

Review Only
Not for Redistribution

Chapter 1

When Your Weakness
Is All You Can See

Brooke

Beer and cigarettes.

Yep...you read that right. Beer and cigarettes. The phone call went something like this:

“Honey, I need you to come home now. The two-year-old is screaming because he wants to sit on my lap while I’m nursing the baby. The baby is screaming because the two-year-old keeps trying to sit on his head. When the two-year-old tries to sit on the baby’s head he can’t nurse. Now he won’t nurse at all and is screaming his head off. The bulldog has started crying because he wants to be fed (doesn’t everybody!!) and I’m going to explode within the next ten minutes if you don’t COME HOME AND BRING ME BEER AND CIGARETTES RIGHT NOW!”

He brought me a Coke and dark chocolate.

Super-Sonic Weaknesses

My precious boys were born just 23 months apart. We didn’t necessarily plan it that way, but it happened nonetheless. If you’ve read my book *Praying for Boys: Asking God for the Things They Need Most*, you’ll know that I actually prayed and asked God to give us boys! I wanted to raise men who loved the Lord with all of their hearts, who

Copyrighted material

Review Only

Hope for the Weary Mom

Not for Redistribution

would choose to take a stand for what's right, who would be world-changers. It had occurred to me that there was a shortage of truly godly men in the world, and that as parents, we were losing the battle for the hearts of our sons. So during a time of self-righteous pride in my own ability as a mother (yes...this was *before* we had kids) I asked God to give us boys. And He indulged me.

My boys, like any number of other little boys in the world, are infatuated with being superheroes. My life as a mother of boys includes masks, swords, light sabers, and dueling bad guys to the death.

There's rarely a day that goes by in the McGlothlin Home for Boys that doesn't involve someone wearing a cape.

I love it. I hope they always want to rescue damsels in distress, bring flowers to their mommy, and fight bad guys. Pretending to rescue those who are weaker makes them feel useful and important. Running around our house with their capes flapping in the wind makes them feel strong. I believe developing these characteristics in young boys sets them up for strength, compassion, and boldness later in life. Superheroes, those found on television, in storybooks, and (the best ones!) in the Bible give my boys something to pattern their lives after. And that's very, very good.

Yes, I want to raise strong boys. But most of the time, I have to confess, I feel terribly weak.

During that first year of my little guy's life there were many nights I didn't think we were going to make it. Both of our boys are "those boys." You know, the ones who are extremely high energy, get into everything, don't take no for an answer, would rather wrestle than breathe, only have one volume (LOUD), and generally leave my husband and me completely breathless at the end of the day? Even as little guys they fought a lot, and they still bicker more often than not.

My inner voice, the one that likes to show me all my ugly, had a field day telling me I would never measure up as a mom.

Sound familiar?

The night I called my husband asking for beer and cigarettes I was in a state of panic. I'm not a beer drinker, and I only smoked a few times in college (sorry, Mom and Dad). But as I sat on my front stoop in tears that night, cell phone in hand, toddler in the Pack 'n Play, baby in the swing (and the stinking bulldog tied to the chair!), something in me snapped. After months of trying so hard to put on a brave and sure face to my friends and family, I broke down and admitted there was no way I could raise these boys by myself.

Now maybe you're stronger than I am. Maybe you're one of those moms who has it all together. Your children jump to attention at your every command, are polite to strangers, and dance a jig while they do their chores. Maybe you don't scare the neighbors by yelling, "HELP ME, JESUS!!!" at the top of your lungs multiple times a day.

But I do. And I bet if you're honest, your life isn't all peaches and cream either. (If it is, you need to be the one writing this book!)

Of course, things do change as they grow up. It's been six years since that episode on my front porch, and I don't have anyone tugging on me to nurse or trying to sit on a sibling's head anymore (okay... maybe sometimes). We lost our precious bulldog to cancer and now have two energetic lab puppies. But I still have incredibly active, highly distractible, in-your-face little boys. Sometimes I'm tempted to think I'm all alone in my walk, and those days threaten to overwhelm me. My complete inability to change their hearts of stone into hearts of flesh makes my weaknesses blaze until they're all I can see.

We moms, we think we're all alone, don't we? We think our problems are worse than everyone else's. We think our children's sinful hearts are more sinful than everyone else's. We think our weak spots have to be hidden and can't imagine telling the truth about what's happening in our hearts. Maybe it sounds a little like this...

I've dreaded this day for over a week. Cautiously, I peek my head around the corner, just barely daring to poke it inside the door, and see

Review Only

Hope for the Weary Mom

Not for Redistribution

that my worst fears have come true. Spotted, greeted by the mother of the birthday boy, I have no time to tuck tail and run, so I muster up all the courage I have, walk in the room, and find myself face-to-face with the non-crafty mom's worst nightmare:

The crafty-mom birthday party (cue Stephen King-ish music and the obligatory don, don, doooooooooonnnnnnnnn).

The room is one big science experiment, literally. My friend Danielle has spent weeks preparing for the little boy birthday party of the century, and it shows. Green slime taunts me. Carefully crafted explosions that make little boys squeal with delight mock me. The entire table of elements taped above a table filled with edible petri dishes stares me down and makes me want to run and hide.

I look for a means of escape, but the exits are blocked by innocent bystanders. Wait, there's an open window. If I grab the boys by the shirt collar and quietly stuff them out the window we can shimmy down the drain pipe to the playground below and no one will know we're gone. Shoot, now they're making liquid ice on the other side of the room. New plan.

Maybe I can bribe them away. That's it. I'll woo them with the promise of a trip to Dairy Queen for their favorite ice cream before the cake is served. What's that? Hot dogs? Man! Because of our new healthy eating plan they haven't had one in a month. I'll never get them away now. They're going to figure out my big secret any second now... Mama is the most un-crafty person in the world, and birthday parties stress me out like nothing else. I'd hoped they would never see "the other side." That they would never know a birthday party could be anything other than a trip to the pool with all their friends.

Busted.

I sit down in a collapsible chair, thinking about how my own birthday party facade is collapsing bit by bit when it happens. Those big, brown eyes that make it oh-so-difficult to stay mad for long look up at me... and he says it. Oh glory, the one thing that makes me just want to

end it all, give up trying, hire a professional... anything to ease this feeling of complete and utter failure.

“Mom, why can’t our birthday parties be more like this one?”

Sigh.

Every summer the “I’m not good enough” feelings start to creep in and make me want to give up even trying to plan a good party for my boys. Thankfully, in God’s great and infinite mercy, He allowed my boys’ birthdays to be just three weeks apart. They’ve never known individual birthday parties, and I plan to ride that wave until it spits me out on the beach, ragged and torn. The fact of the matter is that I don’t have a crafty bone in my body, and it never shows more than when I’m planning a birthday party.

I hate sewing.

I don’t own a glue gun.

I couldn’t tell you where the tape is.

Our glue sticks are all dried out.

My boys bribe the neighbor’s little girl to let them use her scissors and duct tape. And I’ve actually considered hiring her to do craft time with my boys once a week after she gets home from school (we homeschool).

My lack of crafting ability has grown my stress level to epic proportions, and my feelings of guilt and utter failure have grown with it.

One recent Thanksgiving I decided to force myself out of my non-crafty comfort zone and tried to prepare a day of wonderful education and hands-on experience for my boys. As a homeschooling family, we’re always looking for ways to make the calendar come alive, and it had occurred to me that my boys, then six and four, had never really learned the story of Thanksgiving. I decided it was time for that to change.

I spent hours at my local bookstore picking out just the right books to communicate the message of Thanksgiving I wanted them to remember. I scoured the internet looking for an audio book of

Review Only

Hope for the Weary Mom

Not for Redistribution

the story of Squanto because my oldest loves learning about Native Americans. I painstakingly cut a Thanksgiving Tree from brown craft paper and decorated its branches with colored leaves made from outlines of my precious sons' hands, each one marked with something they were thankful for that day.

It was shaping up to be a wonderful success. That Thanksgiving Tree was my crowning crafty achievement, my very heart and soul hanging there on the wall. It should have been the best Thanksgiving ever... except it wasn't.

In reality, I spent most of Thanksgiving Day sobbing—and possibly slightly hysterical—because I couldn't believe my sons could still be so selfish, ungrateful, and yes, *thankless*, after all I'd done to serve them throughout the month. They were disobedient, ugly, unkind, and downright mean all day long, and it made me feel a bit like throwing something. I mean, couldn't they see how my hands shook as I cut that craft paper into a tree? Couldn't they see the look of sheer uncraftery determination in my eyes as I traced their little hands and taped them to the wall each day?

I may have yelled. And screamed. And wept. And threatened. And shaken with anger over their petty arguments that were making our "celebration" a smashing... well... failure. I felt beaten down by their attitudes, and at one point literally curled away from everyone in the passenger seat of our SUV in something reminiscent of the fetal position. The words going through my mind?

This will never change. I just don't have what it takes to be the mom they need. I'm a crafting failure so I must be a failure as a mom.

I should just quit trying.

Glorified Weaknesses

So be honest, mom. How many times since you brought those blue or pink bundles home from the hospital have you just wanted to quit trying? Maybe it's something much more serious than crafting that makes you want to give up. I struggle with yelling. I get

angry too often. I like things to go my way, and when they don't I can make everyone in my life miserable. Your areas of weakness could be totally different, but I bet if I asked you to list them right now you could spout them off one by one. Am I right?

How many times a day do you catch yourself thinking about what a failure you are, or how your one big mess-up will probably land that little person who watches everything you do straight in the counseling chair a bit later in life? How much of your day do you spend glorifying your weaknesses (dwelling on them, allowing negative internal commentary about them to beat you down, thinking about them constantly, etc.) and wondering what will happen if everybody finds out the truth about who you *really* are?

Glorifying weaknesses—no matter how big or small—sucks our souls dry of the life-giving hope we need to just keep going.

But there is a different way. I'm convinced that the place of our greatest weakness can unleash the power of God's greatest grace. Instead of glorifying our weaknesses, letting them control our lives and break our hearts, we can learn to use them to glorify God, confessing our weaknesses and trusting Him to make them into something good.

It was during a phone call with a friend that I finally decided I might not be the only one with these kinds of issues. We'd been chatting about church this and that for just a few seconds when she interrupted the conversation to tell the little voice in her home to stop what he was doing. When that same little voice turned a bit nasty and screamed, "NO I WON'T!" to his mama on the phone, a lightbulb went off in my heart, and I knew I'd met a kindred spirit... or at least another human being who knew what I was going through.

It was a profound moment for me, inspiring me to step out from behind the curtains of my life into the light. One phone call empowered me to connect with other mothers of boys and tell my ugly truth, because I suddenly knew that if I felt alone and desperate

Review Only Not for Redistribution

Hope for the Weary Mom

in my mothering—consumed with the way my weaknesses were affecting my boys—there had to be other moms who felt the same way. Soon after that simple phone conversation, the Lord placed a dream in my heart for what would eventually become the MOB (Mothers of Boys) Society—an online, Christian community helping mothers delight in the chaos of raising boys. A place where boy moms can feel safe, let it all hang out, and find community and help around raising these wild and crazy, beautiful and boisterous, overwhelming but amazing boys.

I chose a piece of truth that can only be found in community.

I chose to fill the empty spaces of a weary mom's life with truth instead of complaining, faith instead of fretting, grace instead of comparison, and yes... coke and dark chocolate instead of beer and cigarettes.

I stopped listening to the voices that pointed out my shame and beat me down and started filling my heart with the voice of truth.

It all sounds simple when you read it now, but in reality it can take a while to make God's voice of truth the one you hear in your moments of great weakness. Second Corinthians 12:9-10, verses that have become some of the most important, inspiring truths of my life, says it this way:

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

I imagine that if Jesus himself could whisper these verses into our hearts it might sound something like this:

Can you hear me sweet one? I'm struggling hard to be heard over the condemning voices in your head, but I want you to hear the truth and

embrace it. It's okay to be weak. It's okay to not know what to do or how to do it. It's okay that you don't have the answers. I do.

What's that? You're tuning in just a little now? I'll try again... It's okay to feel lost. It's okay to need help. It's okay that you're not perfect. I am!

That's better! You're the apple of my eye! My darling girl who was so valuable to me that I gave my life for you! I want to shout my love for you from the rooftops and say it's okay to fail! It's okay to get things wrong! IT'S OKAY TO BE WEAK, because in your weakness I AM strong.

If you'll let me, I will make your place of greatest weakness into my place of greatest grace. I'll be the strength you need to keep going, the one who meets you in your mess, the one who leads you to the next right thing and covers over your sin with my robe of righteousness. Trust me. Invite me in. Shut out those other voices, because I have loved you with an everlasting love. Nothing can ever tear you away from the strength of my love. Listen to me.

Whatever strengths and weaknesses we possess are all a part of God's plan for our beautiful, messy lives. He uses every detail of our mess for His greater glory, and can redeem even our deepest, darkest, most daring mistakes until they're more beautiful than we could've ever imagined.

My friend Jess came to Christ in her late thirties. Prior to this, she led something a double life—taking the moral high ground during the day, and struggling with promiscuity, pornography, and other sinful, damaging choices. At times paralyzed by depression and anxiety, she was crumbling from the inside out.

Desperate for relief, Jess found herself in the office of a Christian counselor. She tells her story like this: “Two things moved me forward during that time. First, the threat of being hospitalized. That scared me to death. Second, my counselor shared Philippians 4:13 with me, which says, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” She also prayed for me during each of our sessions. No one had ever done that. Besides rote prayer and rosaries, I didn't know

Review Only

Not for Redistribution

Hope for the Weary Mom

how to pray. And to be honest, I had given up on prayer except in times of great need when I'd simply promise God that I'd change my lifestyle, my behavior, anything, if only he'd take away the hurt. Medication, counseling, and clinging for dear life to the one Bible verse I knew by heart slowly enabled me to begin moving forward. And then God brought me my husband, Ed. I got pregnant rather quickly and spent a lot of time in prayer. Fear of my old sinful lifestyle catching up with me somehow or affecting our child scared me to death. I was filled with deep guilt and horrible shame. After years of actually blocking many incidents out, they came flooding back. At the time I thought it was due to all the hormones. Now I see that God wanted me to deal with them. I was driving to work one morning and as was my habit, talking to my unborn daughter. I also liked to sing to her, so I turned on the radio. I was flipping through unfamiliar Montana radio stations when I heard Michael W. Smith's voice. I recognized it from my college days, but it was a new song. I had never heard it before.

"But the chorus suddenly blared from my not-so-loud volume setting. I heard it loud and clear. I got it. I received it. And for the first time in my entire life, I believed it. At that moment, my life changed. It was never the same. I finally knew I was forgiven. JESUS CHRIST had died for me. ME! Now, I'm able to share my testimony of amazing grace with those God puts in my life. I know that if God can redeem the worst in me, he can do it for others, too. I could never have made these changed in my life alone. So you see, it's all him. I'm thrilled to tell others about what I'm not so they can clearly see what he is."

The thing I love most about Jess's story is that last sentence. "I'm thrilled to tell others about what I'm not so they can clearly see what he is." It's what 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 calls "boasting in weakness," and it's the very best way to see God be strong in your life.

So boast, Mom. Boast in the fact that you're not good enough, not strong enough, not smart enough, *not enough* to be a good mom,

Review Only

When Your Weakness is All You Can See

Not for Redistribution

25

and watch what God does. That's right, boast. Tell the world you don't have it all together, don't always know the right thing to do, and don't have all the answers. Admit that your kids sometimes have fistfights or shove each other off the new toy. Own up to the yelling and wiggle out of the straitjacket you've been wearing, bound up by a need to be perfect.

Refuse those voices that cry out, "Failure! Mother mess-up!" and instead take them straight to Jesus. Even if they're true—especially if they're true—take them straight to the one who loves you and invite him in, trusting him to make his strength perfect in your weakness.

Boast in your weakness, and then be truly strong.

Copyrighted material