

take, we covet, we idolize, and so much more. While self-deprecation and abasement are never a godly response to our sins, it is right to confess our guilt and to feel righteous remorse. Such godly grief is a hurt we experience not because we pity ourselves over the consequences we face but because we have broken God's law, and "godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret" (2 Cor. 7:10).

Parents will judge themselves and others about many things that are not sin, but if what we are witnessing in ourselves or others dishonors God, it should be handled appropriately, with gentleness and a desire for restoration.

First, we should review what happened when a mistake is made. You can do this with someone else or on your own. Compare your mistake to what God has commanded. If what happened is not sin but, for whatever reason, is foolish or regrettable, then commit to rejecting any belittling accusations and remember your identity as a child of God, forgiven and free. Missteps cannot get a grip on you that God can't release you from. Ask God to help you grow in wisdom and in maturity but not carry around undue condemnation for yourself.

Second, if what happened was truly wrong, actually sinful, then take responsibility for what you did and repent. Own everything you can. Confess it to God and to the person you sinned against. Do not conceal any of it.

Third, show genuine remorse. There is no condemnation for you in Christ, but there should be conviction to change as well as grief over sin. Yet if you don't feel a sense of sincere remorse, do not fake it. Confess that as well. Pray that the Lord would help you grieve your sin.

Fourth, fully accept all the repercussions of your actions. Being forgiven does not mean that your sin won't have consequences.

Last, remind yourself that you are set free. Your sins are forgiven, and your victory in Christ is secure. Your soul is moored to Jesus.

The only solution to our sin is the grace and mercy of God. Getting grace means receiving blessings that we do not deserve, and getting

mercy means not receiving the just punishment for our sin. Grace and mercy are not given because we are not guilty. Whether we are sinners and thus also broken as parents is not up for debate. We need forgiveness. And God is gracious and merciful toward his people! Psalm 103:10–13 says,

He does not deal with us according to our sins,
 nor repay us according to our iniquities.
 For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
 so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
 as far as the east is from the west,
 so far does he remove our transgressions from us.
 As a father shows compassion to his children,
 so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.

If you can show compassion to your kids, how much more will your perfect heavenly Father be able to show compassion toward you? It's this mercy and compassion that sets us parents free. I love that the Bible uses the family as a metaphor for God's gracious relationship with us. I want your family and the way you feel about it to be a beautiful model of the gospel. I hope that everywhere you turn in your home, you will be constantly reminded of the grace of God.



Kind are the words that Jesus speaks
To cheer the drooping saint;
“My grace sufficient is for you,
Though nature’s powers may faint.”

“My grace its glories shall display,
And make your griefs remove:
Your weakness shall the triumphs tell
Of boundless power and love.”

What though my griefs are not removed,
Yet why should I despair?
While my kind Saviour’s arms support,
I can the burden bear.

Jesus, my Saviour and my Lord,
’Tis good to trust Thy name;
Thy power, Thy faithfulness, and love,
Will ever be the same.

Weak as I am, yet through Thy grace
I all things can perform;
And, smiling, triumph in Thy name,
Amid the raging storm.

JOHN NEEDHAM

“My Grace Is Sufficient for Thee” (1792)

Important and Impossible

Being a Good Parent

BEING A GREAT PARENT is pretty simple. Good parents always stay involved in their kid's life. At the same time, they never get overinvolved in their kid's life. All it takes to be a great mom or dad is to never overreact and never underreact. Protect your kids from the things in this world that would harm them, but don't overprotect them; otherwise, they won't know how to live independently. Be helpful and serve your kids, but know when to not solve their problems for them. Let them make their own choices but only about some things and gradually, not right away and not always, and sometimes stop them if they make the wrong choice, and sometimes don't stop them so they can experience the natural consequences. Teach them to be kind but not a pushover. Encourage your kids, but don't flatter them. It is great to delight them, but don't spoil them with delights. Provide for them by working, but be home with them, giving them your best energy and attention. Be stern but not scary. Be friendly, but remain a parent and not a buddy. Love your kids with your whole heart but not more than you love God. Don't forget to make the right choices about education, diet, extracurriculars, housing, and socializing, and make sure you teach them about the Bible

and Jesus because if you don't, even if you get everything else just right, they will lose it all. Be cautious not to do anything excessively or insufficiently, and remember that the stakes when raising a human are incredibly high. That's parenting. That's not all there is to it, but it's a good start.

The tips and tricks for becoming a good parent form a minefield that is comically frustrating to navigate. They are a never-ending list of straightforward yet urgent and seemingly unattainable, almost contradictory principles. It's avoiding too much of this while not doing too little of that at the same time. It's like teetering on a tightrope while carrying two struggling toddlers. The slightest overreaction or underreaction, and we will fail. Again. It's simple: Parenting is important and impossible.

I Might Be the Villain

When my kids were little, one of them asked us if we could get a piñata for Christmas morning. "Of course!" I thought. "The traditional Christmas-morning piñata!"

I loved the idea. We bought a Darth Vader piñata and some plastic light sabers to smash it with. (For the uninitiated, Darth Vader is the infamous villain in *Star Wars*.) It seemed wonderfully appropriate to be smashing an evil villain to celebrate the incarnation. Everyone loves to see a bad guy lose and good triumph over evil. A great story should always have a compelling villain, and the Christmas story has some all-time greats—namely, King Herod and, cosmically, Satan.

As a pastor, I've had the privilege of hearing many people's personal stories, and in these narratives, the bad guy is usually a parent. In so many of the stories I've heard, at some point at least, Mom or Dad is the antagonist or, if not the antagonist, at least the scapegoat.

We are all largely shaped, for better or worse, by our family of origin. It's one thing to reflect on that personally, but it's a whole new level of intimidation to consider it now as a parent yourself. We need a word more emphatic than "daunting" to describe the feeling of knowing that our parenting is informing and shaping another person's story and that

we might be the story's villain. (I hope there's not some future Christmas morning when my kids are therapeutically smashing a dad piñata.)

I know that most of what I do with my life won't have a huge impact, but my parenting, at the same time, for better or worse, can reverberate for generations. This work really matters, and I want to do it right, so I am always thinking about how to do it better. It's incredibly important.

Yet it has crossed my mind many times that I might one day be the bad guy in part of my sons' stories, that I'll be the one they must overcome. But so help me God, I don't want that for our family. I don't want to be the villain in my kids' lives. I don't want to be their opponent.

We can all find faults in our parents. Who can see parents' failings better or be more directly affected by them than their own kids? I feel the pain my sin causes, and so do my children. I can already see how my mistakes have a ripple effect on their lives. Add to that the fact that they will often resist my best efforts and intentions, and it's no wonder that parenting is so incredibly hard. It grieves me that I'm not doing better. I want to parent exactly right. But that is, unfortunately, impossible.

Parenthood is both very important and impossible to get exactly right, an intimidating combination. Important and impossible. It's no wonder that parenting brings with it bouts of shame, pressure, despair, anxiety, and exhaustion. Putting everything we've got into the pursuit of the important and the impossible will inevitably lead to trials, disappointments, and failures. It's literally overwhelming.

So praise God that he does not leave us to our own devices. If we had only our own strength to rely on, if we were not empowered by the Holy Spirit, if there was no grace for us, or if we could not be helped in our labors by God, we would not be more than conquerors—we'd be less than losers. Our households would be hopeless.

Shalak It All

Right now, my family is at a stage when our youngest son has so much confidence in my love for him that if he finds me sitting on the couch,

he will, with a running start, leap onto me and expect to be welcomed onto my lap with open arms. He will jump onto me, uninvited, and fully expect to be embraced and delighted in. Sometimes I don't even see him coming. He has faith that my love for him is so secure that he doesn't need to ask. He trusts that I'll catch him. He trusts that I want him close. He trusts that he's safe with me. He assumes he is wanted. And he is not wrong. In fact, my love for him is so sincere and so substantial and so steadfast that I can't imagine there will ever be a day when I wouldn't delight to embrace him and protect him. When he comes close to me now, we cling to each other, not out of fear but out of genuine love. We delight to be by each other.

The remedy for so many of our struggles as parents is found in having faith that we can jump into the arms of God and be welcomed and protected. We can cling to God out of genuine love for one another, God for us and us for God. Assuming we are wanted by God changes our entire outlook on life. If I, an imperfect father, can so thoroughly delight in embracing and protecting my child, how much more sincere, substantial, and steadfast must the love of our perfect heavenly Father be for us?

Jesus prays for you in John 17, and in that prayer, we glimpse his description of the Father's love. In verse 23, Jesus prays to the Father, "The glory that you have given me I have given to them, . . . that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me." What if you genuinely believed that God the Father feels about you the way he feels about Jesus Christ? How welcome are you in his presence? How cherished are you?

There is relief for every struggle found in knowing and believing that we are safe with God and that God wants us close. Jesus says, "Come to me," and what the Lord says, he means (Matt. 11:28). He will catch us. He embraces us with compassion like a loving father (Luke 15). He comforts us. As we have faith that God delights in us, we, like sheep with a good shepherd, will not be in want (Ps. 23).

He can even cultivate our trust in his love and restore us after our mistakes. Just look at Peter in Luke 5 and John 21. Soon after Peter first meets Jesus, he sees Jesus make the first miraculous catch of fish. After witnessing the power of Christ, Peter drops to his knees and tells Jesus to get away from him. He wants Jesus to go away because he sees himself as a very sinful man and therefore assumes he will be unwanted. This is the voice of shame. Humans crumble under the weight of their inabilities and transgressions. They want to hide.

But Jesus does not oblige Peter's request. He does not go away. He actually tells Peter to let go of his fears. Then they spend the next three years in close proximity to one another, and after three years of developing this relationship, Peter reacts quite differently when he sees Jesus perform a similar miracle a second time.

This event occurs soon after Peter makes his most notorious mistake—publicly denying Jesus multiple times not long after swearing he would never abandon Jesus. Yet even after this significant misstep, Jesus reveals himself to the disciples after his crucifixion by helping them catch fish, and Peter no longer wants Jesus to go away. Peter has changed. His fear is gone. He trusts the love of Jesus for him now, even considering his own sin. Peter can't wait to be close to Jesus. Since he is in the boat with the miraculous catch and Jesus is on the shore a hundred yards away, he dives into the water to get to Jesus as soon as possible. Peter is no less sinful than when he and Jesus first met, but even in his sin, he now assumes that he is wanted and welcomed by God. He trusts Jesus. He has faith that he will be comforted and secure with Christ.

Peter is not wrong. Jesus does not condemn and reject Peter when he comes to him. Jesus restores him. They walk with each other, and that bears fruit in Peter's life.

When we walk with God, Paul tells us, it will produce certain outcomes in our lives. In Galatians 5, Paul describes this as "fruit." He lists the results of walking with God as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,

goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. It's this fruit that is such a relief to the heart of a Christian parent.

Such fruit, says Paul, attests to our freedom in Christ as well. Freedom is one of Christianity's most basic and beautiful doctrines. Christians are freed from serving sin as master so that they can follow a better master. In Galatians 5:1, Paul says, "For freedom Christ has set us free." In John 8:31–32, Jesus states, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." And just a few verses later, he says, "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (8:36). This book is all about that freedom and how it affects our parenting.

By grace through faith, Christians get released from the consequences of their sin. The sacrifice of Christ has satisfied every one of our debts. We are freed from the penalty of breaking God's law, and we are set free from the evil that would ravage us if we didn't live according to God's limits with God as our Master. We are free from trying to earn our righteousness. Now we can serve God and each other, free of the fear of condemnation for our imperfections and trusting in the goodness of his commands.

While Christians are not freed from facing trouble, we are freed from hopelessness and despair. Jesus says that even in tribulation we can "take heart" because he has already overcome the world (John 16:33). That same Peter who races to see Christ after his worst public mistakes reminds us that we can cast all our burdens on God. As a Christian parent, you get to cast "all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you" (1 Pet. 5:7). Did you hear that? *All* your anxieties. *All* your burdens. *All* your worries. Because he cares for you, everything that weighs you down can be cast from you to him.

In this passage, Peter is quoting Psalm 55:22, "Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you." The Hebrew word for "cast" here is *shalak*. It means to throw, hurl, or chuck something. It's a great word. Imagine getting to ball up all your anxiety, bitterness, exhaustion, frustration, shame, and stress into a massive ugly ball of weighty

negativity and then getting to *shalak* it! Chuck it all off a cliff. You can take the burdens and pressures that are weighing on you and hurl them down. When you don't feel strong enough to even lift them, you have permission just to drop them. You are invited to fling your burdens at the feet of God. Your God wants to unburden you. Instead of holding on to all that mess, you get to throw it off.

And that's not all. Regarding all those struggles, you aren't only unburdened but also offered a gift in exchange. If you cast off anxiety and cling to the Prince of Peace like a beloved child clings to his mother, you will receive peace in your life. If you chuck your bitterness and cling to the kindness of God, you will grow in kindness. If you hurl down all the undue stresses you feel and cling to the God who loves you, you will grow love in your heart. If you let go of all your inadequacy and cling to the goodness of God, you will become good yourself. What an exchange! Now that is serious freedom.

The Home-Free Home

I believe that Christian parents would feel much freer and even more confident about their roles at home if they could just be convinced to operate out of the assumption that they are now and forever home-free. The term *home-free* refers to the profound relief, elation, and liberation that comes from knowing that nothing can defeat you. It's the presumption of invincibility that comes from being convinced that nobody can come between you and your finish line. The race is already won. Your success is certain.

Being home-free does not necessarily mean being completely done or finished with your work. There might still be some difficult tasks ahead, even some things you don't want to do. What it means is that there is nothing left that is strong enough to take your victory away from you. Triumph is a guaranteed result.

Sailors on a ship that has been violently tossed by the waves of the open sea in a storm desperately hope for deliverance and a sense

of security that comes only when they have finally made it into the protected safety of a harbor. They are not yet on the shore, but they've cleared the danger. They are home-free. There's a final dash in an obstacle course when the runner has hurdled the last barrier or turned the last corner and there's nothing between her and the finish line except a flat straightaway. She's home-free. There's a point on an oak tree that a squirrel can scurry up to where it is out of reach of any sprinting, leaping dog. Escape to that height, and the squirrel is home-free. There's a depth a fish can plunge to where a diving eagle can't snatch it. Make it to that depth, and the fish is home-free. Knowing you're home-free is knowing you can't lose.

For the Christian, being home-free is the relief, elation, and freedom that comes after hearing and trusting the gospel. It's the result of having faith that we are safe in the arms of God. It's an invincible contentment that comes from believing the promises of God for those who trust in Christ. For Christians, being home-free is the absolute assurance we possess that Christ died for us and that because of his finished work on the cross, his resurrection from the dead, and the salvation extended to those who trust in him, we are forgiven, justified, and cleansed from all unrighteousness. We are secure. Fortified. Cherished. Home-free.

If you are a Christian, you have been home-free since the moment you joined the family of God, and you will be home-free forever because of it. As you exhaled your last breath as an unsaved soul and took your first breath as a saint, you were irrevocably liberated. Born again. Home-free.

You have also been gifted with a sacred book—a book of truths and promises regarding your malady, your liberator, and even your future. The Bible was written by the one who knows and shapes your destiny, and he has been generous enough to reveal your fate to you. He has declared it, and he determines it. You get the privilege of living your life as someone who already knows your story's ending. The worst thing that could happen to you *will not happen*, and the best thing that could

ever happen to you is totally guaranteed. Though suffering may not be less common or less painful for you, though you will still face temptation and sin in this life, truly nothing can prevent you from reaching your ultimate destination. You live content and at peace, persevering in affliction, because you are home-free.

Oh, what joy fills the heart of the parent who is home-free and knows it! It is a transcendent relief. Even death has lost its sting. Nothing can take away the victory and love that the Christ follower has been given in Jesus. This is the victory we so eagerly invite our kids to see and plead with God to grant to our whole household. There's no greater blessing for the Christian parent than to see the seeds of gospel truth we plant grow, by God, into a victorious faith in our children.

Home-free, however, is not the same thing as hurt-free. Jesus was perfect, but even he got hurt. Jesus got sad. Jesus did everything right and was still rejected—often. But when he was hurting, he still had peace. His love did not waver. His joy was consistent. His patience did not run out. He got hurt but stayed faithful. He was persistently gentle.

Because of Jesus, your victory is assured, but you can still expect to be hurt. What I want to help you see is a path not to a hurt-free home but to a home-free home. Jesus got hurt, but he was never anxious, never hopeless, never ashamed, and never bitter. Walking with Jesus will lead you into more of that freedom. The home-free family can bounce back from anything knowing that God's mercies are new every morning. The home-free family can face any hardship or difficulty knowing that God works all things together for good for the sake of those who love him.

Christian parents, I assume that many of you already know this. Most of you would agree with every statement I just made. So, then, these questions must be asked: Why is it so easy for us to parent as if we *don't* believe it? Why do we parent our kids stressed and scrambling, as if we don't know who will win? Why do we parent with so much shame when we are cherished, forgiven, and free? Why do we fret so much when we know God can be trusted? Why do we exhaust ourselves

by parenting out of our own strength instead of being renewed in the Spirit? Why do we parent in a panic, as though our children's salvation is something we can secure if our efforts are intense enough?

I want us to parent as people who are genuinely convinced that because of the grace of God, we are home-free. We are running in a race that has already been won. Until we enter the final joy of our Master, let's "lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith" (Heb. 12:1–2).

That gospel truth should bring you relief. I believe that the fruit of the Spirit will alleviate or even deliver you from what discourages your heart and your mind as you parent.

Relief is a wonderful feeling. It's like sitting down after you've stood so long that your feet ache from bearing the weight. That's relief. It's like finding comfortable shade on a sweltering, sunny day. That's relief. It's like chugging water when your throat is parched. That's relief. This is the kind of feeling we can get in our parenting if we rely on God through faith.

When you're not hungry, eating food can be a nice experience. But when you are starving, when your stomach is growling and it has been too long since your last meal, food tastes different. When you feel real hunger, the first morsel is an almost overwhelming delight. Every sense is engaged, your tastebuds are hypersensitive, and your whole body is ministered to as you chew your first bite. It's like a breath of air after being underwater for too long. I hope that's what reading these gospel truths is like for you. I hope that your hungry, anxious, stressed, bitter soul is satisfied in the gospel of Jesus Christ and that your whole family is ministered to by these words.

Experience the Exchange

The physical body that God designed for you does some incredible things. One of them is that you are constantly exchanging the gases you don't

need for the ones that keep you alive. You are breathing in oxygen and breathing out carbon dioxide. The process of breathing in is called “inspiration” and breathing out “expiration.” You do this all day unconsciously.

What I want you to do right now is to slow down for a minute and consider the process more intentionally. Consciously breathe in slowly. Intentionally breathe out slowly and deeply. Think about this exchange and how it illustrates the exchange that I am discussing in this chapter. Breathe out slowly as you imagine casting away all your shame. Breathe in slowly, thinking about how you receive and cling to freedom. Breathe out slowly, thinking about casting off your anxiety. Breathe in slowly, thinking about receiving the peace of God. As your body expels what you don’t need and takes in what you do, imagine how God encourages you to get rid of your burdens and cultivate the fruit that comes from walking with him.

As you breathe in slowly, consider what it would feel like to cling to God like a beloved child. As you breathe out slowly, consider what it would feel like to ball up all your struggles, chuck them, and walk away from them. As you breathe in, consider the mistakes you’ve made. As you breathe out, consider the grace and mercy of God given to you. After taking a few moments to breathe, pray.

A Prayer for Casting and Clinging

Heavenly Father, I confess that I have not been a model parent. My children see things in me that I wish they didn’t. Sometimes I am overwhelmed by the weight of the tasks you’ve assigned me. I am weighed down by how much there is to do and how much it takes out of me to do it. In my pursuit of being better, I often feel worse.

I want to surrender all these burdens to you. Help me drop what I’ve been carrying. Take it off my shoulders when I don’t

have the strength to cast it away. Give me the courage to ask for help. Please whisper peace to my restless heart. Remind me of my victory in your Son Jesus Christ. Help me loosen my grip on my struggles and cling to you instead. Make me stronger when my home requires strength. Make me wiser when my family needs wisdom. Give me faith when I'm tempted to crumble.

Where I've been timid and weary, make me confident. Let me be overcome by a sense of sincere relief. I want to know your freedom, and I want to live unbound, unburdened, and set free as a parent. Amen.

Reflection Questions

1. What is something from this chapter that stuck out to you?
2. When it comes to parenting, what feels important to you right now?
3. What feels impossible to get right lately?
4. How would you describe your parenting struggles at the moment? What burdens would you like to *shalak*, to cast off?
5. What would you like to see change in your home? What role do you think God might have you play in changing it?
6. What would you like to see change in your heart toward your family?

