

A COMFORTER

“Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day” (2 Timothy 1:12, NIV).

“Be careful!” “Did you remember your jacket?” “Don’t get too close to the edge, you’ll fall and hurt yourself.”

Every mom recognizes these familiar, oft-repeated admonitions. From the moment we discover we are pregnant, the need to nurture and protect our child surfaces as an inextricable part of our nature. No wonder when children grow up and decide it’s no longer necessary to heed our worry-tinged warnings, we tend to take it painfully and personally.

Our oldest son was only 13 when, due to a series of unforeseen events, his life — and ours — took a tumultuous turn.

For a number of years my minister-husband had served on the staff of a fairly large church, one that provided a Christian school into which our three boys were securely settled. When an invitation came for Jim to serve a new, smaller church as senior pastor, he eagerly accepted.

This meant our boys would have to leave their friends and go back into public school. We assumed (our first major mistake, perhaps?) they would adjust as they always had before. For reasons we may never fully understand, our oldest son didn’t.

Instead, over the next few months we watched helplessly as he spiraled into an adolescent crisis — one that would magnify into a maelstrom of destructive behavior spanning the next 20 years.

If we’d known this was going to happen, would we have done things differently? Probably. But, of course, we didn’t know. The truth is neither my husband nor I saw any significant signs our son was headed for trouble. Even so, for years afterward I would ask myself, *Where was I when all this started? Why couldn’t I see it coming? What could we have done to prevent it?* Feeling I had somehow failed to protect my child, I spent many days convinced I must be the world’s worst mother.

On more objective days I decided that perhaps I had overprotected my children or imposed too much of my own will on them. Again, this is so much a part of our nurturing nature, isn’t it?

When our children are infants, we cuddle them, make sure they are immunized against dreaded childhood diseases, and follow close behind their first faltering steps. When they do take a tumble, we are right there to kiss away their tears and bandage their boo-boos.

As Christian parents, we tuck them into bed at night and pray for their safety and salvation.

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FOR CONCERNED MOMS

By Judi Braddy

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When they get older, we hold their hands and teach them to look both ways before crossing the street.

No wonder when they hurl themselves headlong into oncoming trouble, we are the ones who feel like we've been run over by a truck.

Overreacting seems to go with the territory, too. "Mom," my son would often say, "you worry too much."

My standard reply became, "Maybe it's because you don't worry enough."

Later I would learn of things he had done that only served to confirm my concerns. To this day I still don't know what's worse: knowing what your child is doing or not knowing. Either way, it's hard not to worry when they have willfully walked out from under your protective covering.

Eventually I began to see no amount of worrying was going to keep my son from straying, but it was certainly keeping me from doing the very thing that would help the most: praying.

Corrie ten Boom said, "Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow; it empties today of its strength." As a holocaust survivor, she surely knew.

I realized if I was going to have the strength to survive the battle for my son's soul, I had to learn not to let worry rob me of my ability to trust that God was in control of our situation. So I began memorizing Bible verses to counteract the enemy's lies and build my own faith, praying them as promises during the day and repeating them until I fell asleep at night.

"Don't be anxious about

anything," Philippians 4:6,7 reminds us, "but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

How many times over the last 20 years have I put that Scripture to the test? Admittedly it is easier on some days than others.

Martin Luther said simply, "Pray and let God worry."

Certainly no parent wants to believe their child would willfully walk away from faith and family. Yet for reasons too numerous to name, statistics show that many do — even children raised in Christian homes.

Judging from correspondence received when my book *Prodigal in the Parsonage* was published, it's common for parents to experience myriad emotions when their children go astray — disbelief, sadness, humiliation, anger, guilt and depression just to name a few.

Too often we carry all the blame for their bad behavior, to the point we become consumed by our feelings of failure. This can hinder us from seeking a spiritual solution. As long as the enemy keeps us focused inward, we forget to look upward.

I finally came to realize the choices our son was making had little to do with us. We were merely the closest, most convenient symbol of authority against which to vent his anger. Like Eden's first pair of prodigals, his real rebellion was against God.

It also helped to remind myself though God was the perfect

Father, it didn't take long for His kids to tumble into trouble, either. Though their rebellion opened the door to a world of evil for all of us, God had a plan in place. He still does.

The hard truth is we can't always protect our children from suffering the consequences of their or others' poor choices. The best thing we can do is plug into what I call the heavenly GPS: God's Positioning System.

We must believe God always knows where our children are, loves them more than we do, and will, in His great mercy and compassion, clearly direct them back home. Perhaps the harder part is to believe He also has a purpose in the pain — that no route, even our own, is uncharted.

As for us, though our son has made many positive changes, we are still waiting for the day he will fully surrender his life to the Lord. God alone knows how many more bumps on life's road he must navigate before he turns toward home.

Certainly the years are long past when I used to tuck him safely into bed; yet, what a joy it is to know at any hour of the day or night I can still cover him with my prayers. That is the protective comforter I now wrap daily around all my children and grandchildren.

And around my own heart as well. **tpe**

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E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.

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