

WORKBOOK

Sissy Goff, *LPC-MHSP*

THE

LEARNING TO LIVE IN CONFIDENCE

WORRY-FREE

SO YOUR KIDS CAN TOO

PARENT



**THE
WORRY-FREE
PARENT**

WORKBOOK

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THE WORRY-FREE PARENT

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Why This Book?

Hi! I'm so grateful and honored you chose to buy this workbook. My hope in writing *The Worry-Free Parent* was to come as close as possible to making it feel like you were sitting in my office as you were reading the book. But we know that a book is more monologue than dialogue. And my hope was to create conversation. This workbook gives us much more space to do that—to not only create conversation, but to dig deeper and more thoughtfully into what being a worry-free parent really means. Some text will be familiar, but much of the content goes beyond what's included in *The Worry-Free Parent* with the hope that you feel free to do the same.

I have a counselor I see for myself, when I need it, who happens to be pretty tough. Exceedingly kind, but tough. When I refer others to her, I always say that I didn't quite understand I was a sinner until I started going to her for counseling. I did from a theological perspective, but not nearly as much from a personal one. Every time I went in with hurt feelings at the hand of a friend, she would make me look at my part in it. I am so grateful. I also remember seeing one of my favorite musicians in her lobby once, and thinking, *Wow. I liked her before, but I really like her now that I know she can hang in there with this therapist.* Now, don't get me wrong. Right alongside a hard look into my sin and struggles, I saw so much grace. More grace than I ever could have imagined. I understood Jesus' love for me better every single time I left her office. My hope is that this workbook helps you in much the same way.

I want us to take a hard, deep look together. And I want you to find so much grace in the process. Grace and freedom are the goal here. And for you to feel like who you are as a parent is more than enough. Because it is. God

chose you for each of your kids. He knew what he was doing. I want you to know, as you read this book, that you do too. I'm proud of you for picking it up and can't wait to see what God does in and through you as you make your way through the prompts and pages.

Here are a few directions as we start this journey together:

1. Be kind to yourself.

The purpose of this workbook is to uncover more of what keeps us stuck in worry. It is going to be hard sometimes. It will likely bring up things you might not love about who you are as a person or as a parent. Be kind to yourself in those moments. That's not where we're going to stay. There is so much good news coming and so much good about who you are. We're all just a messy mixture of both. One of my all-time favorite quotes is from a poet named Kahlil Gibran, who says, "The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain."¹ We're headed for a lot of joy together.

2. Go slow.

I hope that this workbook can be a transformative tool in your life to help you become the parent you not only long to be, but God made you to be. Transformation does not happen quickly. No new parent by Friday here. Let yourself read slowly and pray and think through the answers to the prompts. Take your time. Let your heart catch up with what God is uncovering in you. There is so much good that is going to emerge.

3. Be kind to yourself.

Yes, still.

4. Be kind to your parents.

I met with a fellow counselor a few months ago who sees a lot of clients in their early twenties. "They're at that juncture," she said, "when they're discovering

more of who they are and all the things their parents did wrong.” I laughed when she said it because I not only remember going through that myself, but I have watched thousands of young adults do the same. As you look back at your childhood and learn more of what you might have missed, your first tendency may be to blame your parents. For all of us, it’s important to process the feelings we might not have been allowed to feel or that we didn’t have room to process as we were growing up. For some of you, those feelings may need to be talked through with your parents. There is past hurt that needs to be addressed still. Some of you may not be able to process that hurt with your parents because of too-early loss or even toxic relationships that wouldn’t be safe to address. But for many of us, I believe our parents were doing the very best they could with what they had. They didn’t have a lot back then. There was not a lot of support for parents or education on how to be a better parent. So if that’s the case for your family of origin, I want you to look at your parents with eyes of grace as well—just like I want you to look at yourself.

5. If it stirs up more, I’d like for you to see a counselor.

If issues arise that feel bigger than the pages of a workbook can address, I’d like for you to call a therapist. If feelings come up that you’re just not sure what to do with, it would be a good idea to call a therapist. If you want to process more with a person who can give you tips specifically geared toward you and your kids, a therapist would be a great person to have on your team. I wish every person had what one parent called a “back pocket counselor”—a person you could see to talk things through with as they come up along the way. They will come up for every single one of us. I remember a mom telling me that counseling had been scaffolding for her and her family. You need scaffolding. And, again, you need a whole lot of kindness and grace.

6. Be kind to yourself.

Yes, it’s that important.

Why This Book?

I am so grateful and impressed that you're embarking on this journey. Thank you for the privilege of allowing me to come alongside you. Your work in these pages—your thoughtfulness, your time, and the heart that you pour in—will be a gift not just to you, but a profound gift to your children. I know it. I think you will soon too.

Introduction

I met with a mom this week who said these words to me: “I just don’t trust myself as a parent. If I was doing it right, my child wouldn’t act like this.” Let’s dispel that myth right here . . . or, actually, all the myths contained within that statement.

1. There is no right way to do it.
2. Your child’s behavior is not a direct reflection of your effectiveness as a parent.
3. If I could give you anything as you work your way through this workbook, it would be the confidence to trust yourself as a parent. And to trust that God is in it with you.

We’re going to talk through all those ideas as we journey together throughout this workbook. But *if you were to say right now what your worries are, what would they be?*

Do you trust yourself as a parent?

Why or why not?

The opening story in *The Worry-Free Parent* book is about the parent who told me she needed to hear that what she was feeling was normal and that she's doing a great job. *What do you need to hear today?*

I want you to practice saying those things out loud to yourself. Yes, I am serious. Say them out loud right now . . . either where you are sitting or in front of a mirror. If I were sitting with you, I'd say them directly to you. Also, just in case they're not on the list you just wrote, what you're feeling is normal AND you're doing a great job. Yes, you.

We all need to be reminded of truth . . . especially those of us who are worriers. *Besides the truth you just reminded yourself of, what is one truth you could hang on to today?* It could be a Scripture or one of your favorite quotes. Or even just a statement. Write that truth here. You could even tear it out and hang it on your mirror or use it as a bookmark in the book you're currently reading. I want you to be reminded of it often.

I'm going to include a worry-fighting Scripture at the end of each chapter to give you truth to ponder. I believe truth is *that* important in our fight against worry. We're also going to include a section in each chapter called Gratefuls, Hopefuls, and Truthfuls—because having gratitude, having hope, and remembering truth can all make a profound difference for us in this journey. In those sections, I want you to include three things you're grateful for, three things that currently bring you hope, and three truths you want to remember, whether those truths are Scripture, quotes you love, or things you're learning. Gratitude, hope, and truth are three of the most important tools to have as we fight the anxiety that is all too pervasive in our world and homes.

I'll repeat what I wrote in the introduction of *The Worry-Free Parent*:¹

Because I meet with kids, I also spend a lot of time with parents. In the past few years, there has been one issue I've talked about the most with both: anxiety. You may have read the statistics already. At the time I'm sitting down to write this book, one in four kids is dealing with anxiety. Because I've been seeing more and more kids facing this issue, I've tried to do a deep dive to help. At this time, I've read thirty-five books on the subject, become certified as an anxiety specialist twice over, and written three books about it already. Those books are about your kids. One is for the elementary-aged girls in your life, called *Braver, Stronger, Smarter*. One is for the middle and high school girls, titled *Brave*. And one is for you and about all those girls, *Raising Worry-Free Girls*. This book, however, is the first book specifically *about you*. Of all of the things I've learned about anxiety, potentially the most important is this: Anxiety is an isolator, but it's certainly not an isolated issue. It has an amazing ability to spread. In almost every situation in which I've had an anxious child or teen in my office, they have had at least one anxious parent. Now, that's from my observation. The research says that if you have anxiety as a parent, your child is seven times more likely to deal with it themselves. [2]

Has anxiety been an isolator in your life? Yes No

How has it impacted you?

When you read that your child is seven times more likely to deal with it themselves, how do you feel?

What has made you decide you want to help stop the spread?

The fact that you bought *The Worry-Free Parent* says to me that you love your kids deeply. That you try hard. That you're thoughtful and probably really smart too. Also that you're at least a little bit of a worrier. And the fact that you bought this workbook says to me that you are committed to finding something different from what you're experiencing now.

How do you hope this workbook will change things?

Worry uses the past to define us. Worry distracts us in the present. And worry defeats us in the future . . . and we're not even there yet. Oh, and one of the most important things to establish is that worry lies. It uses the past, present, and future to lie to you about who you are and who you can be as a parent.

How has worry defined you in the past?

How is he (worry) distracting you from the present?

How is he already making you feel defeated in the future?

What are three ways you believe worry is lying to you today?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

I want you to hear me say again these words from the book: “You’re doing a great job. Just the fact that you’re reading this book helps me know that you’re trying hard as a parent. You want to do all you can to love your kids. And you’re brave enough to look at how your life impacts theirs. I truly believe from all my years of counseling that to look at your own life and deal with your own stuff is one of the very best gifts you can give your children.”

We all need to hear truth, but especially those of us who are worriers.

Worry-Fighting Truth

Because we know that this extraordinary day is just ahead, we pray for you all the time—pray that our God will make you fit for what he’s called you to be, pray that he’ll fill your good ideas and acts of faith with his own energy so that it all amounts to something. . . . Grace is behind and through all of this, our God giving himself freely, the Master, Jesus Christ, giving himself freely.

—2 Thessalonians 1:11–12 THE MESSAGE

Gratefuls, Hopefuls, and Truthfuls

Three things I’m grateful for

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Three things bringing me hope

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Three truths I want to remember

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

To help you track your progress, I'd like you to answer a few more questions that end each chapter. Way to go on getting through the introduction. I wish I could hear what you're learning already. There's so much more to come as you understand more of who you are and all the good that you bring to the life of your kids.

TODAY'S CHECK-IN

1. What have you learned about yourself as a person?

2. What have you learned about yourself as a parent?

SECTION 1

Understanding the Past

1

Understanding Worry and Anxiety

Let's start this chapter by answering these questions:

As you're reading this, do you feel worried? Yes No

Do you have a stress level you'd rate higher than a six out of ten? What number would you give it? Yes No #_____

Are your shoulders hunched up around your neck? Yes No

Is your jaw clenched? Yes No

Have you gotten frustrated with any of your children in the past twenty-four hours? Yes No

Have you reacted with the same emotion and intensity as your child?
 Yes No

Have you had a hard time falling asleep? Yes No

Have you had flashes of thoughts of your children being hurt? Yes No

Have you had intrusive, irrational thoughts? Yes No

Have any of those thoughts felt like they got stuck on a loop in your mind?

Yes No

Have you had a worried reaction that was bigger than the situation warranted? Yes No

Have you had worst-case-scenario thoughts regarding your kids?

Yes No

Have you felt like a failure as a parent? Yes No

Now, let's dig a little deeper. *How have you felt like a failure?*

What is a truth you know already to counteract worry's lie?

In chapter 1 of *The Worry-Free Parent*, you read about the podcast interviewer who said, "We're the first generation of healthy parents." *How do you feel about that statement?*

Would you describe your parents as healthy? Why or why not?

I shared that statement at a recent parenting seminar with grandparents in the room. One older couple got up and walked out immediately. For some of

us, the parents who raised us not only weren't particularly healthy, but also weren't willing to look at their own stuff. Again, your parents were likely doing the best they could with what they knew at the time. Or maybe they weren't. *How would you like to parent similarly to how you were raised?*

What would you like to do differently?

You are forging a new path. And that path is paved with grace—grace from God and grace I would like you to learn to give yourself. If giving yourself grace is more important than trying harder, *what are three ways you could give yourself grace right now?*

What do you recognize in yourself from the following list?

- I'm aware of the things I wish didn't happen in my parenting, like how something inside of me is triggered when my kids are triggered.
- I can match their emotion and intensity, and do so more often than I'd like.
- I can get stuck in the what-if spiral.
- I get angrier than I wish I did.
- It can sometimes be hard to let go of my need for control and simply enjoy my kids.

Write about a time when one of the above happened and what you wish you had done differently.

Five Things True about Anxiety

- 1. The more we understand about worry and anxiety, the easier they are to fight.*

What do you know about worry and anxiety as you're starting this chapter?

Where do you see yourself on the worry continuum?

We usually only have a reaction to our fears when presented with the feared object or situation itself. We're afraid *of*. *What are you afraid of?*

Worry is more pervasive than fear, but it's also more abstract. . . . We worry *about*. Worry comes in all shapes and sizes and is a normal mode of thinking for most parents. Not helpful, but normal. For some parents I see, I truly believe they consider worry a prerequisite to parenting. *How often do you find yourself worrying about your kids?*

What are you worried about?

Fear is adaptive. Anxiety, on the other hand, is maladaptive. It misinterprets threats, distorts our thinking, and often causes our sympathetic nervous system to react without sufficient evidence. Anxiety also causes our worried thoughts or images to get stuck. *When have you felt anxious lately?*

What was it about?

How did your body feel when you were anxious?

What did you do to work through it?

An anxiety disorder is different from anxiety in that it (1) is more intense, (2) lasts longer, and (3) interferes with daily life.¹ For anxiety to be categorized as a disorder, it typically needs to be present for at least six months.

Have you ever been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder?

Do you believe you've ever had an anxiety disorder?

What was it like for you?

What did you learn about yourself through it?

What did you learn that helped in your fight?

I want you to remember. I want you to remember the good that came through the hard. And what you did that made a difference. The same tools work no matter how anxiety manifests itself. More on that later. But for now, remember the good about you that emerged during that time. It's still true today. Your past experience with worry and anxiety will only serve to strengthen you in the battle now. And because this battle has to do with your kids, it might be the most important battle you fight.

According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, "Anxiety disorders develop from a complex set of risk factors, including genetics, brain chemistry, personality, and life events."² *What would you guess has contributed to your anxiety? How?*

2. Anxiety left untreated only gets worse.

The average age of onset for anxiety is seven.³ Take your age and subtract seven. That is likely how long this anxiety storm inside of you has been brewing. And I believe becoming a parent strengthens the storm significantly. *How have you seen that happen in your life?*

Worry often serves a purpose. Many of us try to use worry as a coping skill. We overthink because we believe we're coming to a more helpful conclusion. Or maybe we believe worry motivates us. It energizes us to do the task in front of us. Maybe we worry to keep ourselves from being blindsided by bad news. Worry makes us, somehow, feel more in control. And, in some families, it can even be a way of showing that we care.⁴

How have you, maybe subconsciously, used worry to work for you or believed it could?