

BECOMING MOM STRONG

HOW TO FIGHT
WITH ALL
THAT'S IN YOU
FOR YOUR FAMILY
& YOUR FAITH

Heidi St. John

AUTHOR OF THE BUSY MOM BLOG

Refreshingly real and loaded with wisdom, *Becoming MomStrong* has a much-needed message of hope for moms everywhere!

RUTH SCHWENK

Founder of *TheBetterMom.com* and coauthor of *For Better or for Kids*

Heidi's words are a gift to moms everywhere. *Becoming MomStrong* is our invitation to link arms with other moms who understand that raising children who chase after Jesus isn't for the faint of heart. Her simple yet poignant encouragement spurs us on even on those most difficult days.

JEN SCHMIDT

Blogger behind *Balancing Beauty and Bedlam*, host of the Becoming Conference, and *(in)courage* author

In a culture filled with mom shaming, mom guilt, and mommy wars, Heidi St. John's *Becoming MomStrong* breathes grace, encouragement, wisdom, and relief to those mamas looking for a better way than the world's definition of motherhood. This is the book I wish I had read when I first became a mother nearly a decade ago.

ERIN ODOM

Author of *More Than Just Making It: Hope for the Heart of the Financially Frustrated* and creator of *TheHumbledHomemaker.com*

Motherhood isn't for wimps. One minute it can bring you joy and the next it can leave you weak in the knees. I love *Becoming MomStrong* because it points mothers to who they are in Jesus and who He is in them. It offers practical, spiritual guidance for the journey. Moms will be stronger with this book!

KRISTEN WELCH

Bestselling author of *Raising Grateful Kids in an Entitled World*

Heidi's book *Becoming MomStrong* is exactly what we moms need right now. With each passing day it gets easier and easier to just let things slide and let our kids raise themselves. The reality is that

we only have “such a time as this” to impart wisdom and truth and good and beautiful things into our kids. This is our time, this is our call, and *Becoming MomStrong* is the rallying cry and strategic message we need.

SARAH MAE

Coauthor of *Desperate: Hope for the Mom Who Needs to Breathe*

This book is more than a book. It's boot camp for a mom's soul. Meet your coach: Heidi St. John. She's also your cheerleader. Heidi will help you discover a strength that you didn't even know you had. With authenticity, urgency, and a great sense of humor, Heidi brings you into her spiritual gym and reveals what it truly means to be MomStrong.

JENNIFER DUKES LEE

Author of *The Happiness Dare* and *Love Idol*

Without apology, Heidi gracefully tackles some of the most strength-zapping dilemmas we (and our loved ones) are facing today—hard things that no previous generation has walked through before.

WENDY SPEAKE

Coauthor of *Triggers: Exchanging Parents' Angry Reactions for Gentle Biblical Responses* and *Life Creative: Inspiration for Today's Renaissance Mom*

We all need someone to come alongside and remind us that we weren't meant to mother in fear, but rather we are to be courageous in the face of the many great challenges that present themselves throughout our parenting journeys. *Becoming MomStrong* is the sounding cry that moms everywhere are looking for. This is a book that extends a hand and reminds us we aren't alone and that together we are strong.

KELLI STUART

Coauthor of *Life Creative: Inspiration for Today's Renaissance Mom* and author of *Like a River from Its Course*

Becoming MomStrong is Heidi's rallying call to moms everywhere to fight for their faith and their families. It's her call to arms, her battle cry for a generation. Heidi shares her story for the benefit of all her readers. Her story is every mom's story—filled with failures, embarrassments, and brokenness. But like her own journey, that's not where ours ends. Our redeeming Savior uses it all for His glory.

RACHAEL CARMAN

Author of *How Many Times Do I Have to Tell You?*; RachaelCarman.com

When I read books on motherhood, I expect to learn and be challenged. But I don't expect to find a riveting page-turner that I can't put down. Heidi had me at the subtitle: *How to Fight with All That's in You for Your Family and Your Faith*. Motherhood is a high-stakes calling, but the journey leads us to places of redemption, restoration, and power in Christ that are life altering and gloriously redemptive. After you read this book, make sure you pass it on. This is a message every Christian mother needs to hear.

ZAN TYLER

Speaker; author; and director of language arts, Bible, and press for Apologia Educational Ministries; www.apologia.com

Heidi's biblical perspective on the joys and challenges of motherhood will encourage you and build up your faith. Her down-to-earth way of communicating makes you feel like you are sitting across the table from a friend. Whether you are a soon-to-be-mom, in the middle of raising little ones, or you are supporting a mommy in need, *Becoming MomStrong* is a must read for you!

DEBBIE LINDELL

Lead pastor of James River Church, author, and founder of the Designed for Life Conference

Heidi's engaging writing style and encouraging words dig in and draw a line in the sand of our modern culture. She is a modern-day Joshua, calling on Christian moms to choose to stand and

be counted while she simultaneously reminds us to focus on the trustworthiness and strength of the One we serve. *Becoming MomStrong* is a gift to all Kingdom women for such a time as this.

ANGELA O'DELL

Author, speaker, consultant, veteran homeschool mom; angelaodellblog.com

Can you imagine having a toddler in your home for twenty-two years in a row? If that doesn't qualify you to write a book entitled *Becoming MomStrong*, I don't know what does. A mother of seven, Heidi St. John gets the weariness and realities of motherhood. But more importantly, she understands parenting in the strength of Almighty God. This book is a call to stop cowering in a corner and to start rising up in faith. This is a much-needed message for this generation of moms.

ARLENE PELLICANE

Speaker and author of several books, including *31 Days to Becoming a Happy Mom*

With refreshing honesty about the struggles we face as mothers, Heidi reminds us that the secret to becoming MomStrong has very little to do with us and *everything* to do with God. She issues the passionate call to not give up, but instead to run in *His* strength as we raise up this next generation!

HEATHER HAAPT

Author of *Raising Knights in Training: Ten Principles for Raising Honorable, Courageous, and Compassionate Boys*

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Introduction



WELCOME TO THE BATTLE OF YOUR LIFE

*I*t was 5:30 a.m., and my alarm was going off.

“Mama? Mama? Maaaaaammmmaaaaa! Can you hear me? Are you sleeping?” I opened one eye and tried to focus. It was early, even for my brown-eyed alarm clock. “Sweetheart, why are you awake?” I asked quietly. “Are you okay?”

“Mom,” my daughter continued, “the tooth fairy didn’t come! I put my tooth right where you said she would find it, but she never came!”

Great. It wasn’t even light outside, and I’d had my first failure of the day.

Zero-dark-thirty, and I’d already let someone down.

SUPERNATURAL STRENGTH NEEDED

I wasn’t unfamiliar with this feeling—it was a weird mixture of worrying I’d never get it right and simultaneously not caring if

I ever did. I had experienced similar emotions just five hours earlier, when one of my teens—who has all the youthful energy that comes from not being truly responsible for another human being—plopped down next to me on the bed and started talking. Everything was going great . . . until I dozed off in the middle of our conversation. A disheartened “Never mind, Mom” was the last thing I heard that night as I watched my fifteen-year-old shuffle out of the room.

I tried to make excuses for my sudden onset of narcolepsy, explaining that the baby hadn’t slept through the night for the past few days, but my words rang hollow to the teenager who had finally decided I was cool enough to engage in late-night conversations—except for the fact that I didn’t have any “late night” left in me. *Why can’t I be cool at 7:30 instead of 11:30?*

I took a deep breath and looked around the room. I knew there was something—*something*—I needed to remember before I went to bed. After a few minutes, I gave up. My head hit the pillow, where I lay, without sleeping, recounting all the things that were still left on my to-do list from earlier that day. At some point, the list became a lullaby, and I fell asleep.

Now, my six-year-old alarm clock was bringing it all back. That’s it—I was supposed to be the tooth fairy last night! I *knew* there was something I was forgetting. On top of my usual roles of wife, lover, mother, cook, chauffeur, teacher, judge, counselor, nurse, birthday party coordinator, and chief laundress, I was also a tooth fairy (part time, of course).

“I’m sorry, sugar,” I said to my disappointed child. “Tooth fairies sometimes get lost. Our house is hard to find if you don’t have GPS.”

My daughter looked confused. “But the tooth fairy doesn’t *need* GPS!” she wailed. “She’s a *fairy*!”

#momfail

Have you ever seen that hashtag reflected in the eyes of your children? Have you ever looked into the faces of the people who call you Mom and wondered what in the world you got yourself into? Do you ever feel weak and unqualified for the position that is often referred to as “a sacred calling”? Have you ever wished you could transport yourself and your kids back to a simpler time—a time when schools taught math and reading, there was no such thing as the Internet, and churches taught the truth?

I have. I admit that most of the time I feel like I’m in over my head. Maybe you feel that way too. Maybe, like me, you’re surrounded by fifteen tons of cold, wrinkled laundry, and you know you need to go to the grocery store, but frankly you just don’t care if your tribe eats tonight or not. (Why do they want dinner every. single. night?)

If you’re like me, you’ve been reading the headlines and watching the rapid-fire changes that are taking place in our culture with a fair degree of frustration and fear. Let’s face it: moms today are being asked to deal with more than just the basics of motherhood, like packing lunches and making runs to soccer practice; we’re grappling with questions that previous generations never even saw coming. Social and spiritual land mines are everywhere. We’re constantly assaulted by questions about everything from gender identity to the safety of vaccines. Even the role of government in our parenting decisions is more intrusive than in previous generations.

Today’s mothers need a special kind of strength. Yes, we need to be physically strong, but we also need strength of conviction

and spiritual fortitude. Today's moms need to be strong in the Lord and in the power of *His* might. We dare not rely on human strength for the current battles we're facing in culture.

I've never met a mom who didn't want to raise strong, healthy kids, but there's a caveat: we can't give our kids what we don't have ourselves. Our children need us to stand up in a culture that is literally shouting, "Stand down!" The schools will tell you that they know better than you do. Don't believe them. The media will tell you that truth is whatever anyone wants it to be and that the role of parents isn't that important. Don't buy it.

Voices from your past might whisper, "You're not ready for this." Don't listen. You can do this! You—the mom in the midst of it all—have been set apart for a job that only you can do: to train your children to hear God's voice and to walk in the truth no matter where our culture is heading.

You might be tempted to shrink back from the challenge or let someone you think is smarter or stronger than you take over. But I want to encourage you—for the sake of your children—to engage in the battle. It's no accident that you're here right now. This is a special generation of mothers who have been called to shepherd a special generation of children.

We have found ourselves in the middle of an epic battle, and if we're going to prevail, we'll need . . .

- to be strong in the Lord,
- to know who we are in Christ, and
- to impart that strength to our kids.

In other words, we need to become *MomStrong*!

YOUR MISSION, SHOULD YOU CHOOSE TO ACCEPT IT— AND YOU MUST!

If you're like me, you might be starting to think you're in over your head when it comes to being the kind of mom God has called you to be . . . and that's okay, because you are. We all are, and that's by design. I believe God knew what He was doing when He decided to give inexperienced young women the responsibility of raising children. In fact, I think God must smile when He sees a mother with her child, teaching and training, loving and correcting, sometimes failing and sometimes getting it right. He understands mothers. After all, He is a Father who has watched His own kids struggle and succeed. He knows firsthand the soul-altering love of a parent. And like mothers, God is always at work to shift and shape, clarify and correct the hearts of His children.

Make no mistake: motherhood is tough, and it's not for the faint of heart. In my twenty-six years of parenting our seven children, I've learned how weak I can be and how strong God is. I've come to believe that God wants to use my role as a mother to give me a glimpse into His Father-heart for all His children. After all, He knows I'm going to need it for the mission I'm on with my own kids.

And yes, whether you're aware of it or not, if you're a mom, you do have a mission—to raise the next generation of teachers, doctors, judges, police officers, grocery store clerks, attorneys, and nurses. Truly, the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world. But wait—there's more. You are also raising the next generation of parents! Look around. It doesn't take long for one generation to hand the baton to the next. And it's up to you, mom, to make sure that when the time comes, your

children are strong enough in the Lord to accept the challenge themselves.

What a high calling motherhood is! Our culture may have reduced it to little more than a stopover on the way to something else, but the truth is that motherhood is sacred. You, mom, are shaping the future, one little heart at a time. Everything else pales in comparison.

If you aren't sure where to get the strength you'll need for the journey, keep reading, because this beautifully broken mother of seven would like to give you a gentle hug and a high five as she points you to the true wellspring of life and strength: Jesus.

By the way, it's okay if you're reading this and you don't feel strong. None of us start out strong. The good news is that God doesn't require strength for the journey; He *offers* it. He wants to make us strong, but we have to truly want His strength in order to find it. How do we receive it? By acknowledging our own weakness.

It may feel a little frightening at first, this admission of weakness. But take it from someone who has been there: coming to terms with weakness is liberating. When we finally admit we can't do it on our own and look to Jesus, we're about to be set free. Free from the past. Free from the tyranny of other people's expectations. Free from worry. Free to love. Free to grow. Free to move with confidence into the future. Exchanging our past for a future in Christ and claiming His strength is where becoming MomStrong begins. In Christ, you are more than a conqueror. You are strong, safe, sealed, and secure. You are a channel of the love and life of God for your children.

So where do we start? How can we stand up and be strong

in a culture that marginalizes mothers and puts children at risk by its very definition of family? We go back to the beginning.

God has already given us the blueprint for becoming MomStrong, and that blueprint is found in the Bible. He has entrusted us with bringing up the next generation, and He says that His strength is made perfect in weakness.

So if you're feeling weak today, get ready to find new strength. Get ready to see His heart for you in a new way. It doesn't matter where you are starting. Your inexperience makes you the perfect candidate to receive direction from the One who knows your kids better than you do. Your past doesn't need to define your future. God is in the business of redemption! He makes things new. Strength comes from Him.

By God's grace, we can be strong enough to show the next generation that we serve a mighty God. So join me on the journey, won't you? Let's become MomStrong together!

 Heidi St. John
Fall 2017

Chapter 1



GOOD NEWS— YOUR KIDS CAME WITH A MANUAL!

I like manuals. Luckily for me, most things come with one. Your car came with a manual. So did your TV and your Crock-Pot. Last week, I actually bought an eyeliner manual. You know, because, really, I'm just making that up as I go too.

When it comes to parenting, there are a lot of great books out there. But MomStrong moms are looking for more than advice—we're looking for wisdom. And God tells us that the beginning of wisdom is found in knowing the Lord (see Psalm 111:10). The way we find out what God's character is like is by reading His Word. Every other book out there (including this one) pales in comparison to that singular literary masterpiece. It's the only book you need.

I learned this lesson from an older couple when my now-grown kids were still very young. In fact, it's etched in my memory forever.

One Saturday afternoon when my husband, Jay, and I were rookie parents, a couple from church stopped by. Jay had been a pastor for just five years or so, and I was doing my best to juggle the roles of pastor's wife and mom to three kids under the age of six. Garry and Carol had been running errands, and they felt like the Lord told them to drop by on their way home to see how we were doing. In fact, I'm sure it was the Lord's prompting, because Jay and I were fighting, and there's no way we would have invited them over to see *that*.

Now you need to know me and my sweet man to truly grasp the nature of our "fights." We're not screamers, though once in a blue moon we will raise our voices. We don't throw things either. (We made this rule after I accidentally gave my husband a black eye during a heated argument just after our first anniversary, when I kicked my shoe off at him and it hit him squarely in the eye. It was totally an accident, but he's still getting marriage mileage from it!)

It's embarrassing to admit, but that day we were pretty up in arms over a parenting issue with one of our delightful little angels. I can't remember what it was about—when you have seven kids, those details can get a bit fuzzy—but I'll never forget the humbling experience of looking at our screen door and seeing Garry and Carol standing there staring at us . . . and looking rather amused. After all, it's not every day you happen to walk in on your pastor and his wife acting like three-year-olds in a sandbox.

"Is this a bad time?" Carol asked, sheepishly holding out a box of doughnuts.

Jay and I looked at each other. I felt my face getting hot. “Of course not,” we lied. “Come on in.”

Garry and Carol sat on the couch, but the awkwardness of the moment persisted. Finally, I looked at Jay and then back at our friends. There was no point in pretending that now was a “good time.” We were clearly not having a great day.

“To be honest,” I started, “we’re having a disagreement. Do you mind if we get your perspective on it?”

It’s worth noting here that Garry and Carol weren’t a couple of newlyweds. They were the parents of five wonderful daughters, and we had a tremendous amount of respect for them. We were still very much in the “experimental” part of our parenting, and we clearly needed some advice and godly counsel.

Carol and Garry spent quite a while listening to us talk about our problems and a *particularly* long time patiently sitting by as I unpacked a load of my insecurities about motherhood. That’s when Carol noticed something.

“Heidi, I see you’ve been reading a lot about parenting,” she said. She was right. On the coffee table in front of them sat a plethora of books. Carol picked up one of my favorites and thumbed through it. “This is a pretty good one,” she said as she put it back on the table, “but I can’t help noticing the absence of the book you *really* need to be reading.”

I raised an eyebrow. *Good!* I thought. She was going to lead me to the holy grail of parenting books! I reached for a pen and paper.

“I don’t see a Bible anywhere on this table.”

(Insert painful silence here.)

I’m not gonna lie: that was awkward. Here I was, a pastor’s wife, caught in a full-on argument with my husband, surrounded by every self-help book on the shelf . . . *except* the Bible.

Great.

Now Carol wasn't being rude; her tone wasn't the least bit condescending. I knew she loved me. I also knew she was right.

"Heidi," she continued, "if you commit to spending more time in your Bible, you will soon discover that you won't need to rely on these other books. The Bible and the Holy Spirit are all you really need. Wisdom starts in the Word. God will give you whatever else you are lacking. And if that includes finding encouragement from these other books, you'll know that, too."

It's been nearly twenty years since then, but I've never forgotten Carol's exhortation to me. It was the first time that I realized I was depending on human voices and that those voices were taking priority over the voice of my heavenly Father.

To be MomStrong is to understand what comes first. Our priority must be hearing from the Lord in every aspect of our lives. If we're not listening for the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit, we're more likely to fall victim to the latest and greatest parenting fad or to get sucked into the trap of believing we can do it without the Lord—and that's exactly what the enemy wants.

THE TROUBLE WITH COOKIE-CUTTER PARENTING

Garry and Carol's visit marked the beginning of when Jay and I turned away from cookie-cutter parenting advice and started learning to listen more carefully for God's wisdom. Good teachers and pastors are wonderful, but they're no substitute for time alone with the Lord. We need to hear from God more than we hear from people.

In the nineties, Jay and I participated in a popular parent-

ing class at our church with several other young couples. Those were formative years for all of us, and we wanted to get it right. All the parents who took the class with us were well meaning, and I'm sure the author of the course was well meaning too. But the results (i.e., how the theory worked in real life) ranged from disappointing to devastating. The problem? Too many of us accepted this cookie-cutter approach to parenting as the inspired Word of God rather than directly seeking the Lord.

We all did our best to follow the advice laid out in the book we were studying. It touched on virtually every aspect of parenting: there was a right way and a wrong way to feed babies, and there was a right way and a wrong way to do nap-time and bedtime. It really was a formula for parenting. The trouble is, formulaic approaches to parenting don't usually work, because each child is different. We learned very quickly that what worked for one child didn't necessarily work for the next one, and so on.

Many of the lessons we learned in the class were excellent, but the hard-and-fast rules of the program set the stage for what turned into legalistic, performance-based parenting. It was as if there were a competition between the families in the class. Whose kids were the most polite? Which ones came running as soon as they heard their names?

One morning in church, I noticed that my kids were arguing over something. Normally I would have just corrected the situation, but in this parenting competition I'd placed myself into, the stakes seemed higher. I felt like I had to crack down hard on the infraction. Suddenly I felt like everyone was watching my children. It didn't help that I was a pastor's wife either. Every time the kids disobeyed me in church, I was deeply

embarrassed for others to view my apparent lack of parenting know-how.

The comparison trap was stealing the joy from parenting—but worse than that, it had us all focused on achieving temporary obedience rather than gaining insight into our individual children. That pride and embarrassment put the focus solely on my children's *actions* rather than on their hearts.

This is the real danger of formulaic parenting. Formulas tend to make parents believe that correct actions always indicate a contrite heart. Of course, that's simply not true. A child can be made to sit down on the outside and still be standing on the inside. In the past twenty years, I've never met a mom who merely wanted her children to *act* like good kids. We want more than that for our kids—we want them to *be* good kids. Unfortunately, performance-based parenting often encourages just that—a performance.

*Performance-based parenting often
encourages just that—a performance.*

Of course, reading advice from other godly people isn't bad; we can glean much wisdom from believers who have walked the journey before us. But when we do all our learning from others and forget to spend time with the Lord, we're in danger of winning the battle and losing the war.

The battles come in the form of everyday issues like getting

your kids to put away their toys, sit still at the dinner table, and brush their teeth. These are largely just prewar warmups, and we all approach these situations differently. But *war* is different: the stakes are higher. We're talking about the hearts and minds of our children here—their character, their compassion, their moral foundation, and their capacity to love. Matters of preference are inconsequential; matters of the heart and soul are eternal. MomStrong moms understand the difference, and while they don't ignore the battles, they know that their primary focus must be on winning the war.



MomStrong moms don't ignore the battles, but they know that their primary focus must be on winning the war.



WHEN FATHER DOESN'T KNOW BEST

I want to go a little deeper with this “battle vs. war” idea because I know firsthand how easy it is to lose sight of the larger goal of capturing the hearts of our children. It's possible to win battles with our kids over lesser things but lose their hearts in the process. To that end, MomStrong moms are always asking, “What's the bigger issue?” It's easy to look back and agree that having a kid who isn't potty trained by the time the books say he should be pales in comparison to making sure the hearts of our children are tuned to hear that still, small voice of the Lord. The

hearts of our children are what we want to guard above all else, and perhaps no one learned this lesson the hard way as much as King David did.

In 1 Kings 1:1-14, we read the story of King David and two of his sons, Adonijah and Solomon. Both his sons knew their father was dying, and both wanted to be king in his place. As we read the story, we see that Adonijah was absolutely set on taking his dad's place, despite the fact that the throne had already been promised to Solomon. Adonijah began boasting, "I will make myself king!" He then got together a bunch of chariots and charioteers and recruited fifty men to run in front of him (see 1 Kings 1:5). According to Scripture, King David had never disciplined his son at any time, even by asking, "Why are you doing that?" (see 1 Kings 1:6).

Seriously? *Never*? Listen, I wasn't there (I know—shocker), but my guess is that King David's children were not all that unlike my own kids. I bet they pushed their parents to the absolute limit dozens of times. In fact, I'm sure they gave their father dozens of reasons to discipline them, but even so, the Bible says King David didn't take advantage of any of these opportunities. David gave Adonijah autonomy, position, and everything money could buy, yet he neglected to give him the one thing he needed most: fear and respect for the Lord.

So how'd *that* work out? Well, to make a long story short, while Adonijah was running around partying with his friends and anointing himself king, David followed through on his promise to his wife Bathsheba and anointed their son, Solomon, king instead. When Adonijah tried to overtake his brother's throne, Solomon had him killed. And there you have it: a serious case of winning a battle and losing a war. David's failure to

hold his sons accountable for their actions cost both him and his family dearly.

There is a huge part of me that totally gets what David was going through. Like most parents, I imagine that David probably got tired of listening to complaints from and about his children. After all, King David had many wives—there are eight named in the Bible. The man had his hands full, with nineteen sons and at least one daughter. He had a full-time job just managing the people of Israel, let alone all his wives and children.

It would be easy to make excuses for David's lousy track record, but instead I hope we can learn from it. First lesson: just say no to multiple wives. And on a more practical level, even when we feel overwhelmed by the job of correcting our children—when we think we can't do it for one more second—our kids need us to stay engaged. David's decision to disengage from the hard work of parenting left his family tree in chaos.

The way I see it, David's troubles aren't that different from our own. (Well, with the exception of the multiple wives. Even *I* can see that's a bad idea.) Regardless, our culture today is quick to excuse parents from the tough job of parenting.

In February 2013, police officers pulled over fifteen-year-old Ethan Couch in the family pickup truck. In addition to having no driver's license, the underage Texan boy was drunk on vodka, an open bottle tossed in the back of the truck. A passed-out girl slumped next to Ethan in the passenger seat. It was widely reported that the young man was disrespectful to the police officer, who tried to warn him about the dangers of drinking and driving.

When Couch left later with his mother, Tonya, he had

received two citations for his crimes. This wasn't new territory for the Couch family, as they already had a history of defying the law and then using their wealth to avoid prosecution.¹

Four months later on June 15, Ethan, drunk once again, plowed through a group of people helping at the scene of a minor accident. Four people were killed. In the court case that followed, Couch was charged with four counts of intoxication manslaughter and two counts of intoxication assault. Tarrant County prosecutors were seeking a maximum sentence of twenty years of imprisonment for Couch, but in December 2013, Judge Jean Hudson Boyd sentenced Couch to ten years of probation after his attorneys successfully argued that the teen needed rehabilitation instead of prison.²

While the story of Ethan Couch is tragic, it was his defense strategy that made his case famous. According to psychologist G. Dick Miller, who testified in court, Ethan was a product of "affluenza" and was unable to link his actions with their consequences because his parents had taught him that wealth buys privilege.

Does that sound like anyone else you know? If King David were alive today, I imagine his attorneys might have used a similar defense for his son. Blame belongs to the rich dad, overwhelmed with his own life, who by design or accident taught his kids that they didn't have to be responsible for their actions.

It's easy to think we are loving our children when we let them get away with wrong, but the opposite is true. Oh, how the outcomes for both of these families would have changed had they known, taught, and applied God's Word in their parenting decisions! Is it a guarantee of success? No. I know many

wonderful parents whose children have chosen to walk away from their parents' godly instruction. But we aren't responsible for the outcome. As parents, we're accountable for training our children in righteousness. The results are up to God.

Parenting is a tough job, but thank God, we don't have to rely on our own wisdom. God has already given us the best parenting manual in the world—His Word. The more we teach our children to follow in the ways of the Lord, the better equipped they will be to face the challenges ahead and “be successful in all [they] do and wherever [they] go” (1 Kings 2:3).

I'M NOT GONNA LIE . . .

Let's be honest here. We can't give our children what we don't have ourselves. We can't train them in discipline and biblical values if we aren't living out those values in our own lives. And the truth is, our kids aren't the only ones who need help navigating the treacherous currents of modern society; we as parents are surrounded by lies too. We're being told that unborn babies have no right to life. We're being told that marriage between a man and a man or between a woman and a woman is not only okay, it's to be celebrated. Deception and unbiblical thinking have become so commonplace that we're afraid to even speak the truth for fear of being discriminated against or being labeled “intolerant.”

What was once regarded as a parent's responsibility is now seen as an infringement on the child's rights. For example, parents today are being told that kids as young as elementary school age can make their own decisions about everything from birth control to which gender they want to be. We're being told that our children have the right to get an abortion without

parental consent. Simple tasks like looking at your thirteen-year-old's medical records now require permission from your teenager! The assault on parental authority is no longer hidden in the shadows.

Today's parents can see trouble on the horizon, but they've been told to be quiet, to "live and let live." It's a dangerous ideology, because it keeps the truth concealed.

So what do we do?

Parents need wisdom and discernment in order to make the right decisions for their children. But where can we look to find it? Unfortunately, we can't even assume that our churches will lead us there. Every day it seems that more and more church leaders are laying aside the truth of God's Word and exchanging it for the lie that we can take God out of our everyday lives. In a misguided attempt to be loving, many Christians today—even pastors—are sacrificing truth for the sake of "love." But is it really loving to disregard the truth? The Bible says the two must never be separated—and yet many teachers and Christian leaders today would challenge this most basic of Christian teachings.

Recently, in a heartbreaking departure from biblical truth, former pastor Rob Bell teamed up with Oprah Winfrey to spread a message of equality and love. With her sights set squarely on the Christian community, Oprah interviewed Mr. Bell with the skill of a master marksman. When pressed by Oprah to explain when the church was going to "get" gay marriage, Bell replied, "We think it's inevitable and . . . we're moments away [from the church accepting gay marriage]." He went on to say, "The church will continue to be even more irrelevant when it quotes letters from two thousand years ago as their best defense."³

When I heard these words, my heart broke. Yet Paul warned us that this would happen. In 2 Timothy 4:3-4, he wrote: “A time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. They will reject the truth and chase after myths.”

Likewise, the apostle Peter devoted most of 2 Peter to warning against false teachers:

There were also false prophets in Israel, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will cleverly teach destructive heresies and even deny the Master who bought them. In this way, they will bring sudden destruction on themselves. Many will follow their evil teaching and shameful immorality. And because of these teachers, the way of truth will be slandered.

2 PETER 2:1-2

John, too, repeatedly warned of false teachers in his writings:

Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world. I JOHN 4:1

Those “letters from two thousand years ago” that Bell views with such disregard are the very words of God. They are our best defense. In fact, they’re our *only* defense! Without them, we are lost. God’s Word doesn’t change with the winds of the culture. His truth is eternal.

Scripture makes it clear that God's Word is true and unchanging:

The sum of your word is truth,
and every one of your righteous rules endures forever.

PSALM 119:160, ESV

When we stray from the Bible, we are in dangerous spiritual waters. MomStrong moms know the Word, and they respond to today's challenges with God-centered wisdom. Don't be deceived: your best defense, your only defense, is the Word.

*MomStrong moms know the Word,
and they respond to today's challenges
with God-centered wisdom.*

I've said it before, and I'll say it again: we can't give our kids what we don't have. If you aren't in the Word for yourself, you need to be—for your own sake as well as for the sake of your children. It's time we stopped leaning on our church leaders and religious figures to interpret the Bible for us and returned to reading it on our own—and not just on Sundays. God offers a promise for those who seek wisdom: they will find it. The war may feel long and fierce, but we don't have to go it alone:

Don't turn your back on wisdom, for she will protect you.

Love her, and she will guard you.

Getting wisdom is the wisest thing you can do!

And whatever else you do, develop good judgment.

PROVERBS 4:6-7



MOMSTRONG MOM, SEEK HIS WISDOM

Becoming MomStrong means digging into God's Word for answers to the daily challenges you and your family face. If you've never done that before, I encourage you to do something that took me years to do—be intentional about making time to read the Bible each day, even if it's only a little bit at a time.

It's okay to start small. Commit to reading the Bible for just ten minutes each morning, and you'll be amazed at what you'll learn about the character of God and His heart for this hurting world. You'll also see that God has set standards in place since the creation of the world. His law is as steadfast as the law of gravity—and things go better when we obey, just as they do when we respect the laws that govern the physical world.

If you're struggling with one of your children or with a situation one of your children is facing, it's time to get on your knees and ask God for unique wisdom and perspective. God knows exactly what's going on, and He can give you the wisdom you need. Isn't that amazing? It's one of the reasons we have hope as Christian moms. Instead of facing all the challenges and changes of motherhood on our own, we have the Creator Himself walking alongside us.

PRAYER POINTS FOR A BATTLE-READY MOM

- Pray that you will have clarity as you make parenting decisions (see James 1:5).
- Pray that your children will become wise and learn to love God's Word (see Psalm 119:105).
- Pray for wise mentors for you and your children (see Proverbs 15:22).
- Pray that, unlike King David, you will stay engaged with your children in every stage of their lives (see 1 Kings 1:1-14).