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*Facing Every Mom's Fears*  
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Requests for information should be addressed to:  
Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49530

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## Chapter 1

# THE HIGH-WIRE WALK OF PARENTING

*“I fear my child will choke if I don’t watch her eat.”*

*“I’m afraid I’m smothering them in my worry that they  
won’t turn out right.”*

*“I fear my boys will marry women I can’t stand.”*

*“I’m afraid to let my kids go to school. There is so much evil  
out there—I just want to protect them from it all.”*

## High above the Center Ring

Like every parent on earth, I had no idea what I was getting into. If any of us knew what really lay ahead of us as mothers, I doubt we could muster the courage to go forward. If we had truth in advertising for babies, if the FDA required a list of parenting's potential side effects, we'd run for the hills. I believe that's why God makes babies so adorable—so cuddly and lovable and instantly attractive—it's the world's ultimate silver lining program. The good stuff of parenting has to be so very good because the bad stuff is so very bad.

Fear is the bad stuff of motherhood. Bringing a child into our lives is signing on for a multidecade program of worry, second-guessing, regret, and fear. I have two children, Amanda (Mandy) and Christopher (CJ), who have brought more joy, more love, and more worry into my life than I ever thought possible. I've been a parent for a dozen years now, as Mandy will turn twelve the month this book hits the shelves and CJ will turn eight shortly after. Things I thought I'd get used to, I never have. Things I thought would surely slay me have become ordinary, everyday parts of my life. *None* of it has gone the way I expected—in the very best and the very worst sense. I am a changed woman because I am a mother.

I am a changed woman because of this book as well. I wanted to write a book about fear because I believe it has such an enormous impact on how we parent. Few other factors control our actions, our thoughts, our abilities, and our limitations more deeply than fear.

Contemporary living gives women much to fear. True or not, parenting feels as though it has become more difficult

than it has ever been. National events and the natural events of my own family have brought fears to light I would not have dreamed I owned.

It matters tremendously how we deal—or don't deal—with our fears. I hope you discover this book to be a useful companion on your journey to courage. Each chapter will focus on a different aspect of your fears as a woman and as a mother. You'll hear stories from my own life and from scores of women around me who shared their own experiences. Each chapter will offer you questions to help you face your fears, practical tips to fight your fears, and verses from the Bible to help find your faith in the face of fear.

If you learn nothing else from these pages, gain nothing from the practical tips, funny stories, useful insights, or psychological research, I hope you learn that *you are not the only woman to fear*. When I began soliciting feedback from women on the subject of fear, I recorded on cards what they told me. I gathered cards upon cards upon cards, building an enormous pile of responses from women across the country—women just like you. The quotes you see at the beginning of each section are the real words of mothers throughout the country who shared their fears with me—and now with you.

The universality of fear is astounding. I thought I knew what was coming, but I was wrong. I was unprepared for the startling expanse of pain, guilt, and worry as hundreds upon hundreds of women poured their souls out to me.

I wish you could see these precious cards that represent so many fears spread out on my dining room table. I pick up the card from over here, from the woman who is so certain she is failing her children and is sure she is the only woman on the planet feeling so scared and inept. I move her card

*Few other factors control our actions, our thoughts, our abilities, and our limitations more deeply than fear.*

over where there is a stack—astoundingly high—of women who have expressed the exact same emotion. I want to introduce these women to each other, to let them know they are not alone. And I want to let you know you are not alone.

*I want to introduce these women to each other, to let them know they are not alone. And I want to let you know you are not alone.*

And I want to let you know you are not alone.

Come along with me on what has proven to be the most amazing journey of a lifetime. We'll draw courage from each other, from professionals who lent their expertise, from Scripture, and from the most unlikely metaphor you could imagine: a high wire.

Courageous parenting, I have discovered, is a high-wire act. A circus-worthy feat of daring. An act that seems too scary, too risky to be possible for mere mortals like us.

But it is possible for a host of reasons. Want to find out why?

Pass the popcorn, turn the pages, and let me show you.

Challenge 1:  
*We Find Fears We Never Knew We Had*  
*If Only Chocolate Were Courage*

My first instinct was to title this book *Fight Fear with Chocolate*. Not only did I figure this guaranteed me a runaway bestseller, but it would allow me and other chocoholic women around the globe justification for one of our favorite coping mechanisms. Silly as the chocolate title sounds, it's not too far off, is it? Making a beeline for the chocolate is a legendary tactic when fear or worry strikes a woman.

Now, we're no fools. We don't need anyone to tell us compensating with chocolate is not a good impulse. We know that already. Where fear is concerned, though, lots of our first impulses are unhealthy.

Daily life as a parent hands us many reasons to fear. When we are afraid, our responses range from the survival/instinctual based, to the wise and methodical, to the silly and reactionary. All are real. All are human. Not all are productive. Chocolate makes an especially fine example because it reminds us that while all fears feel real, not all responses get results.

Take the "Stomp and Hiss" for example. You know what I mean: that quick hiss of sucking my breath in through my teeth while I stomp my foot down on the brake and my hand flies out across a body—any body—blocking and protecting in an automotive near miss. I've done it a hundred times. I even do it during crises on television or in the movies.

I'm also the queen of holding my breath on the playground—so convinced my little one will fall to his imminent demise from the monkey bars. Now really, will sucking

in my breath increase my son's safety? No, but I can't help doing it anyway. When my son is old enough to head for the skate park, I think I'm going to need medication.

You don't automatically pair up moms and fear. That is, until you're a parent yourself. With the exception of the occasional B movie or daytime drama, moms aren't associated with scary things. To the world we're "Mommy." The bastions of comfort. Warm cookies. Oatmeal. After-bath cuddles. Home. Moms are the spokeswomen for "It'll be all right."

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up moms and fear.  
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a parent yourself.

It's what mothers are supposed to say, right? We're comforting creatures, the living symbols of unconditional love. We're the ones who are supposed to be there for you when no one else will even give you the time of day.

Those stereotypes didn't materialize out of thin air. In many ways, moms *are* all that. Parental love—especially a mother's love—is one of the most powerful forces on earth. Mother Nature. Mother tongue. The Mother of all \_\_\_\_\_ (insert any noun here). Our language is filled with references to the power of motherhood. While there are days when I'd pay any price for the first words out of my children's mouths in a crisis to be "Daaadddy!" you and I both know they are usually "Mooommm!" Even when Daddy is standing right next to them. That's because I am the mommy, and it is in the natural order of the universe that I am supposed to make it all better.

Moms protect. Even in the animal kingdom—what's the most dangerous animal? A mother protecting her young. You don't need to turn on Animal Planet to look for evidence of this; humankind is brimming with it. Want to watch a mild-mannered parent turn fierce? Threaten her child. The urge to protect our children wells up in us like the Cowardly Lion's new medal, and we roar. Even those of