

**SACRED
GROUND

STICKY
FLOORS**

JAMI AMERINE



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Names and details have been changed in some real-life stories to protect the privacy of the individuals involved.

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Introduction

THE SPILL

All of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.

2 CORINTHIANS 3:18

He arrived by state transport in a worn and tattered car seat. It was the Thursday evening before a long holiday weekend when the '90s silver Toyota Corolla pulled up in front of our Texas home. The evening was still slightly warm, and the sky was exploding with all the colors of the setting sun. On this cul-de-sac, a symphony of tragedy and triumph played out as a battered baby boy arrived safely at his new home.

My family, all seven of us, stood on the front porch and watched as the plump woman from the state tugged at the car seat, with the mystery boy strapped inside, and finally finagled it out of the impossibly tiny back seat. My eldest daughter, Maggie, put both hands over her eyes and, under her breath, gasped, “Please be careful.”

The state representative, aware of the spectacle in which she was

center stage, waved and offered assurances. “Got it! Sorry, I’m not used to these big car seats!” My husband, Justin, walked over to help. She halted him with one hand and said, “You can take my briefcase.” The boy was still her ward and responsibility. He did not yet belong to our arms, our home, our hearts.

As the woman lugged the precious cargo into the house, my husband followed her. His looks spoke volumes, morphing from expressions of disgust to concern and then on to exasperation. Finally, the woman placed the carrier with the injured baby on the formal dining room table, and we tried to concentrate on the overwhelming process of signing documents and listening to instructions.

Our four older children stood and stared, in both love and heartache, at the small creature peacefully sleeping in the shabby car seat. Sam, our three-year-old, kept pointing at the baby, giggling and saying, “Bebe! Bebe! Sam holds da bebe!”

After affixing 500 signatures to at least 4,000 documents, we took the state representative on a walk-through of our home. We gave a thorough explanation of the mechanics of our fire extinguisher; provided copies of our evacuation plan in case Russia invaded; showed her where we kept our prescriptions, cleaning products, and unmentionables; and finally waved goodbye.

We were now a family of eight.

Welcome to the Family

Battered. Broken. Bruised. A little cherub with pink cheeks and doe eyes. Although “Charlie” was barely four months old, a tiny cast enveloped his wee limb. He smelled of an unknown origin and the hospital. He cooed, just a bit, and his voice was notably raspy. (At the time, we believed it was from crying, but we’ve since realized it’s just part of his unique “Charlie charm.”) I had spent the two days prior at the hospital with the boy; I prayed he would remember me

and not be afraid or confused. He opened his eyes and smiled at me. For that moment, my heart skipped a beat, and I could barely breathe. We all stood over him. We were speechless.

We had taken the classes. Talked about the possibilities and readily agreed, “Sure we can!” But now, here he was. Fully human, fully damaged, fully in need. The full reality of him was overwhelming.

I wanted to make it all better. I wanted justice for those broken limbs. I wanted healing. I wanted him to know Jesus. I wanted his story to be different, and yet I wanted to know his story. How does this happen? How could anyone hurt an *infant*?

Finally, one of the kids broke the silence and said, “His head is *enormous!*” and we all burst into laughter and tears.

“Welcome to the family, kid!” said another. “Let the razzing begin!”

We spent the rest of the night gently passing him around, giving him a sponge bath, feeding him, and figuring out how to change his diapers without disturbing his wounded limbs. We made bottles, washed his tiny clothes, and joyfully served the least of these as a family.

Down Came the Cider

The next days were nothing short of exhausting. Charlie was in pain, and unless I held him, swaddled, he was despondent. I slept in a chair in the corner of our master suite with him upright on my chest to keep the pressure off his broken frame.

After a sleepless Saturday night, I needed to talk to someone. On Sunday morning, I sent a text to a precious friend, a seasoned foster mom who says wise and beautiful things. I filled her in on the events of the last few days and told her I was drained and needed to hear a friendly word.

I hit *send* and waited. She would say something fabulous, and I would be energized for the day. My phone buzzed, and I grabbed it,

impatient to see what dear jewels of love and affirmation she would send. I read her words with an unquenchable eagerness:

“What a precious little lamb! You and your family are blessed to be at his service. I encourage you to keep a journal of this special time with this baby boy. You are on sacred ground.”

What?

I started to type “LOL” but then worried she wasn’t kidding. “Sacred ground”? I didn’t see any burning bushes around. I had no poignant response, so I just typed, “Thanks,” and proceeded to drudge on with my day.

On Monday afternoon, Justin and the older kids were running errands. I was enjoying the rare peace of having fewer humans in the house. Three-year-old Sam took a nice long nap while I worked on bills. I had Charlie swaddled to my body with some mysterious contraption that had been invented since the last time I had babies. As long as my movements were slow, he was comfortable, and more than anything I wanted him not to hurt. I continued to work, feet up on the chair across from me, a Wonder Woman mug to my right holding steaming coffee. I marveled at my abilities.

A bit later, Sam wandered into the kitchen with sleep-mussed hair, his face drowsy. I greeted him. “Hey, Sam-I-am! Did you have a good nap?”

He nodded, yawned, and said, “Mommy, I want some juice.”

I nodded absentmindedly. “Just let me finish filling out this form, and I’ll get you some.”

Sam climbed onto a stool next to the kitchen island, where an enormous jug of apple cider from Costco was sitting. “Sam do it!” he said.

“No, Sam! Mommy will get you juice,” I said. “Just a second!” The jug was nearly full, and it was roughly the same size as Sam. From where I sat I could tell it had been opened; someone hadn’t screwed on the cap securely.

Sam pulled his Thomas the Tank Engine cup closer to the juice. “It’s *my* turn, Mommy.”

Carefully, so as not to hurt the baby, I pulled my legs down from the chair and stepped barefoot onto the cold tile. As the blood returned to my legs, I realized both my feet were asleep. “No. No. No. Sam, Mommy will do it!” My feet were tingling, and the tension from holding Charlie flared in my back. The instinct to stop him was slowed by the desire not to cause myself or the baby any pain. “Sam, *stop!*”

Sam ignored me.

The little boy was no match for the bargain barrel of cider. He tilted it, and it fell to its side, rolled off the island, and exploded. The juice splashed six feet straight up, spraying Sam, me, the baby, the cabinets, and the ceiling. I stood speechless.

“Sorry, Mommy.”

I could barely hear Sam because, in my mind, I was loudly and clearly explaining to him why he must wait for Mommy to help pour his juice. I could hear myself telling him he needed to go to time-out for disobeying me. In reality, only a whimper escaped my lips. Tears stung my eyes. *Wait. I am a seasoned, professional mommy. Am I crying? Literally crying over a spilled drink?* I could feel the cider river expanding beneath me. *Do we have flood insurance?* The whimper turned to sobs. Heaving sobs.

The human being strapped to my body began to stir. I heard Sam’s muffled apologies, and I could hear the garage door open. I still didn’t move. I felt the cider being absorbed into the cuffs of my jeans. Through my tears, I saw the rest of the family appear in the kitchen doorway.

Sam said, “Look, guys! Mommy is crying really hard.”

“What *happened?*” asked my husband.

Through my childish sobs, I wept, “Oh, Justin...we’re going to have to move.”

My friend's words, "You are on sacred ground," rattled around in my head for days after "The Spill." They were whispered into my ear at the oddest of times. Once while giving Sam a bath, another time while I was sautéing onions, and again while changing a poopy diaper. On a couple of occasions, I had thought of texting my friend and flat out asking her what she could have possibly meant...but I was afraid I would sound dumb. So I let it go.

Still, the whisper returned.

Surrender on Sacred Ground

About two weeks after "The Spill," I relaxed my exhausted body in the semi-comfy recliner, in our master suite where I continued to spend my nights with Charlie. My head fell back, and I drifted off to sleep. My leopard-print-slipped feet curled under me. The baby lay on my chest in the only position where he could find comfort and rest. And I heard the whisper again: *You are on sacred ground.*

I opened my eyes to look around the room. This time, the words had been nearly audible. Moonlight crept under the blinds. I kicked off a slipper and set my foot on the carpet. The ball of my foot discovered a sticky spot...*apple juice*. From the office-turned-nursery off our master bedroom, I heard Sam making car noises in his bed. Justin rolled to his side and began to snore.

You are on sacred ground.

I could hear the four older children in the kitchen. Good grief, they were eating. *Again*. The smell of popcorn and bacon, of all things, wafted under the bedroom door. Suddenly, there was a loud but familiar crash. The clock in the kitchen had fallen off the wall. *Again*. The crash was followed by snorts of laughter, the thud of punches, and the girls' whisper-yells of "Guys! Shhhhh!"

I snatched my phone off the arm of the chair and fired off a group text to the kids: "You will wake the babies and your father!"

Be quiet and clean up your mess!” Sophie, our youngest daughter, texted me back: “OK! LOL! SORRY! ILYSM.”

I stared at the last part of Sophie’s text. What? Oh! I knew that one. I texted her back: *I love you so much too. Night.* The kitchen exploded with laughter. *Again.* They think it’s funny when I figure out the texting lingo.

I laid my head back, closed my eyes, and began a mental grocery list. I would have to buy more bacon. Milk, bread, avocados, and something nice to put in Justin’s lunch, just to spice things up . . . maybe some of his favorite pickles.

You are on sacred ground.

The baby stirred on my chest. His movements caused him to whimper. I whispered, “Jesus, grant this boy comfort and rest.”

In that moment, I felt the warmth of God’s presence. He doesn’t leave. He is with me. With us. I dared not move or blink out of fear that I would either disturb the little guy or lose the strong sense of Jesus. How I wish my heart always felt this peace.

The child sighed. I yawned and felt myself starting to drift off once more. Before I reached a state of blissful sleep, the words arose again.

You are on sacred ground.

As I felt the little one’s body melt into mine, I didn’t pause to question my friend’s insight. I surrendered to it.

Yes. I am on sacred ground.

Because God Is There

I admit that before my friend sent her text, it never occurred to me that this life, this home, could be sacred ground. But now, “You are on sacred ground” has become a mantra of sorts for me. A daily reminder to behold what God is doing. (So far, I’ve been accused only once of being sacrilegious by claiming my home is sacred ground.)

I'm sure the words "sacred ground" conjure up some images for you and, most likely, they aren't visions of where you are standing right now. If, like me, you've stepped on a Lego while barefoot, it can be difficult to wrap your mind around the divine qualities of the path beneath your feet.

But when we know what to look for, everything changes.

I propose that the place where you stand now, the place where you care for and lead those you love, is sacred ground.

When I was growing up, we had a large white family Bible made of fake leather, with big gold letters on the front: HOLY BIBLE. It was on the coffee table for as long as I can remember. I liked to look at the pictures. Perhaps because I'm dyslexic, I'm very visual. So I spent hours looking at pictures of famous biblical paintings in that huge King James edition. Three specific works of art spoke most to my young heart and mind.

The first was of Jesus on the cross with Mary at His feet. The sky was painted this icky brown color, and Jesus, in spite of His horrific injuries, was clean, with only little trickles of blood on His hands and feet. The crown of thorns was carefully set on His brow, not pressed into his flesh like I would see later in other paintings and depictions. His mother was clinging to the foot of the cross and had a single tear on her cheek.

The second picture was a black-and-white image of Daniel in the lion's den. I am sure you've probably seen this one. In it, Daniel peacefully stands to gaze at the sky from his would-be tomb. His back is to many lions. The lions are just as tranquil as Daniel, unprovoked to devour the prophet because he belongs to the Master of all, the living God.

The third painting was of Moses. In it, he is sitting on a rock, removing his sandals. In front of him is a bush, and it is on fire. Of the hundreds of times I looked at these pictures during my childhood, this one made me the most curious. Why was it important?

Yes, a bush caught fire and a voice came out of it, but in the scope of parted seas, plagues, talking serpents, tame lions, virgin births, and the Son of Man being raised from the dead, it was hardly epic. Certainly, the moment did have one unique element: God saying, “Take off your shoes, Moses. You are on sacred ground.” Why that spot? Is it still sacred now, or was it only sacred when God was there?

Forty-five years later, I have my answer. It was sacred because God was there. There in the mountains, a man who was guiding sheep—a caretaker, but not yet a leader—went hiking through the rocky terrain. The Lord called out to him in the place where Moses could hear and receive a message. In this location where they talked, Moses *was* on sacred ground.

I realize now that each of the scenes etched into my memory were images of sacred ground. Mary, kneeling at the foot of her son’s cross; Daniel, surrounded by the enemy, yet safe in the unseen protection of the Lord; Moses, called to something greater by a talking shrub that was on fire—all *sacred ground*.

Your home is holy too. The living God wanders your halls, searches your heart, and dwells among your family. The place where your family comes to know that you love and lean on Jesus Christ to get you through sleepless nights, apple-juice spills, and all the trials of motherhood and life is sacred ground.



I am the mother of children by birth, adoption, and foster-love. There is no end to the adjectives that describe these children, these individual pieces of my soul: military, teen, tween, birth, foster, adoptive, college-aged, preschool-aged, infant, grade-school-aged, high-school-aged, homeschooled, married, engaged, handcuffed, shipped off, reformed, searching, found, broken, bound, set free.

Even when you don't keep adding kids to your family portraits, the children you do have are adding to that list of descriptions, needs, stages, and phases.

Pictures on the wall surround me; pictures of my babies. Pictures of smiles, laughter, joy. Pictures that depict my heart. I love all my children. They are wholly a part of me, and wholly apart from me. And they are a part of my 23-year journey to freedom through belief in a good God.

I have not been the perfect mother. My background is in education. My learning philosophy is "Success breeds success." And I fail regularly. I don't have all the answers to the struggles of parenting, and I'm not sure this is the perfect time to write this message—shouldn't I wait until I'm more whole, until I'm further along in this journey? But imperfect timing is sometimes the perfect time to share with each other from the broken places and empty spaces.

So here I am.

Like the photos that surround me now, my offerings in this book are scenes, glimpses of different times and moments that have captured my heart, reshaped my faith, and mended broken places. They don't follow the order of calendars, but instead follow the path of a mama's memories and heart lessons. I share from that journey as you and I look more closely at what it is to stumble and get up again under the covering of grace. In this place, I have not loved perfectly but, friend, I have loved well, and I have *been* loved most perfectly.

I look back at where I came from and how I got to this place of adult children, toddlers, and temporary foster-loves, and while I still haven't completely grasped who God is, I know there is no way He is anything like the old me.

The calamity that is my life doesn't influence the power of Yahweh. He is privy to the devil's old tricks.

Your life's voice is born of your life's journey. God's voice in your life is born of the Word, and it *always* applies to your journey.

He will provide and comfort. It is in this place—your life, your home—that His Word is your truth and breath. He will be unmistakably present in those moments. His presence will become more and more evident, the sound of His voice clearer. Be still. Let Him be God. Let Him wander your halls, search your heart, and dwell among your family. He will walk through apple juice and step over the piles of laundry because His grace is everlasting. A simple *yes* is all He waits for.

The thing I am certain of is that God is real, He is for us, and He is totally invested in you and your family here on the sacred ground—sacred ground with very sticky floors.



Part 1

RELENT AND REPRIEVE



God doesn't want something from us;
He simply wants us.

GERALD L. SITTSER¹





**The place where
we and our
children are
hurting, in trouble,
or in need is the
very place He looks
on and comforts
as Father.**





Chapter 1

THE SHAME GAME

I will forgive their wickedness,
and I will never again remember their sins.

HEBREWS 8:12

The moment arrives. A child is placed in your arms. And boy or girl, newborn infant or adopted toddler, you are officially guaranteed one very specific emotion from this day forward.

Guilt.

Congratulations.

If there is a more perfect word to be associated with motherhood, I have not uncovered it. Believe me, I've looked. The magnitude of mother guilt is like nothing any other human can experience.

Now, God sees all that guilt, and He stays. It is healing (and free therapy) to confess that we are far from perfect, and yet Jesus still dwells in us. He is constant—a devout fan—and nothing we can say or do would sway His desire to abide in His people.

With that said, allow me to shoot from my mama hip, speak my truth, lower the bar, level the parenting playing field, or whatever this whopper of a confession does. Here it goes:

I smoked when I was pregnant with my first baby.

Told ya. Whopper.

And that is merely the beginning of my bad parenting. I wasn't trying to get pregnant, so I didn't know I was pregnant at the time. But still...images of myself as Marlboro Mama haunt me.

As soon as I found out I was pregnant, I labored to kick the smelly and unhealthy habit. However, I loved to smoke. It kept me skinny and calmed me down. And back then, I was prone to try anything and everything that might help me overcome the mental terror known as "being Jami." So the attraction of this habit was not so simple to turn off. It didn't feel like an easy, obvious trade initially...my stinky cigarettes in exchange for a human to feed, burp, and diaper.

I started off feeling bad. The mother lode of guilt begins to accumulate, for some of us, at our child's conception.

From the moment I found out I was pregnant, I started believing the lie that I was going to be a terrible mother. Hating on myself was my specialty—my premium ability. And from that place of self-destruction, both mental and physical, I created a god who hated me just as much. This god was perpetually disgusted with me, my diet, my budget, my wardrobe, and the car I drove. The voice of truth that said I was God's beloved daughter was continually drowned out by the voice of defeat and condemnation, which interestingly enough sounded a lot like my own voice. My full-time job, aside from working as a receptionist at a dentist's office, attending college full time, and being an exhausted pregnant newlywed, was to hate everything about myself—and believe God did too.

But I puffed on my Marlboros and didn't talk about it. Instead, in our little pink stucco rental home on the corner of Oak Street, I played house. My husband, Justin, was beside himself with the idea of fatherhood. In our minds, our first child was a boy, and we called him "Baby Jake." We decided not to find out the sex of our baby with a sonogram because we felt certain we knew who Jake

was, and we thought it was more fun not to know for sure until the delivery.

I practiced mothering on Justin. I made elaborate meals and budgeted to the penny. I was organized and efficient. I worked tirelessly to perfection and marveled at the idea of motherhood. Jake and I were already a team.

All the while, everyone in my life insisted they knew I was going to have a girl. They pressured me to pick a girl name. My mom and my mother-in-law told me about detailed dreams they had of a brown-eyed girl.

I secretly hoped they were wrong. The aspect of pregnancy that was most confusing to me was that I could be carrying a human being inside of my body and not know something, *anything*, about that human. I pictured a blond-haired, green-eyed little boy. I bought tiny boots and Wranglers and imagined Justin and Jake on the tractor out at our family ranch. But when I shared these images with anyone, including one of my best friends, the visions were met with a sigh, followed by, “I just know you are having a girl.”

I daydreamed about Jake. I talked to him. Justin and I had fun looking at magazines and making plans to move to a different house with a yard and trees for our son.

Pregnancy wasn't all bliss. I had strangers touching my belly. Seriously, what is that about? Once while checking out at a grocery store, an old man walked up and just started rubbing my stomach, and I began to cry. He said, “Oh little mama, those pregnancy hormones will get you every time.”

I grabbed my bags, bolted to my car, and heaved sobs as I drove. Hormones had nothing to do with losing every inch of bodily territory. Not only was I sharing my insides with a very active baby who made me wet my pants and would stretch and push so hard you could see perfect imprints of tiny feet just under my rib cage, but the outside of my body was free rein too?

I was weepy, sleepy, grumpy, and exasperated. However, for the first time in my life, I had a friend, a constant companion. Jake was with me, and no matter what anyone said, I fully believed I knew my son. I was utterly ecstatic with the idea of this baby boy.

Then came Maggie.

Swapping Lies for Love

“It’s a girl!”

What? I was bewildered. Stunned.

In the hours and days that followed the birth of my daughter, people would proudly say, “I knew it was a girl!” or “I told you so!” They felt confirmed and wise. I felt as if I had lost someone I knew... someone who hadn’t existed. Jake.

Of course, I adore Maggie. Of course, God knew what He was doing and why. But the fact is, I was confused and faced with a season of loss when she was born. And those emotions produced another passion that would become a trademark of my parenting journey: guilt, guilt, guilt.

I started that journey while Maggie was in utero as I puffed on a cigarette. I walked that journey for years, heaping guilt on myself for everything that hurt my children. *This is just what mothering is*, I thought, *self-condemnation and mental anguish over things completely out of my control*. I was most excellent at accepting condemnation and brutalizing myself to the umpteenth degree.

I know it sounds silly—feeling guilty for not knowing my child’s gender before her birth. But I felt unworthy to be her mother because I hadn’t recognized her for who she was. And in my unworthiness, I succumbed to every interference and let everyone else be what she needed.

My mom liked the name Maggie. My mother-in-law loved Mary. Justin loved Margaret. And so Jake became Mary Margaret, Maggie for

short. I called her Maggie, and she looked at me with wisdom and genuine concern, as if to ask, “You have no idea what you’re doing, do you?”

Loser

Alone the first night in that hospital room, a young mother nursed her newborn baby as I bottle-fed mine. “Loser” was branded on my engorged breasts that Maggie was unable to latch on to. *I can’t even do this simple thing. I can’t even feed my child.*

“What’s your baby’s name?” the other mother asked.

Jake stuck in my throat—and then the name I had really loved for a little girl, Piper Louise, almost spilled from my lips. But when it came time to name the girl in my arms, I hadn’t had the confidence to overcome the opinions of those who “knew her” better than I.

“Mary Margaret, Maggie for short.”

“Oh. That’s weird.”

Yes, I thought. *It is weird because I was supposed to give birth to Jake.*

“What’s your baby’s name?” I eagerly moved the focus off myself.

“Alaska Dawn! Like the morning sun. In Alaska.”

I was the weird one? In that room with the woman who gave birth to a daughter in Texas in the afternoon and came up with the name Alaska Dawn? From that moment on, I took pride in Maggie’s old-fashioned, classic name. Mary Margaret was strong, and it was biblical. Maybe I had done one thing right in keeping my mouth shut about naming her. No, I didn’t know her or what I was doing, but she was healthy and beautiful.

Surely the rest of the mystery of motherhood wouldn’t be as confusing or gut wrenching as pregnancy and childbirth.

(In hindsight, Shirley might have been a good name.)

Surely instinct would set in, and I would know what I was doing.

Surely I wouldn’t always be this overwhelmed or my body this mushy.

This, too, was not accurate: I continue to be mystified, and my abs are still a hot mess.

Believing the Snake

With Maggie, we followed all the rules. All of them. Just as I tried to live out my faith for the legalistic god I imagined, I lived out my parenting the same way. And just as the fruit of that kind of faith was fear, the fruit of this kind of parenting was guilt, depression, and more loads of worry than even the ridiculous piles of diaper laundry.

At one point I was paranoid I had postpartum depression, without manifesting a single sign of it. I read one sign of PPD was having thoughts of hurting your baby, putting her in the oven, or dropping her off a tall building. I had no intention of doing any of those things, but I wondered if I could be caught off guard by thoughts I wasn't having and accidentally put Maggie in the oven or throw her off a building. It was exhausting, to say the least. When no one was looking, I would apologize to Maggie for being such an awful mother.

I have no proof, but I am 99 percent sure she would have nodded in agreement.

Maggie outpaced us before her second birthday. Her first sentence was, "Unfortunately, the curriculum is insufficient for my level of intelligence." At the time, we thought it was hilarious. Our laughter would come back to bite us violently in the proverbial, metaphorical, and literal sense (Maggie was a biter).

I watched other mothers with their babies and was convinced that the difference between their relationships with their Haydens, Haleys, and Ashtons and my relationship with Maggie was that my daughter was better than me. Also, she deserved better than me.

I'm certain now that these kinds of pressures, lies, and comparisons are the handiwork of the enemy. His goal is to separate us from our identity and make us believe that we are doing the most natural

job on the planet—loving our children—poorly. This is his craft. Mothers ever since poor Eve have dealt with this. I should have known better, should have learned from her mistakes, but the hissing voice of that sneaky snake has effectively robbed women of the sacred ground beneath their feet for ages.

I picture Eve, perfectly toned, tanned, and naked, standing by the tree and listening to the lies of the enemy.

You could be better.

You could understand more.

You could be more. You could be complete. You could be like God if you would just do this one thing.

How many times during my day did I think I needed to do one more sit-up, eat one fewer calorie, read one more devotion, or buy one more planner in order to make God love me? I didn't believe I was enough just as I was. I didn't teach my babies that they were enough just as they were. If Eve, who knew God well, who hung out naked with Him, bought the lie of the enemy and was set on a path of guilt and condemnation, what was I to do? Separation from God seemed inevitable.

I believed the snake.

During those early years of parenting, I didn't realize that in my darkest moments, I was nearest to God. Instead of seeing Him as He sees me, I pictured Him as a wrathful, disappointed, and abusive father whose love I needed to earn.

I believed that God parented as I parented. I projected my falsehoods and failings onto Him, and I had a total lack of confidence in His abilities. I'm ashamed to say I didn't catch on earlier to the understanding of truth and the path to restoration. If God is a parent, as He says, and I am a parent, made in His image, and I am an unqualified mess... where does that leave Him?

Well, therein lies the key: He is not me. He is the Creator; I am the created. The place where we and our children are hurting, in

trouble, or in need is the very place He looks on and comforts as Father. He is not the god I defined with *my* fears and phobias.

Although I was raised in some form or fashion in Christianity, it took a long time for me to truly meet Christ. If my identity is in Him, then I have lived the better part of my life in an identity crisis of epic proportions.

Freedom came. Yet I still grieve when I look back at how I raised my first four children, a rowdy bunch we call “The Originals.” I was heavily steeped in the law, with no concept of the gospel that fulfilled it. The law was my safe haven. I believed God would only be approachable when I completed a list of tasks I fabricated from faulty teachings and my busy brain. First, get up at 5:30 a.m. and highlight more verses in my Bible. Second, do not yell. Third, volunteer, clean the toilets, and eat a low-carb, low-cal, low-taste diet (high in fiber, completely void of comfort). Fourth, never let them see you cry. Now, I attempt to grieve without guilt; I know God can handle my tears.

I know you’ve felt this guilt as well. You haven’t been all things to your children. You’ve messed up, and the next day you’ve messed up again. God never meant for you to carry that guilt. He shouldered the weight of it on the cross. He knows you stumble; He knows you don’t parent perfectly. And He wants to you to surrender that guilt and those feelings of unworthiness to Him. There is no place for guilt on the sacred ground of your home—just grace. Only, forever, grace.