

WEEK 1

Becoming Brave and Wise

THE ART OF TURNING TO GOD FOR WISDOM AND COURAGE

Fear of the LORD is the foundation of true wisdom.

All who obey his commandments will grow in wisdom.

— PSALM 111:10

This is my command—be strong and courageous!

Do not be afraid or discouraged.

For the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.

— JOSHUA 1:9

Our study this week focuses on material from chapters 1 and 3 of *Becoming MomStrong*.

Let's Become . . .

MomStrong moms know to ask God for wisdom and courage.

LET'S START HERE

What women in your life do you consider wise? Why?

What's one thing you would do differently if you had more courage?

Is fear holding you back from becoming MomStrong? If so, how?

LET'S TALK: *A Note from Heidi*

Motherhood. It's never what we think it's going to be, is it? It often requires more than we were expecting to give, but in return, it gives back more than we ever thought we could receive. Motherhood isn't for the faint of heart either—but I don't need to tell you that, do I? My guess is that you're holding this book in your hands because you see the battle you're in.

Mothers today need the wisdom of Solomon and the bravery of Esther. Sometimes that feels like a lot—because it is. The really great news here is that your kids came with an instruction manual. It's called the Word of God. For the next several weeks, we're going to dig into it together, and as we do, it's my prayer that you will feel the strong arms of God wrapped around you. Shaping the hearts and minds of the next generation is a God-sized assignment, one that God wants to partner with us to accomplish.

I'm so glad you're walking with me as we become MomStrong together. This week we're going to get started on the path to knowing God better. I challenge you to lay down your expectations right now and open your heart to what God wants to teach you. I hope you come away understanding where to turn with your deepest parenting questions (hint: not my words!) and feeling confident that you can step out in courage, knowing beyond a shadow of a doubt that the God of the Bible is trustworthy. We'll consider some sections from my book and some passages from Scripture, and then we'll talk about amazing women from the Bible who still teach us how to live MomStrong.

—HSJ

BECOMING MOMSTRONG

Wisdom

Here's the bottom line: the only way to grow in wisdom is to know God better. In chapter 1 of *Becoming MomStrong*, I write about my eye-opening encounter with Garry and Carol, who pointed me to the right place to go for parenting advice: “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.” How can we know the Lord? By reading His Word. That sounds simple, but for most moms, it’s a battle simply to make time to read God’s Word. In the rush of day-to-day life, it’s easy to push our minutes with God into the “if I have time” column, isn’t it?

Why do you think it’s such a struggle to make time for God?

Where do you typically go to find advice for your challenges as a mom?

Why don’t we usually think of the Bible as a source of parenting wisdom? How can we change that?

Since God is the source of wisdom—for parenting as well as for all other aspects of our lives—we need to seek His wise perspective as we shepherd our children. God’s perspective is never temporary. It’s eternal. God’s desire is that we learn to look beyond the short term (our children’s behavior) to the long term (our children’s hearts). Consider these thoughts from chapter 1 of *Becoming MomStrong*:

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 pre-war 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.

What short-term battles with your children have you been tempted to focus on?

How can you focus on the big-picture war for your children's hearts and minds?

To win the long-term war of child rearing, we need to think about training our children to know Scripture, hold biblical values, discern true teaching, and develop godly character. But guess what? It's pretty hard to teach those qualities to our children if we don't possess them ourselves. We can't give our kids what we don't have. Becoming MomStrong means we look first at our own walk with God, asking Him to help us model a right relationship with Him for our children.

Be honest. Is there something you're trying to teach your children that you are struggling with yourself?

The comparison trap steals the joy from parenting.

What's one step you could take this week to learn more about the Bible and develop your own character?

Now before you start allowing the devil to beat you up, let's talk about something else. As long as we live on this earth, we'll hear persistent voices clamoring to fill our souls with condemnation. Weary, worn-out mothers are perfect targets for the enemy. One of Satan's favorite tactics is to use condemnation to discourage us, and he is a master at making us believe someone else could do our job better than we can. So before you start beating yourself up, remember not to allow the voice of condemnation to drown out that still, small voice of conviction.

The voice of conviction is God's voice. It lifts us up and sets our feet back on the Rock. But unless we are listening to God, condemnation can creep in and turn us into victims rather than victors. Here's the truth: every mom struggles. Of course we can't just wait until we have our lives all put together before we begin teaching our kids. They need us now—which means we get to teach them even as we're still learning ourselves.

Wisdom says, "Go deeper! Don't give up; turn to Me!" The more we go to the Word and take our questions to God in prayer, the more we'll see His guidance in our parenting struggles. God offers wisdom for worn-out moms. Aren't you glad?

What does the Bible say about wisdom? Look up these verses and fill in the blanks. (Note that these verses are taken from the New Living Translation.)

Proverbs 1:7: _____ is the foundation of true knowledge, but fools _____ wisdom and discipline.

Proverbs 4:6-7: Don't turn your back on wisdom, for she will _____ you. Love her, and she will _____ you. Getting wisdom is the wisest thing you can do! And whatever else you do, develop _____.

Ephesians 1:16-17: I pray for you constantly, asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual _____ and _____ so that you might _____.

Read James 3:13-18. What characteristics does James say are not part of godly wisdom?

What does godly wisdom look like? How could the kind of wisdom described in James 3 help you in your parenting?

Look up the following verses and write down what each tells us about how we can become wise.

Colossians 1:9

James 1:5-6

When we need counsel for parenting, we can pray and go to Scripture, asking God to show us how to apply His words to our relationships with our families. What's one Scripture verse that could help you parent with more wisdom? Write it here as a reminder.

Courage

I've never met a mom who doesn't long to protect her children. We spend those first harrowing years of motherhood protecting our kids from cartwheeling off coffee tables (I actually failed at that one) and teaching them to buckle their seat belts, brush their teeth, and look both ways before crossing the street. You know, things like that. As our children get older and it's time to let them make their own choices, it's easy for fear to keep us from letting go.

In chapter 3 of *Becoming MomStrong* I write, "Motherhood is all about courage, from the moment you watch your baby take those first wobbly steps. Many of the steps they'll take after that are wobbly too. The trick is to trust the Lord as you wobble through each transition together."

What's one area where you have trouble letting go of your children and their choices?

How could you learn to trust in the Lord in that area?

If we fix our eyes on the scary world around us, focusing on all the problems we or our children might face, we'll never live with courage. We need a longer-term perspective, one that sees beyond the mistakes our children might make today, the hurt they might feel tomorrow, or the rejection they might face next month. As chapter 3 of *Becoming MomStrong* says, "God has plans for your children, just as He has plans for you. But remember, we only see the tiniest fraction of God's grand design. That's why we need God's perspective for our children—it's the only one that really matters." Our perspective is focused on the here and now; His perspective is eternal.

What struggles are your children facing right now?

Where the hurt
runs deep, the
grace runs
deeper.

How might it help to consider this challenge with a longer-term perspective? For example, how might this struggle eventually strengthen your child? How might God be using it to shape him or her?

Mothers who deal with struggles by crying out to God for courage and wisdom are doing more than acquiring these characteristics; they're also teaching their children to do the same. That's powerful! Chapter 3 of *Becoming MomStrong* says, "The reality is that we all face different kinds of giants in our lives. The question isn't whether they'll show up; it's whether we'll have the courage to load our own stones into our own slings when the time comes."

Are you facing a difficult situation right now? If so, think about the message you're sending your children about God in the midst of it. Do they see a mom who is filled with faith or fear? How could the way you are responding to this struggle reflect God's true character to your children?

How could having God's perspective help you face these challenges with courage instead of fear?


As humans, we desperately want to control what happens to us and our children. We want to avoid pain and suffering. Yet as Christians, we know that God doesn't promise us a pain-free life. Chapter 3 of *Becoming MomStrong* states,

The Bible says that we can make our plans, but ultimately the Lord determines our steps (see Proverbs 16:9). And some of those steps can be pretty painful to take. . . . We don't always get to choose what happens to the babies we carry so carefully inside us. We can't always predict what a day will bring. But we are guaranteed this: God will never leave us or forsake us (see Hebrews 13:5). Ever.

Write out Deuteronomy 31:6 below.

How does God's presence give you courage? What helps you remember that He is with you?

Read Psalm 46. Note that these verses don't depict a calm, idealistic scene. What are some of the frightening circumstances the psalmist describes (see verses 2-3, 6)?



Why can the psalmist say that he won't be afraid in the middle of everything that's going on? What are some specific things he mentions that might give him courage (see verses 1, 5, 7, 10)?

Consider verse 10: "Be still, and know that I am God!" How can being still and understanding who God is help to give us courage?

A Voice from the Bible: Ruth

You've heard from me, but now I want you to hear from a much older woman—one who is three thousand years old, in fact (give or take a few centuries). Ruth has her own book in the Old Testament, and she exemplifies quiet courage.

If you have time, read the whole book of Ruth—it's only four chapters! If you're too busy running after a toddler, juggling five loads of laundry, and cooking dinner, I feel your pain, so allow me to summarize for you while you reheat your tea.

Ruth was a young woman from Moab, a country east of Israel that traced its ancestry to the son born to Lot and his daughter (yes, you read that right). Moab's unsavory beginning and its idol worship didn't gain it any favor in the eyes of the Israelites, who considered Moabites lower than low.

Ruth married an Israelite man whose family had moved to Moab during a famine. But in the span of a few years, Ruth's father-in-law, husband, and brother-in-law all died. When her mother-in-law, Naomi, announced that she was returning to Israel, the newly widowed Ruth was determined to come too. Her response to Naomi is one of the most beautiful passages in Scripture.

Look up Ruth 1:16-17 and fill in the blanks below.

Ruth replied, "Don't ask me to leave you and turn back. Wherever you _____, I will _____; wherever you _____, I will _____. Your _____ will be my _____, and your _____ will be my _____. Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD punish me severely if I allow anything but death to separate us!" (Ruth 1:16-17)

Think about this: Ruth was moving away from her family, her country, her religion, and everything she'd ever known. She knew she might never return. In her new home, people would look down on her—or outright reject her—because of her nationality. By sticking with her mother-in-law, Ruth might have been giving up any opportunity to

marry again and have a family of her own, because what good Israelite would marry a foreigner? Yet Ruth chose to take care of a woman who wasn't even her flesh-and-blood relation.

What does Ruth's speech tell us about her character?

What do you think gave Ruth the courage to move to Israel with Naomi?

After Ruth and Naomi moved back to Bethlehem, Ruth ended up gleaning grain in the field of a kind, wealthy landowner named Boaz. Ruth's courage caught Boaz's attention, and he had some encouraging words for her.

Look up Ruth 2:11-12 and fill in the blanks below.

[Boaz said,] "I also know about everything you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband. I have heard how you left your _____ and _____ and your _____ to live here among complete strangers. May the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose _____ you have come to take refuge, reward you fully for what you have done."

Naomi eventually decided that Boaz, who was a distant relative of hers, would make an excellent husband for Ruth. She gave Ruth some advice: “Now do as I tell you—take a bath and put on perfume and dress in your nicest clothes” (Ruth 3:3). So far, so good. But then things got weird: “‘Then go to the threshing floor, but don’t let Boaz see you until he has finished eating and drinking. Be sure to notice where he lies down; then go and uncover his feet and lie down there. He will tell you what to do.’ ‘I will do everything you say,’ Ruth replied” (Ruth 3:3-5).

Talk about courage. Ruth probably didn’t know the Israelites’ social customs or etiquette. She was already looked down on as a foreigner, and we don’t have to stretch our imaginations too far to figure out that if she was seen sneaking around the male-only threshing floor at nighttime, tongues would wag, and her reputation might suffer even more. My guess is that she was terrified that night. Yet she acted.

Why do you think Ruth followed Naomi’s advice?

How can trusting God and His ways enable us to act even when we are fearful of what might happen?

Ruth's story had a happy ending: she married Boaz and had a baby boy. Years later, that baby boy became the grandfather of King David. And Ruth—the despised foreigner—is listed in the genealogy of Christ in Matthew 1. Ruth was a true woman of courage.

How can Ruth's story encourage you as you consider an area of your life where you're afraid to act?

What are you afraid to lose? What might you gain by trusting God and moving forward?

LET'S REVIEW

Every season of motherhood offers new challenges and new chances for us to grow in wisdom and courage.

It's tempting to feel like we're in control when our kids are little. After all, we set the schedule, right? As our children grow, we still need to trust God, but the tone of our prayers changes. Things feel a little less in our control (because they are!), and we need even more wisdom. We need to trust that God will give us the right combination of grace and discipline to get to the heart of issues rather than just concentrating on external behavior.

In the teen years and beyond, the season changes yet again. There are new challenges, new fears, and new opportunities to release our children so they can pursue God's amazing plans for them. I've poured out my heart to God many times as my children have stood at the precipice of adulthood because I realize even more acutely that the trajectory-setting decisions they're making now are theirs alone. When mothers begin the season of launching their arrows into the world (see Psalm 127:4-5), an entire new kind of courage is required: the quiet kind. The kind that leans deeply into God for wisdom. We need God's wisdom to know when to speak and when to be still.

No matter what season of motherhood you're in, you've been given a choice. You get to choose to be surrendered to God. You get to choose to spend time in His Word. You get to choose to pray for your children.

As you come to the end of this week's study, ask God to open your eyes to anything you might be missing. Take time to be still before the Lord. He's waiting to give you exactly what you need for each season you're in and every struggle you face.


Let's Take Action

Did you know that God calls you friend? He does! And just like any good friend, God wants to spend time with you. Here's an opportunity to get to know Him a little more intimately. This week, reflect on what you've learned and talk about it with God. He wants to hear from you,

and He wants to help you as you grow in wisdom and courage. Choose one or more of these journal prompts and write your thoughts below.

Dear God, please help me to turn to You when I need wisdom. Show me how to read and apply Your Word. Right now I need to know what to do about . . .

Dear God, teach me how to trust You and respond with courage in this situation that has me afraid . . .



God, you know I want to become wiser and more courageous. There are so many sources of advice around me, but please help me to turn to You first when I need wisdom. Teach me to trust in You and Your Word above all else. Give me the courage to act when I need to, and help me to trust that no matter what happens, You are with me, fulfilling Your good plan for me. Amen.