

ELLEN MILLER

# *Lord, Have Mercy*

Help and hope for moms on their last nerve





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*Lord, Have Mercy: Help and Hope for Moms on Their Last Nerve*

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# Introduction

DEAR FELLOW MOM,

I am excited and truly humbled that you are willing to share a small amount of your precious time with me over the next ninety days.

In case you didn't read my first book, *The One Year Book of Inspiration for Girlfriends . . . Juggling Not-So-Perfect, Often-Crazy, but Gloriously Real Lives*, allow me to introduce you to my family. They have shaped me—and this book—in countless ways, and perhaps you'll see a bit of your own family in them too.

My husband, Steve, and I were married in 1990. When we met, I was divorced with two kids gifted from God: one that we lovingly joke I got stuck with (birthed), Shauna; and one I got to pick (adopt), Scott. Steve adopted both children as teenagers. Yes, that's how awesome my husband is.

Our daughter, Shauna, and son-in-law, Adam, are the parents to our only grandchild, Ava, born in 2007. Ava, like her mother, is an old soul who speaks the truth in love as few can. Both have been critical in the development of this book, and I am blessed beyond measure to be Mom and Sugar to these two girls.

Our son, Scott, was the inspiration for my first book. Missing for three and a half years as he battled an addiction to methamphetamines, Scott has graciously allowed me to share our ongoing story once again with the prayer that it might be a source of encouragement for other moms who struggle with a child who struggles. Our collective journey taught me more about the grace and love of Christ than I would have known otherwise.

Although I might be further along on this mothering journey than you, I suspect we have faced some of the same pressures. From our six-year-olds dribbling soccer balls in the kitchen (as we attempt

to make dinner) to the “smack talking” of our teenage daughters, we moms often find ourselves on our last nerve. While our hectic schedules and family dynamics definitely contribute to our frazzled state, we also wear ourselves down when we neglect our own needs in order to care for everyone else’s. Considering this might be your situation, I wrote this devotional to provide you support and insight in five critical areas that can offer you peace, hope, and joy—even as your three-year-old colors on the freshly painted walls.

The devotions found in the first section, “Lord, Have Mercy; Renew My Spirit,” will remind you that you are beautifully and wonderfully made. But with that fabulous design comes some special-care instructions: In order to take care of others, you must *first* refresh yourself.

Let’s face it. Moms worry. We worry about a looming due date on a work project, we worry about what’s for dinner, and we worry when our children are out past curfew. So who has the time or brain cells to worry about the state of one’s soul? I have learned the dangers of ignoring this deepest part of myself, so in “Lord, Have Mercy on My Soul,” I will share with you how feeding your soul will fortify your mind and heart to deal with your family and your work.

Your family is the most important institution on earth, and there’s nothing Satan wants more than to see it unravel. Whether you’re a single mom or a married one, it’s important to understand temptation and the ways it can destroy your life and those you love. We’ll explore the best routes of exit in “Lord, Have Mercy; Get Me Out of This Mess.”

Exhausted moms who are juggling too many balls can unwittingly blow their Christian witness to their family and friends. When this happens, we become all the more frustrated, aggravated, and anxious. I wrote “Lord, Have Mercy; Help Me Be Good” to enable you to find, keep, and demonstrate internal and external peace, even when the people around you are driving you nuts.

Last, I affirm and validate your commitment and conviction to raise your sweet babes—from those in diapers to those heading out the door with car keys in hand—in the most God-honoring way you

can. You'll see that I am as passionate about doing that as you are in the section "Lord, Have Mercy as I Raise These Kids."

I celebrate our differences and thank you for your open mind and heart. I learned that the readers of my first devotional included women who considered their faith the most important part of their identity, as well as women who didn't think much about faith at all. They varied in age, life stage, and political inclinations. But regardless of our differences, I'm pretty sure we all have one thing in common: More than anything else, we long to raise our children to be thoughtful, generous, discerning, joyful human beings.

Mothering is not for wusses. It's best suited to heroic idealists, the ones who dream audaciously and absolutely never wave the white flag of surrender. Those who are not mothers—even our husbands—do not always understand our fierce loyalty. Because of this, I believe we need God's Word and one another to get these little rascals raised.

As we begin, I want you to know that throughout my days of writing this book . . .

I have not stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly, asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God. I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance.

I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him.

**EPHESIANS 1:16-19**

Because you're short on time and those kiddos are growing faster than Johnson grass, let's get our visit under way.

*For his glory,  
Ellen*



*Lord, Have Mercy* RENEW MY SPIRIT

## SPECIAL-CARE INSTRUCTIONS

I AM A FREAK ABOUT MY CLOTHES. Oh—not so much about the brands I wear but about how they’re laundered. It matters so much to me that I always read the care instructions before toting any garment to the dressing room. Weird, I know.

But here’s why: I want my clothes to fit well and I want them to wear well. After too many of my garments were stretched, shrunk, or damaged at the dry cleaner, I determined that the best way to ensure their fit and longevity was to take care of them myself.

Most of my clothes have care instructions that call for washing on the gentle cycle and then hanging or laying them flat to dry. A few garments can be fluffed in the dryer on a low setting. I take these instructions very seriously, and the time investment has paid off. I kid you not—I have owned and worn certain classic designer pieces for years, and they look brand-new because I take *special* care of them.

I want you to think of yourself as the most beautifully designed pair of slacks walking a New York runway. I’m thinking Stella McCartney’s Chellini trousers. Yes, you’re pricey—\$1,375 last time I checked. You hang perfectly—no bunching, no binding, and—oh—check out that rear! You are the perfect size and length, making legs look long and lean. You’re the most gorgeous, intense color ever found, and your fabric is divine; you are soft and comfortable and you never wrinkle.

But imagine that instead of being washed on the gentle cycle in cool water, you get thrown in a tub of hot water with an orange hoodie on a cycle spinning at 1,800 RPMs. Instead of being hung gently to drip-dry, you are placed in the dryer with a pair of sneakers and a few pairs of Levi's 501 jeans. Do you come out looking refreshed and renewed? Of course not! You come out of the wash looking completely worn out! This is no way to be treated; you deserve better than this.

You are the most beautifully made and priceless person in the world to your family, and you must be given special care. So over the next eighteen days, I'm taking over your laundry. Ha! Not really. But I do hope to encourage you to remember that you are important and that to last a lifetime, you must take special care of yourself as you consciously consider those things that will refresh your mind and body in order to renew your spirit.

I know the LORD is always with me. I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me. . . . You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever. **PSALM 16:8, 11**

I can't believe how much I enjoy writing about laundry. If this devotional thing doesn't work out, I think I'll try my hand at a jingle for Tide.

day 2

## WHAT YOU LEFT AT THE HOSPITAL

SHAUNA AND ADAM WERE completely incredulous the day they brought our granddaughter, Ava, their seven-day-old preemie, home from the hospital. As Steve and I helped them to the car, Adam looked at me, eyes wide, and said, “I can’t believe they just let us walk out of there with her.” Yep. No manual. No contract. No warranty. Just a real live human being swaddled in a fuzzy pink blanket. Good luck!

Driving home with a brand-spanking-new kid is relatively simple. But keeping any new mom’s identity intact while she learns to be Mommy to one, or now to two or more, is something else.

In Kathryn Stockett’s book *The Help*, protagonist Aibileen is a wise domestic who understands that her most important role is shaping the mind, heart, and soul of the child she has charge over. Aibileen knows that what we are taught to believe about ourselves is what we become. As she holds the little blonde girl on her lap, she recites the most important nine words in the saga:

*“You is kind. You is smart. You is important.”*<sup>1</sup>

I would like to recite those nine words to you because somewhere between the epidural and the healing of your episiotomy, I suspect you may have forgotten this.

You don't just *act* nice—you have an incredible heart. You are thoughtful, you are generous, you are kind to your core. Your light shines brightly on those around you.

You're not just lucky at what you pull off—you are amazing! Your mind is open, your intellect grows each day, you hold the equivalent of a doctorate in family management. And you may be doing it while juggling a forty-plus-hour-a-week job outside the home!

You're not “just” Mom—you are the glue of your family. You idealize, you develop, and you manage the future influencers and leaders of our country. Mom, no one I know has the power to impact change for our world as much as you.

You may rarely hear these words because your kids (if they're over the age of nine) might think you're as dumb as a doorknob, your husband is *still* distracted with his own post-delivery issues, and those of us who benefit from your kindness, intellect, and leadership forget it is you who hold the keys to our future civilization.

As he thinks in his heart, so is he. **PROVERBS 23:7, NKJV**

“You is kind. You is smart. You is important.” Now, just ponder *that* as you sit in the car-pool line.

## SOMETHING'S GONNA BLOW

IF YOU DIDN'T GET THE CHANCE to build an erupting volcano when you were in grade school, never fear, your kids will probably get the assignment. That will give you the opportunity either to create one again or to enjoy a virgin voyage into the world of volcano making. Either way, you'll be up all hours of the night building the base, dripping in papier-mâché, and testing the explosive recipe. When everything comes together, it's a blast—unlike some of our *personal* eruptions.

How and why do the children of our wombs elicit such exasperation? Because we're a walking, talking science-fair volcano recipe ready to blow at any minute:

We're emotionally invested = ½ c. water

We're physically drained = ¼ c. vinegar

We're overscheduled = ¼ c. dish detergent

We're spiritually bankrupt = red food coloring

And they're sinners = THE BAKING SODA

This is not a good combination.

To neutralize our recipe for disaster, let's look at what we could take out of the mix. Since we carried these human beings *inside our bodies* or perhaps stayed up nights pacing, awaiting word that our baby had been born, it's likely we'll stay emotionally invested in them until the day we die. My kids are in

their thirties, and I am as deeply invested in their welfare today as I was when I found out that I was pregnant with the first one and that my second one was awaiting my adoption.

This leaves us with the next three things in our concoction for explosion: physical exhaustion, a crammed schedule, and spiritual bankruptcy. Each of these is within our control. When was your last Sabbath? Stop laughing. I'm serious. When did you last take time to rest? You might not get a full day to yourself until your kids leave for college, but that doesn't mean you can't take at least sixty minutes once a week right now. You *have* to fit rest into your life. And when you take that time, do something you love or luxuriate in doing nothing at all. Embrace it mentally and emotionally as *your* Sabbath for refreshment.

Identifying what comes between your being a good mom and your being a great mom requires reflection and discipline. Say no to those things that encroach on your brain cells. Being overscheduled is more of a mental stressor than a physical one. Show me a mom with a quiet mind, and I'll show you a mom with self-control.

Everyone experiences spiritual bankruptcy, whether they have kids or not. It comes from neglecting time for prayer, the study of God's Word, and worship. Like the red food coloring in the volcano mix, spiritual insolvency stains everything. Your investment in your spiritual bank account is totally within your control. So when might you make such a deposit? On your Sabbath!

This leaves us with our precious little sinners. The ones who take Magic Markers to the freshly painted walls (Scott, age three) and the ones who sneak a wine cooler from the

garage fridge (Shauna, age fifteen). Sometimes they will make questionable, even very bad, decisions. Our kids will always be our baking soda.

The creation of the heavens and the earth and everything in them was completed. On the seventh day God had finished his work of creation, so he rested from all his work. **GENESIS 2:1-2**

Sweet sister, we have to get control of the family schedule by saying no. We must invest in our spiritual bank account. And we need some time off. That investment will lessen our physical, mental, and spiritual exhaustion, leaving us with “only” our emotional investment (water) and a precious little sinner (baking soda). When those two mix, we might get a little fizz, but nothing that will blow.

day 4

## FIND TIME TO SOAK; TAKE TIME TO PRAY

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME you lit a candle, ran a hot tub of bubbles, and became so relaxed you needed a pair of water wings to keep you afloat? Can't remember? Then you're either the mother of a toddler or the mom of kids in soccer, dance, piano, and tae kwon do. *A bath?* Ha! I bet you go days without even washing your hair!

Alone time is a *luxury* most moms rarely get to enjoy. Once the kids are past the clingy stage, you're in high demand for carpooling, helping with homework, and cheer-leading from the stands. Some moms balance all this while juggling conference calls, pacifying demanding clients, and writing *War and Peace*-length e-mails to their bosses after the kids are in bed.

And this is how some good Christian moms find themselves in an extramarital affair.

A couple of years ago I became a fan of the TV series *Parenthood*. I really enjoyed the program; the writers did a great job of capturing the best and worst of families. In the next-to-last season, one of the women, Julia, lost her job as an attorney and was thrust into a stay-at-home mom role for which she wasn't well suited. You might say her "lather-rinse-repeat" lifestyle grew monotonous; the day-in-day-out routine of her grade-schoolers was not a world she had imagined inhabiting 24-7. While volunteering at her kids' school, Julia

struck up a friendship with a stay-at-home dad. And the friendship blossomed.

I wanted to scream at Julia: “*Guard your heart!*”

Sweet, witty, smart, pretty Julia didn’t set out to have an affair. She was an incredibly devoted mom and wife (unfortunately, her hunk of a husband had become distracted by work). Julia’s friendship with the classmate’s dad started innocently as they volunteered together on a project. But Julia found herself thinking more and more about this guy and how he made her feel. Julia didn’t have a chance because she didn’t see *it* coming.

Moms, we might not have an affair, but we can be led astray. That’s why we have to find a few minutes alone each day with God. Time spent in prayer is not a luxury but a vital necessity for protecting our marriage, children, reputation, and walk with Christ.

We pour every ounce we have into those kids in the next room. We fuss over the house; we worry over work; we manage our household budget like the CFO of a publicly traded company. But when we fail to invest in our own minds, hearts, and souls, we give the enemy a foothold from which to completely unravel our lives.

Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life. **PROVERBS 4:23**

Sister, carve out some quiet time to study God’s Word. Guard your heart. And pray like your life depends on it. Because it does.

## I SAID THIS PRAYER *for You* LAST NIGHT

YOU MIGHT THINK IT STRANGE that I prayed for you last night. But I did.

God has placed you on my heart. Although I don't know you, I feel as if you've been my friend forever. And because I care so deeply for you, I want you to know that this is what I prayed:

---

*Our heavenly Father, I pray you will bless my friend with eyes to see herself as you see her—as your glorious daughter destined for greatness on this earth and for your Kingdom. I pray that you will send the Holy Spirit to be a constant reminder of her critical impact on our society through her role as a mom, and I ask you to empower her with the good sense to carve out a time of Sabbath for her rest and the discipline to take it.*

*I ask that you will shower her with opportunities as she prepares for greatness and the fulfillment of her untapped potential. Bless her with discernment as she is influenced by others and godly wisdom as she is looked to for influence; flavor her every word, and provide her the favor of those in her midst.*

*Give her the ability to embrace your freedom and relief from her sin so she can live life to its fullest—better serving herself and her family, and most important, glorifying you. Provide her tools, people, and your Word that she might fortify herself to be the woman of God you long for. Keep her confident. Keep her courageous. Keep her positive. Keep her humble. Keep her close.*

*In the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, who develops, fortifies, and sustains us for his glory. Amen.*

## YOUR CARE LABEL

YOU HAVE A CARE LABEL; it's stitched on your heart. But it's not going to do you much good if you don't remember what the instructions say or if you don't take time to reread the label every now and then.

God's Word provides you everything you need to know about the best way to refresh yourself to last a lifetime. If one of the verses below speaks to your heart and renews your spirit, commit it to memory. Cut it out and tape it to your mirror, or better yet, place it where you probably spend most of your time—between the 10:00 and 2:00 position on your steering wheel.

These care instructions are for a gentle spirit—one that isn't bothered by a little agitation—to keep you as glorious as you are at this moment for years to come.

I know the LORD is always with me. I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me. . . . You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever. **PSALM 16:8, 11**

As he thinks in his heart, so is he. **PROVERBS 23:7, NKJV**

So the creation of the heavens and the earth and everything in them was completed. On the seventh day God had finished his work of creation, so he rested from all his work.

**GENESIS 2:1-2**

Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life. **PROVERBS 4:23**

In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as they love their own bodies. For a man who loves his wife actually shows love for himself. **EPHESIANS 5:28**

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.

**PHILIPPIANS 4:6**

The faithful love of the LORD never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning. **LAMENTATIONS 3:22-23**

We will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. **EPHESIANS 4:14**

As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend.

**PROVERBS 27:17**

Those who trust in the LORD will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint. **ISAIAH 40:31**

I am dying from grief; my years are shortened by sadness. Sin has drained my strength; I am wasting away from within.

**PSALM 31:10**

He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside peaceful streams. He renews my strength. **PSALM 23:2-3**

I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms. **EPHESIANS 1:19-20**

Their lives became full of every kind of wickedness, sin, greed, hate, envy, murder, quarreling, deception, malicious behavior, and gossip. **ROMANS 1:29**

Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it. **PSALM 139:14**

He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

**EPHESIANS 4:16**

Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

**COLOSSIANS 4:6, NIV**

The LORD will guide you continually, giving you water when you are dry and restoring your strength. You will be like a well-watered garden, like an ever-flowing spring. **ISAIAH 58:11**

