

# Married Mom, Solo Parent

*Finding God's  
Strength to  
Face the  
Challenge*

Carla Anne Coroy

 Kregel  
Publications

*Married Mom, Solo Parent: Finding God's Strength to Face the Challenge*  
Copyright © 2011 by Carla Anne Coroy.

Published by Kregel Publications, a division of Kregel, Inc., P.O. Box 2607, Grand Rapids, MI 49501.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without written permission of the publisher, except for brief quotations in printed reviews.

Some of the anecdotal illustrations in this book are included with the permission of the persons involved. All other illustrations are composites of real situations, and any resemblance to people living or dead is coincidental.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked CEV are from the Contemporary English Version. Copyright © 1995 by American Bible Society. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked KJV are from the King James Version.

Scripture quotations marked MSG are from *The Message*. Copyright © by Eugene H. Peterson 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are from the New American Standard Bible®. Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. ([www.Lockman.org](http://www.Lockman.org))

Scripture quotations marked NIV are from the Holy Bible, New International Reader's Version®. NIV®. Copyright © 1995, 1996, 1998 by Biblica Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. [www.zondervan.com](http://www.zondervan.com)

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. [www.zondervan.com](http://www.zondervan.com)

Scripture quotations marked TLB are from *The Living Bible*. Copyright © 1971 by Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois. Used by permission.

Statistics used in this book were taken from an online survey, conducted by the author, of women who considered themselves “married single moms.” The numbers were accurate as of publication. The current survey results are available at [www.carlaanne.com](http://www.carlaanne.com).

#### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Coroy, Carla Anne, 1970–

Married mom, solo parent : finding God's strength to face the challenge / Carla Anne Coroy.

p. cm.

1. Mother and child—Religious aspects—Christianity. 2. Child rearing—Religious aspects—Christianity. 3. Parenting—Religious aspects—Christianity. I. Title.

BV4529.18.C673

2011

248.8'431—dc23

2011024223

ISBN 978-0-8254-2626-1

Printed in the United States of America

11 12 13 14 15 / 5 4 3 2 1

*This book is dedicated to  
the man who has given me the privilege  
of living the life of a married mom and solo  
parent, causing me to grow, learn,  
and lean on Jesus. My husband's support,  
prayers, and pursuit of godliness and  
integrity have given me the space I've needed  
to share my heart and our story of God's  
hope and healing in our life. Not only has he  
been my biggest cheerleader and deliverer  
of cups of coffee and chocolate, he's faithfully  
(and ruthlessly) edited my words to  
help me say what I mean.  
Trent, I love you.*



# Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i> .....	9
<i>Introduction: What Is a Solo Parent?</i> .....	11
1. This Is Not What I Signed Up For! .....	15
2. The Emotions of Solo Parenting .....	23
3. Emotional Divorce .....	59
4. Life in Community .....	79
5. Discipline Divided .....	95
6. Those Should Be <i>His</i> Chores! .....	119
7. Keep My Mind <i>and</i> the House? .....	127
8. Make the Most of Mealtime .....	143
9. Celebrations Wrapped in Loneliness .....	159
10. Give Me a Break! .....	171
11. Honoring the Man You Don't See Enough .....	183
12. I Have Needs Too, You Know! .....	195
13. The Father Your Kids Need .....	213
14. So Now You Want to Be a Part of This Family, Huh? .....	229
15. From My Husband's Heart .....	237
<i>Appendix A: Resources</i> .....	253
<i>Appendix B: Blessings to Pray and Say</i> .....	257
<i>Appendix C: Job 38–42</i> .....	261
<i>Notes</i> .....	271
<i>About the Author</i> .....	272



## *Introduction*

---

# What Is a Solo Parent?

I'm not sure when I fully realized it. It took me years, and when I finally got it, I was not at all impressed. I was raising my children as a single mom even though I was married to their dad.

I had dreamed about a happy family, a clean house, a warm and inviting meal with me and the father of my children in that picture. In the midst of my husband's doctoral degree pursuit and all that entailed, his job, his volunteering in church, and his excessive computer-gaming habits, I realized that if I wanted a photo of that happy family, we'd have to fake a pose and snap the picture quickly. This was not the happily-ever-after I had planned on. I was raising my kids alone even though I was married. I was a solo parent.

### **A What?**

A solo parent is someone who is raising children and running a home and family alone. In this book I am primarily writing to the married woman who solo parents. Her husband might be working away from home or putting in exceptionally long hours; he might be captured by the lure of hobbies and interests that eat up his time, addicted to any number of things that impede his ability to be a good husband and father, or hindered by health issues that keep him from assisting his wife in the everyday running of their home and family. She feels fully responsible for how the house and yard are maintained, how the kids are raised, the spiritual well-being of the family, how well the kids do in school, and the family finances—no matter how well or how poorly that is going. She feels like

## Introduction

---

the buck will stop with her for any emergencies, and often all failures as well. She carries a heavy load and falls into bed by herself at the end of the day, exhausted.

My story will be different from yours. Each solo parent has a unique set of circumstances. Your struggles will be different from mine. Every generation has had its share of married solo parents. Yet somewhere along the line, we've forgotten how it is done: how a woman with a husband does the job of raising her kids when he is not around.

Perhaps you are the wife of:

- A man in the military
- A long-distance truck driver
- A busy doctor or lawyer
- An executive, traveling businessman, or workaholic
- Someone who works two jobs to provide for you and your children
- An alcoholic or drug addict
- Someone serving time in prison
- A farmer, fisherman, or oil-rig worker
- A man with gambling, pornography, computer, or online-gaming addictions
- A pastor or ministry worker
- A man with a chronic or terminal health condition

There is no end to this list. Your situation may not be listed here, but no matter how you got here, as a solo parent you have needs, desires, struggles, and frustrations that single parents don't face and that married wives with involved husbands just don't understand.

I may not have mentioned your particular situation earlier, but you know if you are a solo parent. Though everyone's story and situation is different, every solo parent carries a heavy load.

I have carried that load.

## Difficult Questions

I've lived this life and have learned a lot the hard way. This challenge has become my passion.

## *What Is a Solo Parent?*

---

During my years as a solo parent, I've had some hard-to-answer questions. Questions like:

- How do I find time to spend with God?
- How can I honor my husband and teach my children to honor him when there are times I wish he'd never come home?
- How can I raise my kids with consistency when my husband comes home and changes the rules?
- Would it be easier if I left my husband?
- What do I do when my kids are suffering physically, mentally, emotionally, or spiritually because of my husband's absence or lack of involvement?
- How can I love my husband when I feel like a doormat or his servant and nanny?
- Is it even possible to have a happy, healthy home and build great memories for my kids when there is such an obvious hole in our family?
- Is it okay to meet my sexual needs without my husband or outside my marriage if he is never around or available?
- How can I teach my kids about godly marriage relationships if they never see one in our own home?
- Is it okay to pray for my husband to die so that I can respectably marry a different man to be a dad to my kids?

Maybe you've been too afraid to ask these questions out loud. Perhaps this is the first time you've seen your feelings put into words.

I would encourage you to be honest with yourself and God as you read through this material. Some parts of this book lean more toward teaching and training, much like spending time with a mentor. Other parts are practical and hands-on. There is a study guide and a personal reflection journal available at no cost on my website ([www.carlaanne.com](http://www.carlaanne.com)) if you'd like to go through this with a book club, Sunday school class, or other group, or if you just want to dig deeper yourself.

I'd encourage you to go through this book with a mentor or godly woman in your church. Find someone who is a few paces ahead of you in your spiritual walk, marriage, and child-rearing. Ideally she would be someone who

## Introduction

---

has walked this road of solo parenting herself. Get together with her once a week or so. If you have the study guide, discuss the questions in it together. Pray together. If you have further questions for her, be honest and open, asking even the hard ones. It's when we grapple with the tough things in life that we are often stretched to a new level of maturity and wisdom.

If you don't have a mentor at this time or cannot find one, a friend or group of friends who are in the same stage of life would make a great discussion group. Be sure that you are all careful to respect each other's answers, thoughts, and opinions, while staying faithful to the challenge of being women who seek after God.

You can go through this book on your own. I suggest you download the free personal reflection journal from my website ([www.carlaanne.com](http://www.carlaanne.com)) to record your thoughts, questions, and answers—keep it handy as you go through the book. You may one day be the mentor of another woman who is seeking counsel.

---

Dear God, I praise you for the wonderful woman who is reading this book. You created her in such a beautiful way. I pray that you will woo her to yourself, let her hear your voice speaking, and grow in her the passion to take up the challenge you will set before her.

I pray that you will guard her heart and mind, that you will surround her with your presence, and fill her with your power. Holy Spirit, I invite you to lead us in this journey of becoming godly women, mothers, and wives. Through the holy name of Jesus the Christ, I ask these things of the one true God. Amen.



## *Chapter One*

---

# This Is Not What I Signed Up For!

At first I was glad to keep the hearth fire warm and burning while Trent studied for his doctorate, taught at the University of Toronto, wrote his thesis, served on our church board, and spent his free time at home unwinding in front of his computer. I was convinced I was being a good wife, doing what I could to support him in becoming successful. It pleased me to think I was partly responsible for his achievements.

While I was expecting our first child, I began to notice my “support” was not having the effects I had hoped for. It was a rough and risky pregnancy, so I was on bed rest for almost eight months. Things were difficult financially as I did not have any income during this time and Trent was still in school.

We set up a cot in the main room of our basement apartment so that I could have a change of scenery at bedtime. I spent my days in silence reading books, napping, and wondering about the baby. Cell phones were not as common as they are today, so entire days would go by without a chat with Trent. I had nothing to do but worry about him, the baby, and how we’d manage to pay the bills. I missed him. I longed for him to be nearby when the baby kicked or my belly bounced with baby’s hiccups. When Trent finally did get home, he would either work on his studies or play computer games.

The following few years went by in much the same way, although Trent was able to study less and work more, relieving much of the financial stress.

## Married Mom, Solo Parent

He would work, study, attend church board meetings, and then come home to sit in front of his computer, spending time with his thesis or a game. The children were often shooed away from “Papa’s room” or office. I’d keep them busy every spare moment I wasn’t working so he’d have as much time as necessary to do his thesis well.

I found a group of friends that included other solo parents. We called each other every day, encouraging each other and helping each other out. When a mom began spiraling into a pity party or negative thinking about her marriage and parenting, the others would gather round and set her back on solid ground. I was often met at the door by a friend telling me to get the kids in the van because it was time to go to the beach. Without any preplanning on my part, off we went with only five minutes’ notice to spend a refreshing afternoon with friends who cared. They knew that it was a hard life to live because we were all in it at the same time. None of us wanted the life of a solo parent, but we all wanted to do more than survive. We wanted to make a change for our kids, for our marriages, for us.

When Trent completed his PhD, we moved to New York State with our three children, aged three and under. I had hoped my days of taking care of the children alone, eating dinner without Trent, having long evenings to myself, making excuses for my husband’s absences, and going to bed alone would finally be over. Now Trent had a “real” job, and I assumed he would be home in the evening, walking in from work happy to smell the home-cooked meal and enjoy eating it at the table with me and the kids. I assumed he’d help out with baths and bedtime, cut the grass, and shovel the driveway.

Instead, I found myself mowing our two-acre yard, keeping up the house, cleaning the pool, taking the vehicle for maintenance and repairs, going to doctor visits with the kids, and grocery shopping with three toddlers and a week’s worth of groceries in one cart. (Whoever the brilliant person was who invented a double seated grocery cart with the extra seats attached, I love you and thank you. You made my life so much easier!)

Trent had taken a full-time position spread over four days per week instead of five. On the fifth day of the work week, he served as a consultant for the university he had graduated from. Often one of the two jobs would spill

over to take up weekend time. When it wasn't work, he was caught up in a new hobby: online gaming.

I began to feel like a widow or jilted lover. The sadness ran deep, the loneliness was constant, and the sense of betrayal stung. I once told a friend that I would rather he had an affair with another woman because then at least I could compete. Anyone can lose some weight, tone their muscles, update their hair and makeup, or even have cosmetic surgery to fix the genetic flaws. But I could not compete with the prestige offered by a lucrative position or the attraction of on-demand adventure in an artificial, online world and community.

Trent found a new job in Southern California. So we moved across the continent with just a few weeks left of my fourth pregnancy. His new position required him to travel extensively around the world. When Trent was out of town, he was gone for days, sometimes many weeks. At times the kids didn't see or interact with their dad for months. When he was in town, he was at the office about sixty minutes away in good traffic, two hours away in bad traffic. He would be gone before I or any of the kids were up, and he'd be home long after we'd be asleep.

In the wake of the telecom market crash in 2000, Trent encountered pressure to perform at work beyond what seemed humanly possible. We now had four children, ages five and under, and only one vehicle with five seatbelts. Two huge mortgages caused a great deal of financial strain, as we tried for nearly ten months to sell our previous home in a city filled with people out of work and attempting to move away.

Those years were hard—especially when the kids were really little and I hardly slept through one night a month. Someone was always teething, nursing, or getting sick. For a long time I didn't know how to answer when people asked me if I was still married or where my husband was. These people meant well, but they never knew how my heart broke whenever they told me they hadn't met my husband so why didn't I bring him along sometime. I made decisions that I would have never dreamed I would make alone: moral decisions, health decisions, education decisions, parenting decisions, spiritual decisions, and decisions about my future and the future of our marriage. I felt betrayed, resentful, hurt, and angry. It was such a lonely time.

## Married Mom, Solo Parent

---

I went to church alone . . . with the kids. I went to my gynecologist appointments alone . . . with the kids. I ate dinner alone . . . with the kids. I went out for dinner alone . . . with the kids.

When I was in my last month of pregnancy, I paid a visit to my obstetrician. Being full swing into my solo parenting career, I had three other children in the examining room with me. The kids were behind the curtain . . . until my cell phone rang. Trent had been gone long hours so I knew it would be him. I decided to let it ring as I was lying down with my legs in stirrups. The doctor was checking to see if I was "ready" to deliver. Ahria, my oldest daughter, knew it would be Papa. She grabbed the phone to give it to me. She was very excited that he would be phoning, but not understanding that a cell phone conversation in the midst of a gynecological exam was not appropriate.

She tried to pass me the phone.

I tried to tell her to put it back in my purse.

The doctor got involved, and it ended up a flying, ringing, black brick that splashed and then gurgled as it landed in a bucket of green liquid on the floor. Leaving me in my awkward position, curtain now flung back to reveal all to the children, the doctor valiantly tried to fix the cell phone by running it under water. It was almost enough to put me into labor! Sometimes you just have to give in and laugh!

It hurt that the one I gave my heart, life, and love to on my wedding day was not there. I love my children dearly, but children never replace what a husband is meant to be.

## The Benefits

Being a solo parent definitely has its benefits. I loved making decisions without having to wait for Trent to agree with me. I could make plans without checking with him first like my girlfriends all had to with their hubs. There was no one to tell what I had spent money on because I took

care of it all. I could arrange the furniture and yard just as I liked because Trent was never there to give his opinion. If I was going out to eat, I had two choices: some kids place or anywhere my heart desired. I could watch chick flicks and cry when I watched them. My girlfriends could come over and even have a sleepover. It was just like college days, except for the diapers we changed while we chatted, the larger-size clothing, and the kids who woke up before we were done talking.

I loved that I had full influence on the kids—until I heard them yelling my words at each other.

I loved that I could make whatever my heart desired for dinner—until I got sick of the leftovers all week.

I loved that I could wear my favorite sloppy clothes and not have to look nice for anyone—until I missed the compliments.

As solo parents, we have a lot to deal with on a constant basis. Sometimes we adapt so well, however, that we're really not sure we'd want anything different. Yet when the house is quiet, the kids are asleep, and we're left alone to our thoughts, watching our dreams collide with reality, we realize . . . this is not what I signed up for.

## **The Challenge**

Solo parenting was not my dream life. I'm sure it's not yours, either. Like it or not, though, this is the challenge that faces some of us.

The challenge for a solo parent begins with just day-to-day living. Getting the house cleaned, the kids fed and off to school, the laundry done, the bills paid, and fitting in a little sleep seems like challenge enough.

The challenge for a solo parent, however, is much grander, much larger, much more complex, and much more rewarding than these day-to-day struggles. I would like to extend to you the challenge that God gave me and that I believe he is giving to all solo parents.

The challenge is simple, but not easy.

The challenge is biblical, but not necessarily found in a particular chapter and verse.

The challenge is noble, but not often applauded.

The challenge is easily undertaken, but needs God's help to accomplish.

### **The Challenge**

for the married solo parent is to be  
a woman whose heart seeks after God;  
a wife who honors her husband and teaches her children to do likewise;  
a mother who teaches her children how to  
seek after God, honor him, obey him, and love him in all things  
while practically caring for their needs,  
all the while leaving room in the family for her husband to be  
the man, husband, and father God created him to be.

To run from this challenge is to refuse to see the wonderful purpose God himself has chosen you for.

I didn't see the challenge at first. Maybe I was just too tired. Or perhaps I wasn't ready to face the idea that the God I said I loved might have had this in mind for me. I'm not sure if I just didn't want to, but whatever the reason, I didn't see it. Not until things got rough and tough for me did I even bother to look and question whether or not there was actually a purpose in my situation that was bigger than what I could see from my worn-out vantage point.

I believe God created you and me. It is remarkable to me—completely incomprehensible—how intricate and delicately balanced our bodies are. Add to that a brain that somehow houses our thoughts, controls impulses to our body, and communicates with it without our having to first think the thoughts. And how does our brain communicate emotion to our souls? Wow! I believe that there is one true God who created each of us beautifully and for a purpose.

Each of us has many different purposes for different seasons of our lives. For the solo parent, God has planned a very special purpose . . . one that he chose us for. That's why grabbing hold of this challenge and making it your own is so important.

You may be saying to yourself, "Isn't that what every Christian mother should be doing?"

Absolutely! The difference is that for a solo parent the reasons for being that kind of woman, wife, and parent are different from those of a mom with an involved dad. When fully engaged parents rely too much on the

*This Is Not What I Signed Up For!*

---

other spouse to get the job done, at least there is a backup. The solo parent has no backup; no one's available to step in when she's having a bad day. The emotions and overloaded to-do list also make rising to this challenge that much more difficult.

Perhaps you are a solo parent who hasn't thought about how God or Jesus could make a difference in your day-to-day life. I'd like to encourage you to read on, ask him your questions, and even test him. The great King David said this: "Taste and see that the LORD is good. Oh, the joys of those who take refuge in him!" (Ps. 34:8). This book provides plenty of tips, tools, ideas, suggestions, and resources that you will find helpful, whether you follow Jesus or not. But the most powerful resource I can point you to is Jesus himself. Think about it.

If you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and have chosen to spend your life becoming more like him and choosing to obey him in all things, you have at your disposal all you need to succeed. "By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence" (2 Peter 1:3). God promises in the Bible that "He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:6 NASB). That means that God is working in you to make this perfect by the end. It doesn't have to be perfect today or tomorrow . . . but he is working in you and me, that we might become the kind of mom, wife, mother, friend, and godly woman that he intends, and he's not going to stop until he gets it just right!