



Dear Parents ...

There is *REFRESHING HOPE* —

Looking through photo albums, intense emotions emerge as I recall my motherhood journey. My passionate response echoes your voice, women *and men*, parents throughout this country. Without question motherhood *and fatherhood* is quite a hike, but worth every single step. Looking back, I appreciate more than ever the extraordinary season of my life that I've just passed through. I celebrate it, yet parenting children to adulthood is a time that holds few simple answers and even fewer absolute and perfect conclusions. It adds dimensions to our lives that are unobtainable in any other way. As if we were talking face-to-face, I can imagine you agreeing with me.

Raising a child brings exhilarating heights of joy, and for many, we experience painful trials, and excruciating lows from circumstances and choices that force us to walk through unexpected challenges. For most it is not a textbook journey. Thankfully, God's grace is steadfast, all the while making improvements in us as we stretch to meet demands that are well beyond what we imagined when this journey began. As I speak to women and have the opportunity to look into their faces, I see the stories written on their faces—stories of common bonds and shared experience.

It begins with the miracle of a soft flutter in early pregnancy, barely recognizable, but it soon grows into feet that kick, hands that reach, a heart that beats—a precious baby. When we hear a first vigorous cry, we melt into the wonder of being a new mother—a love is born within

mother's heart—it is an expression of the very deepest desires for our child. We pledge to wrap him or her in love and security, and provide and protect with everything within us.

Mother's paint a beautiful portrait and leave a valuable inheritance—a legacy of love. It is visible, extremely tangible, and spans generations to come. The world may not give this important job much notice, but we know better. So does God—each mother is an individual copyright, unique and valuable.

Each day, each step, we dream. These dreams are the beginning, a small hint, of what we hope and pray will bring a meaningful life for our children. We guide and anticipate, we unveil our values, our beliefs and our spirit. Almost as quickly, step by step, we must learn to let go—and let our children walk from there. Often they strain and pull in directions that blow them *and the family* every which way. Like kites in the wind, we trust God to be the “string” that holds securely. We trust our prayers and God's promises are alive and well. Dreams change shape—but as we expect answers, in His time, God rebuilds, changing the course and revealing new dreams that yield a beautiful reflection. Through the years we work to build strong family roots, but we must come to the place where we accept God is the Master Gardener, reshaping and pruning.

Too often negative emotions surge over us, leaving residuals that rest uncomfortably within. Painful episodes, time in the trenches, can leave us feeling weak and alone. It takes time to recover from the battles. Perfection and guilt can strip us of all sense of goodness and accomplishment. Likely we've all been there, but with conscious effort and surrender to God we can learn not to indulge ourselves in these destructive patterns as we abide in Him.

Aside from the healthy pride we should feel in our children and their accomplishments, we must remember to tread lightly in this arena. If we are not careful, only the right and good things will define our success as a parent. What will we do if and when the visible things are *not so good?*

We cannot allow the *not-so-good* behavior define who we are or how well we have parented. Does this behavior define our child's heart, our belief in

them and who they will become in the future? It does not—our love and our God-given belief in them prevails even when current circumstances say the exact opposite. We cannot hold up the good behavior with too much pride, nor cling too tightly to the bad. This is a hard lesson, but *oh so true*.

Truly, the grip of fear consumes at every opportunity. It conjures up torment and zaps every bit of joy from our days. For me, as it might be for you, eliminating it is an on-going process and one that is not easily defeated, especially when it concerns our children. We begin by living in “today,” recognizing what is within our control and what is not. Fear drives us to our knees more often than we like, but God reminds us faith is action and fear is only a feeling—one that He can help us overcome. He promises. (Philippians 4: 6 & 7)

We can persevere and get through the stinging pellets and pounding storms. In whatever form painful trials present themselves, they are very real and wound deeply. Remember not to compare, because all families have their crosses to bear, some have less and some have more. I have ridden the “merry-go-round” of troubles, those that seem to never end. However, I encourage you to accept what life brings to your family. Meet with God daily; hand Him your heartfelt longings and the difficult things you cannot change. This surrender allows forgiveness to flow, fears to dissipate and propels us to move forward in hope, praise and faith.

We know as women that we must cry our puddles of tears, often creating a whole river that flows under a bridge. It's expected, but we can't stay there too long or we'll drown. Our problems hurt, we stew in anger, we have private pity-parties and on some days sadness prevails. This is reality for moms, for women. God sees the sad patches that rip our hearts to shreds—He is a best friend who extends great compassion and love.

We see clearly that prayers cling! We see that God's grace is fresh every day, bringing guidance and strength. We are soothed with His healing balm. He

Judy's 'heart-to-heart' about *Refreshing Hope in God:  
A Mother's Journey of Joy and Pain*

shows us how to appreciate and believe in ourselves, restores belief in our children, and sets our belief in Him on firm ground and solid rock.

Not one of us is perfect, we are all born broken, but His promises lead us to know we can have faith in those things yet unseen. (Hebrews 11:1) And as you look up to Him for the answers, perhaps having experienced many hard lessons—in time you will find your children have learned, matured, and are on the path that God intends—His best waits just around the corner. And guess what? As mothers we recognize the same is true for us. Through our most grueling days, we have been transformed into better human beings. Because of this, we have thankful hearts. God has revealed more of Himself—our character, strength and faith have been expanded and stretched to new heights. And we have a fresh appreciation for the peaceful and blissful days that bring a joy and satisfaction that is ever so sweet. Motherhood is quite a hike, but as we walk this journey with God, there is a magnificent view from the mountaintop. As your heart swells with love for your children, remember it is God's love that placed it there. A mother's love is a powerful force that partners with God to help our children find their way home. In knowing this, greet today with a thankful and expectant heart. "God's loving kindness is everlasting." (Psalm 136)