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*The
Peaceful
Mom*

Building a healthy foundation with

Christ AS Lord

Discussion Guide for

*The
Peaceful
Mom*

Introduction

The path to becoming a peaceful mom is difficult to find today. Many moms live in constant worry, anxiety, and frustration. But God has provided a narrow path for each of us to find His peace. It begins with knowing our God-given purpose. And it involves having a close relationship with the Lord.

1. In what areas of my life do I long for God's peace?
2. What is the first key to having real peace in my life?



Part One

God and Me



Examining the Throne of My Heart

In the church today, many of us think we understand what it means to be Christians. Maybe we said a special prayer after a church service. Maybe we filled out a card at a revival. Maybe we got baptized or joined a church. Then life went on. Pretty much the same as before. Perhaps we go to church, pray, and read the Bible. But something seems to be very wrong. We are filled with fear and resentment, desperate to make everything work out right. We don't experience the fruit of the Spirit. We live in defeat and discouragement rather than the power, peace, joy, and victory of Christ.

In fact, this is so normal in Christian circles in our culture that we think it is just what the Christian life looks like. A few crumbs here and there are all we can really expect. We live as spiritual orphans rather than as sons and daughters of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Most of us have never realized that there are invisible things blocking God's Spirit and power in our lives. We can exalt almost anything or anyone to the place of greatest priority, reverence, honor, and desire in our lives. Our mouths can speak and sing about trusting Jesus and surrendering all to Him while our hearts have a different agenda entirely. We can deceive ourselves into thinking that Jesus is our Lord while we serve other things.

Negative emotions and thoughts can sometimes be red flags that

it is time to do a “throne check” of our hearts. We need God to shine the light of His Word and truth into the darkest places of our hearts to expose our hidden motives and priorities. He can help us to see any idols we have in our lives—things or people that we desire more than the Lord.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How have I defined being a Christian until this point?
2. How does my past thinking line up with what Jesus said about those who want to follow Him?
3. What major changes do I need to make in my relationship with Christ?
4. What desires, things, or people are potential idols in my life?
5. What two or three changes can I make this week to get rid of any idols and be sure Jesus is truly on the throne of my heart?

Choosing to have Christ alone on the throne of our hearts is the first key to peace.



Putting on My Oxygen Mask First

As moms, we are often applauded for putting ourselves last, for taking care of everyone and everything else before ourselves. We tend to feel so guilty if we ever say no to anyone else: at work, at home, at our children's school, in our neighborhood, at church. We give and give until we are completely spent and exhausted. Then we may resent everyone for needing us and for asking us to do more than we can do.

There are certainly times when we need to sacrifice and give more than we feel like we have to give. But if we continually neglect our own physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental health, we will eventually burn out. Moms are human. We are not superwoman. We need proper rest, time, and brain space to connect to God. When we are not connected to the Lord and filled with His Spirit, we have nothing good to give to our families. Our physical and spiritual well-being greatly impact our children and families. We have legitimate needs and we must take time to care for our physical health, and to abide in Christ and nourish our souls. No one else can do that for us.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Do I feel guilty for taking care of my own physical and spiritual needs as a mom? Why or why not?

2. What are some situations where I should put my needs first?
3. What are some situations where I should put my children's needs first?
4. What are two of my needs I need to focus on most this coming week?
5. How might I let God be my Good Shepherd in practical ways this week?

Taking care of our deepest spiritual and physical needs is a key to peace—for us and for our families.



Correcting Skewed Beliefs

As children, we all develop core beliefs about key life concepts. We are influenced by everyone around us, especially our parents. These core beliefs are deeply held convictions about God, other people, relationships, marriage, family, society, gender, and ourselves. Sometimes our thinking about certain issues becomes warped. Maybe we live with adults who don't know and live out God's truth in their lives. Or maybe we have godly parents but we misunderstand critical concepts for some reason. Maybe we experience some kind of trauma that dramatically alters the way we think about important concepts. Maybe we take more responsibility on ourselves than actually belongs to us but no one talks with us about it.

Our core beliefs are contagious to our children whether we verbalize them or not. As the parents in the relationship, we benefit from taking some time to evaluate our core beliefs against the Bible. Then we can correct any wrong thinking or lies we have inadvertently embraced. And we can pass along godly truth to our children to bless them.

This doesn't guarantee that our children won't have skewed thinking of their own. They will. All people do. They will have their own heart work to do as they grow. But we can be healthy models who help them deal with their skewed thinking early on, giving them a big head start and a solid foundation on which to build for themselves.

We can even use the chart about common lies in this chapter with our kids to help them learn to build on the truth of the Bible when they are thinking wrongly.

When we realize that we are dealing with wrong thinking or temptations, we can choose to take our thoughts captive for Christ (see 2 Cor. 10:5). We can reject the wrong thinking and replace it with the truth of Scripture. This brings us spiritual healing and wholeness, and we can also teach our children to do the same thing when they are struggling with lies or skewed thinking.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What two or three traumatic or extremely memorable experiences in my life may have twisted my thinking in unhealthy ways?
2. What are three skewed beliefs I can identify that have caused me a lot of pain either in my relationship with God or with other people?
3. Which core beliefs do I know I need to change in my life?
4. What emotions am I experiencing as I think about changing some of my long-held foundational beliefs?
5. Where can I look for encouragement and support from the Lord and from other wives and moms this week as I begin this process of healing and allowing the Lord to transform my mind?

Submitting our core beliefs and self-talk to the truth of the Bible is a key to finding peace.



Taking Responsibility for My Character

Our culture encourages us to blame others for our actions. It encourages us to expect other to meet our needs and facilitates an entitlement/victim mentality. But God's Word has a lot to say about personal responsibility and accountability. The Bible teaches that we have two choices about who controls our lives: our old sinful self or the Holy Spirit. Each person is responsible for getting rid of sin in his or her own life. God empowers us to do this as we come to Him in humility and faith. Our spiritual growth is also up to us. We each get to decide how much we grow. We can't make ourselves grow. But we can open our hearts to God to pour His life, truth, love, and healing into our lives. We can abide in Christ so His nourishing Spirit fills us and helps us to be fruitful.

We have a responsibility to teach and train our children. We are extra responsible when they are younger. We can't make them obey the Lord in their hearts. But we can teach them and model God's ways. And as they grow, they become increasingly responsible for making their own choices.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How do I hurt my relationships when I try to make other people responsible for my thoughts, words, or actions?

2. As I examine the fruit of my life, where do I see the fruit of the Spirit and where do I see the fruit of my sinful flesh?
3. Is there anyone I need to apologize to this week? Who is it?
4. What are three tangible things I can do to begin to feed my faith in Christ more this week?
5. Am I being overly responsible or not responsible enough with each of my children spiritually, given their age and maturity? What do I sense God may desire me to change?

Taking responsibility for our walk with Christ and our spiritual and emotional well-being is a key to peace.



Finding Victory over My Negative Emotions

Emotions are a gift, one of our greatest gifts as women, and they are part of being made “in the image of God” (Gen. 1:27). We can use this gift for great good in our relationships with the Lord and with other people, including our children. However, because we are fallen, our emotions can lead us into trouble. They are not a source of absolute truth and they are not always trustworthy.

God can empower us to identify negative emotions and the real underlying issues. We can identify the difference between righteous and unrighteous anger. God can even help us tame our hormonally driven negative emotions during PMS, pregnancy, and perimenopause. We don’t have to be slaves to our feelings and emotions anymore! In Christ, we can take responsibility for our emotions. And we can let other people hold the weight of responsibility for their emotions.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How can my emotions be a gift?
2. How can anger be a good thing?
3. How would my family benefit if I were no longer a slave to negative emotions or hormones?

4. What are two practical steps I can take this week to begin to walk in victory over my negative emotions?
5. In what ways do I struggle against the fact that I am not responsible for my children's emotions?

Taking control of our emotions through the power of God's Spirit is a key to peace.



Part Two

Day-to-Day Parenting



Modeling Respect in All Areas of Life

Respect is a big word that means a whole host of different things to various people. Respect is an important part of healthy relationships with other people and with God. Our culture has lost a lot of respect for God, for people in positions of God-given authority, and for people in general. But for believers, this should not be the case.

We need to know how to properly reverence the Lord, how to respect those in positions of authority, and how to treat all people with honor because they are created in God's image. The way we respect government officials, church leaders, school leaders, managers at work, and leaders at home reflects our reverence for God Himself. It's not that those people are God. They are definitely not deity. But God has set up an authority structure to provide for His people, protect them, and prevent chaos and abuse. When we appropriately honor those in authority, He views this as though we are honoring Him. But we don't idolize people. Ultimately, our trust is in God much more than in any person.

Some people think that if we respect other people, it means we disrespect ourselves. That is not God's design, thankfully! In His design, we treat God with the greatest honor and reverence, but we also treat others and ourselves with honor, dignity, and respect. Respecting ourselves doesn't mean that we respect our sinful nature or that we are selfish. It means that we think rightly about ourselves in light of

God's Word. It means that we receive His love and truth for us. We don't hate ourselves or treat ourselves with contempt. We don't abuse or sin against ourselves.

One important area where moms can model respect is in our relationship with our husband and/or our children's father. Children absorb so much from the interactions in this relationship. In fact, the way we relate to our husband or children's father probably has more impact on our children's future relationships with God, with their spouses, and with their own children than any other human influence.

We also have the opportunity to treat our children with respect and honor. The way we talk to our children often becomes their inner voice later in life. If we are verbally abusive and disrespectful to our kids when they are young, we can crush their spirits. Our destructive words can carry far into the future in our children's hearts and minds. When we treat them with honor and respect, they know that they have worth and are better able to receive that God loves them and treats them well too.

Moms have the important job of modeling respect for our children and to our children. This helps prepare them to show proper respect to those in authority, and to treat their friends and siblings with appropriate respect. It also lays the groundwork for our children to have healthy relationships with the Lord, with others, and even with themselves.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What happens when children don't see respect modeled properly in their homes and in society?
2. Who are some people in positions of authority in my life or my child's life that I have a hard time respecting (I don't have to necessarily name people out loud)? How might God want me to change my approach this week?

3. How am I doing with properly respecting myself and setting a healthy example for my children?
4. What are two ways I might try to model respect for my husband or my children's father in front of them that would be most impactful for my family this week?
5. What are two ways I could respect my children this week that would bless them?

Embracing and modeling respect in all areas of life—with God, with others, and with ourselves—is a key to peace for our families and for us as moms.



Can I Love My Children “Too Much”?

Children are such a blessing from the Lord. Many women believe we are wired to love babies and children and to desire being moms to one degree or another. Yet our culture often places children on a pedestal. We hear messages that seem to say that if we don't have children, we are not good wives. Or we are not complete as women. We hear from our culture, even our Christian culture, that our fulfillment should come from marriage, motherhood, and family. Well-meaning family and friends pressure us from the time we are young, “When are you going to get married? When are you going to have a baby?” Blogs and websites for moms and the entire marketing machine for baby products tell us that children are the most important focus of the family.

But we can take our desires for our children too far. We can desire to have children more than we desire to be close to God. Or to desire certain things for our children more than we desire fellowship and submission to Christ. This can be so subtle that we don't even realize we have set our children on the throne of our hearts as idols. Ultimately, real fulfillment only comes from knowing and loving Jesus. Children are a good gift. But we must love the Giver more than even the most precious gifts.

Believers throughout the ages have been called to demonstrate that they love God more than they love their children. The circumstances

change. Not all of us are called to do exactly what Abraham or George Mueller had to do. And yet, in a spiritual sense, we all are called to be willing to lay our children and our desires for them on the altar before Jesus on a daily basis.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Why did God ask Abraham to be willing to sacrifice Isaac to Him?
2. What are some of my greatest fears for my children?
3. In what ways might I be exalting my children as idols in my heart?
4. In what areas do I expect my children to bring me happiness, contentment, fulfillment, and worth?
5. What kinds of negative consequences do moms and children face when mothers idolize their children?

Laying our children willingly before the Lord in total surrender is another key to peace.



Trusting God's Will for My Children

God is good. He has good plans for our children. He knows the future and is already there! He is sovereign. But sometimes it is challenging to believe and trust that God knows what is best for our children. We especially struggle when we see our children suffer, or when we believe we know what is truly best for their careers or relationships. We want so much to protect them and see them succeed. We don't want them to experience pain, failure, heartache, or anything negative. We just want roses and sunshine for our kids.

If we are not vigilant, we can slip into trusting our own wisdom and plans for our children more than we trust God's wisdom and plan for them. It is so easy to place our will above the Lord's will, thinking that we know best. Unfortunately, when we don't trust God, we actually sabotage our children and ourselves. We sometimes end up steering toward the very things we fear most when we trust ourselves more than we trust the Lord.

Thankfully, there are so many solid reasons why we can trust God more than anyone or anything else. If we dig into the Word and invite God to purify our thinking and our motives, we can build strong trust in God, knowing there is no better place to be. And we can learn that trusting ourselves is a very dangerous place to be.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What are some areas where I struggle to trust God with my children right now?
2. How specifically will my lack of trust in God help or hurt my children?
3. What are some reasons I really can trust God more than I can trust myself or anyone else?
4. What is a difficult situation from my own childhood or life that God has used for great good?
5. What three areas of struggle can I entrust to God, inviting Him to accomplish His good will and purposes there? How can I show that I will trust God with these areas this week?

Trusting God's will for our families and for ourselves is a key to peace.



Seeing Through the Lens of Eternity

God calls us to a higher perspective, His perspective. He calls us to stand beside Him and see His glorious view, the view that expands far beyond today and even this lifetime. As moms, we have lots of concerns for our children. Some of them are important. But we can't afford to lose sight of the *most* important things from God's viewpoint.

God is most interested in how we are building in our children's lives—and our own lives—spiritually. How are we teaching them to know and love Him and to love others with His love? We want to keep God's priorities in mind even when we are dealing with earthly, temporary goals.

It is wise to ask ourselves occasionally, What kind of legacy do we want to leave for our children? What things do we want to avoid that could seriously emotionally and spiritually scar them? What things do we definitely want to do for them and have them remember? When our children think of us, do they see Jesus in our lives?

Something that helps us keep proper perspective is effective prayer. Prayer is one of our methods of communication with God. We can share our hearts with Him, and He shares His heart with us too, through prayer and through His Word. Scripture grounds us in knowledge. It is our spiritual food and water that sustains us daily.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What is one thing of eternal value that can be easy for me to miss in all the busyness of life?
2. What are the two most important things I do not want in my legacy for my children?
3. What are the two most important things I do want to leave in my legacy for them?
4. What are the five components of prayer listed in this chapter? Which component can I emphasize in my prayers this week?
5. How would practicing praise and thanksgiving each day help me keep an eternal perspective?

Focusing on eternity and seeking God's higher perspective is a key to peace.



Avoiding Some Common Mistakes

We have all witnessed mistakes in our parents' approaches to parenting. And we have all committed mistakes ourselves as parents. We may not even realize that some of our ways of "loving" our children are detrimental. They just seem so normal from our experiences. Thankfully, we don't have to stay in the dark about our approaches that are unhealthy for our children or for ourselves.

There are a lot of ways we moms can use our power and influence to harm. Here are some things we want to avoid:

- Loving with strings attached
- Playing the martyr
- Controlling our children
- Saying too much to other people about our children
- Speaking death to our children
- Projecting unhealthy body image

Fortunately, there are also many ways we moms can use our positions for good! We can learn to love our children in new ways even if we experienced some of these unhealthy approaches earlier in our lives. God's Spirit can give us the strength and wisdom to shed our unhealthy habits and begin to relate to our children, others, and ourselves in ways that honor Him and speak God's life to our families.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What are two or three unhealthy approaches I saw in my home growing up?
2. How do these unhealthy approaches impact my tendencies as a mom?
3. Which of these mistakes bothers me the most when other people treat me like this?
4. What are the most tempting “common mistakes” for me as a mom?
5. What is one way God may want me to change my approach with my children this week so I can have a healthier relationship with them?

Understanding and practicing healthy, godly love is a key to peace for the whole family, including ourselves.



Counting Trials as Joy

Everyone, including our children, face trials in life. How we respond in times of hardship speaks powerfully to our children about our true spiritual beliefs. They see if we crumble or worry obsessively. They know if we are shaken or if we stand firmly in faith. They learn to panic or to remain calm as we model responses for them.

If we learn to look at trials the way God instructs us to in His Word, we may find that these are some of our most impactful opportunities to teach our children about the Lord and about authentic faith in Him.

We often grow the most spiritually during our greatest trials. If we are open to what God wants to show us, many glorious spiritual treasures, answers to prayer, miracles, and blessings await us even in the most difficult chapters of our lives. We don't want to miss out on these blessings. What an incredible gift we can give our children when we model for them how to count trials as joy in Christ!

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Which story impacted you the most from this chapter and why?
2. Think of a time in your life that was very difficult. What good

fruit can you see now that came from that time? What important truths did you learn?

3. How do you tend to respond when things go wrong?
4. What do you want to model for your children during hardships and difficulties?
5. If you are going through a trial right now, how might God be calling you this week to approach it with joy in Him?

Looking for the treasures God has for us in the midst of suffering is a key to peace.



Living Out Forgiveness, Mercy, and Grace in Our Own Lives

We all struggle with forgiveness. It is tempting to hold on to resentment and bitterness when we feel slighted or sinned against. We have a sense that wrongs need to be made right. We want to see justice served. But if we are not careful, unforgiveness will poison our hearts and minds.

Left unchecked, bitterness eventually becomes deadly. My bitterness hurts me spiritually and physically. It hurts my relationships with other people. And it even destroys my fellowship with the Lord until I consciously repent of it.

We don't have to stay stuck in resentment and bitterness. In Christ, there is victory over bitterness and freedom from this snare of the enemy. We can stop leaving this door wide open that Satan uses to easily access our lives. We can shut him out and not allow him access or authority in our lives by holding grudges.

To give grace and forgiveness to others, including our children, we must first truly receive God's grace and forgiveness from Jesus on the cross. We can't forgive other people's sins against us in our strength. But Jesus can enable us to forgive anything that might be done against us or our children. He can even use what others intended for evil to bring about great good. There is no greater witness to the world than

a Christian who willingly repays evil with good, hatred with love, cursing with blessing, and persecution with kindness.

We are not called to trust people who continue in unrepentance. For reconciliation to occur, there has to be a mutual rebuilding of trust. Trust is not an unconditional command from the Lord. But we can choose to forgive on our end as we allow God's power to pour through us, and we can invite Him to do amazing things in the midst of painful times.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Who is the most bitter person I have known? (This is a good question to answer silently.) What has been the fruit of this person's life?
2. What reasons do I give to justify unforgiveness, resentment, and bitterness in my life?
3. On a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being hardly at all and 10 being all the time, how much do I struggle with bitterness?
4. Who do I need to work on forgiving this week?
5. How are my children impacted by my bitterness against them or other people?

Overcoming bitterness by God's Spirit, and walking in forgiveness, mercy, and grace, is a key to peace.