

the
PROVERBS 31
MINISTRIES
podcast

Biblical truth for any girl in any season.

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Jeannie Cunnion: Yeah, well, let me assure you, I am preaching this one for myself today. When I wrote the Bible study, I needed this teaching, but I need it now more than ever. So today I want to talk about the pressure that parents feel and the relief we find in God's promises. We're going to talk about the pressure and the promises. And as you mentioned, Mike and I have five boys. They range in age from five to 24. So, we have little Finn, we call them our family mascot, he is about to start kindergarten. And then we have Owen who is in middle school. We have Brennan and Cal in high school. And then we have our son Andre, who is about to start his junior year at Lipscomb University, and Andre joined our family from an orphanage in Haiti called Danita's Children and our family returns to Danita's every year to spend time with the beautiful children there. And this past year while we were visiting it was in March. I had a conversation with my friend Charis; Charis is a missionary there, she's been there for 20 years, we're similar in age, the difference is Charis is parenting 80 children and I'm parenting five. And we were having a really honest conversation about the things that we're going to unpack today. It's the pressure. We were sharing some of the struggles that she and I are both having especially as our children get older, and we really have to face the fact that we do not have any control over the outcome of our effort, but the similarity in our struggles was really apparent and it basically comes down to learning to trust God with the children that He has entrusted to us. So, if you're listening today, no matter, no matter, the ages of your children or, or what season you are in parenting or whether you're parenting one child or five children, or 80 children, I hope that this conversation will be — and I believe this conversation will be — deeply encouraging to you.

And so, I want us to talk about some of the specific pressure that parents are under. Before I do that, I do want to give a little warning, because talking about the pressure, acknowledging the impossible standards that we set for ourselves, and, and the unrealistic expectations we have of ourselves, doesn't always feel good. I remember speaking at a conference about this topic and when I had finished speaking, a kind woman came up to me and I could tell that she had been crying and she said, "Jeannie, you know, I want to be honest with you. As you are going through each one of those pressures, I wanted to cover my ears, because I didn't want to have to face the reality. It's easier, it feels like it's easier to pretend like that pressure doesn't exist." She said, "but, but when you got to the promises, I realized why I needed to acknowledge the pressure or the bad news, because we have to call it out because ignoring

the pressure doesn't lessen it, it actually heightens it.” And so, we're going to begin by just acknowledging the bad news or the pressure, and then I promise we'll get to the good news.

So, I'm going to read a list of pressures, and these are all in the Bible study, and, and we go through them in depth each week, each one has a specific week committed to it. But today, I just want to read this list and I'd ask you to listen and think about where you fall in this specific pressure. In the Bible study, you can kind of rank from one to five, I feel a lot of pressure or no pressure in that area. But I'm gonna just name some, for sake of time, I won't name them all, but just see, see if these resonate with you.

Okay, so the first one is the pressure to orchestrate a perfect future for your child. The pressure to be a perfect example for your children to follow. The pressure to create a saving and vibrant faith in your child's life. The pressure to produce Christ-like character in your children's lives. The pressure to shield your children from the ungodly influence of culture. The pressure to protect your children from hardship or suffering. The pressure to ensure your children fulfill their full potential and purpose. The pressure to prove you have it all together in front of other moms. And finally, the pressure to earn God's pleasure in the way you parent your children.

Now, that is just some of the pressure but I bet you'd agree that that is a lot of pressure. Because no matter where we are on the parenting spectrum, we feel the pressure to get it all right so our kids turn out all right. But at the very same time, we are aware of our weaknesses and our shortcomings and our brokenness, and the ways in which we get it wrong and that leaves us in fear that our kids will turn out wrong. And these pressures, they leave us stuck. We end up bouncing between fear and worry with these clenched fists that are trying to control the outcome of our effort. It leaves us stuck feeling guilty about all that we're not compared to what every other mom seems to be. It leaves us feeling angry. Angry that no matter how hard we try, we aren't getting the results that parenting books promised us we'd get if we followed the right steps. It leaves us ashamed. Ashamed over our shortcomings and, and our weaknesses that are daily revealed through our mothering. I'm so well acquainted with that shame. And then ultimately, this pressure can leave us feeling pretty hopeless. Because what this pressure does, is it makes us put all of our hope in ourselves. We think that if we just keep trying harder, to be better, we will finally become the moms that we long to be. But we are exhausted. I am exhausted. We're exhausted, because it's not how our Heavenly Father created us to parent. But here's the good news. All of that pressure, it loses its power when we focus on who God is, instead of who we aren't. That pressure loses its power when we focus on what He can do over what we can't.

See, the truth is parenting isn't about God relying on us to get it all right. Parenting is about us relying on God to captivate our child's heart despite all of our mistakes. Parenting is about us relying on God to get it all right. And when this becomes our posture, then, then we open those clenched fists, and we have open hands, and we're waiting, we're just waiting to witness how God will be faithful to His promises, even when everything in front of us makes us want to doubt and question His goodness. Now, you might

be listening and that might just bring so much relief to you this morning, that just might be so encouraging. Or maybe, maybe this brings skepticism. Maybe you're thinking about the research that talks about what a significant role we play in our children's lives? Or maybe you're even thinking about some Bible verses that talk about how significant we are. These these verses that say we play a significant role in our children's future and faith and the truth is, yes, we do. Of course, we do. Our actions can hurt or heal, our words can build up our kids and, and cast vision for them or our words can tear them down. What we model has an enormous impact on the thought patterns and behavior of our children. And, and of course, we're wise to remember that how they see us living our lives is significantly more influential than what they hear us saying with our mouth. All of that is so true. So yes, we should seek to model what it looks like to live in pursuit of Christ. We're wise to heed the instruction that Paul gave Titus when he wrote, *"And you yourself must be an example to them by doing good works of every kind. Let everything you do reflect the integrity and seriousness of your teaching."* That's Titus 2:7 (NLT). And in this passage, Paul is emphasizing to Titus that the example he sets should foster rather than frustrate the spread of the gospel. And so similarly in our lives, we should foster rather than frustrate our children's understanding of what it means to follow Christ.

So yes, we are significant in their lives, but God is sovereign over their lives. He is sovereign over their lives, and over all of our mistakes. There isn't anything He can't redeem. And He is really good at working through our weakness. But what I find so beautiful, so humbling, and honestly, at times so frightening, is that God chooses to involve us. He chooses to partner with us, in seeing His perfect will be done in the lives of our kids. But He is not asking us to play His role. See, our children don't need us to be the perfection of Christ. This is so important friend; our children don't need us to be the perfection of Christ. I think so many Christian mamas — and, oh, my hand is raised so high — we put so much pressure on ourselves to be the perfection of Christ for our kids. That's not what they need. They need to see us in pursuit of Christ. They need us to point them to Christ. Our children need to know more than anything else, that there is only one person who has never and will never let them down. And that is not you, and that is not me. It is Jesus. Because as hard as we are going to try to be good examples for our children to follow, and we should try, we will fail. We will let them down. But this this is what we need to know, confessing this does not make us failures. Failing your children does not make you a failure. If you can confess it, it makes you free. It makes you free. It makes you someone who is truly grateful for God's redeeming grace that is bigger than your biggest mistake. See, moms we don't have to be ashamed of our weakness and need. Oh man, I lived so many years so ashamed of my inadequacy and my weakness. But when I had three boys under five and the wheels had come completely off, I was so afraid that God was disappointed in me, that I was letting Him down because I couldn't be a perfect mom for these precious humans that He had entrusted to me. But our weakness, our shortcoming, our inadequacy, it is meant to make us run to Him and rely on Him to be for our children what we could never be for them on our own. Jesus actually loves to meet you there. He loves to meet you in that place and to equip you in that place of inadequacy and weakness.

We see this so beautifully demonstrated in the life of the Apostle Paul. And I'm going to give a brief teaching on this passage that you're probably familiar with but I don't want you—I know sometimes I tune out when I hear a passage familiar with or I've heard taught on several times, but I want to encourage you to lean in because I think there's something in this that's new for us today. See, when Paul, Paul wasn't trying to raise tiny people into godly adults in the 21st century, right? He was commissioned to spread the gospel of Christ to the first century world after he'd spent the majority of his life persecuting Christians. But I want to see how this teaching regarding Paul plays out in our parenting. So we're going to look at 2 Corinthians 12:7-8 (NLT). Here we find Paul pleading with God to take away an affliction in his life that reveals his human weakness. And he writes, he writes, *“Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away.”* How many times mama have you begged the Lord to take away a weakness in your life that reveals your inadequacy and your weakness and your shortcoming? And then Paul writes that *“Each time he said to me, ‘My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.’”* So, he's, so God said, He's saying, God take this thing away because it reveals how weak I am. It doesn't let me be self-sufficient. It doesn't, it doesn't allow me to rely on myself basically. But rather than remove the weakness, God said to him, Paul, *“‘My grace is all you need. My power does really good things in your weakness.’”* And it's, it's Paul's response that gets me the most, and I, we don't often in this teaching, we don't often get to Paul's response. But I think this is where... and this blows me away because then Paul responds, he says, *“So now, I can be glad to boast about my weakness, so that the power of Christ can work through me.”*

And it's the “so that” in that sentence that's going to be so powerful for us. Paul's now, he's gone from saying, take it away to now, okay, I can be glad to boast about the fact that I have weaknesses and shortcomings and lack and need. Because of that, I get to experience the power of Christ working through me. I get to experience the Holy Spirit, working through my weakness. So now he's saying, I'm free from feeling like it's all on me. The pressure to play Savior in the lives of the people I'm with and witnessing to is off. Now, I'm just a vessel of God's power. And so, what hope does that give us for our parenting today? Well, it's the Lord's gracious assurance to Paul, is the same very assurance that He gives to you and to me in our weaknesses as moms. So just like the Apostle Paul, can you imagine if we were willing to boldly respond, okay, so now I am glad to be honest with my children about my weakness. Now, I'm glad to be honest with my children about my mistakes and my lack, so that they can witness the divine power of Christ working through me. For when I confess I am weak, then I am finally strong. Now I get to experience the Holy Spirit working through me. Now I am free from feeling like it's all on me and I have to get it all right. I can partner with God and the work He wants to do in my kids, but the pressure to play their Savior is off. And accepting our weaknesses keeps us parenting from a posture of humility, with our hope not anchored in us, but with our hope anchored in God.

Now, again, you might be listening and thinking, man, that feels, that is such relief. Well, wait a second. Like, what about Proverbs 22:6? Right? What about that verse Jeannie? It says, *“Bring up a child by teaching him the way he should go and when he is old, he will not turn away from it.”* (NLV) So isn't that a guarantee that if I get this right, it'll turn out right? Isn't it like good parenting in and good kids

out? And isn't that what that Proverb is saying, and, and this is a great example of when Scripture creates pressure rather than relieving it because Proverbs aren't if-then promises, they are wise instructions for godly living. Oh man, and we should, we are wise to heed them. But in this case, the why and in this case, the wise instruction to us as parents is to identify and develop the unique personality, disposition and giftedness that God has uniquely stored in each one of our children, to His glory, and not ours. Right? And that's a whole other talk, parenting our children to the Father's glory, right, and not to our own glory.

So, when we read this, when we read this passage as a promise our mentality ends up being, *well, it's all about me, and if I get it mostly right, it'll turn out right and if I get it mostly wrong, they'll turn out wrong*. And if you've been parenting long enough, you know that you can do a lot of right things and then your children choose a path that you wouldn't have chosen for them. Or you can do a lot of wrong things and you're astonished by the way God can redeem it and restore it, right? This isn't a promise but when we read it is wise instruction then what happens is, we point our children in the right direction, remembering that they each have their own journey with God to take. Remembering that He is a good Father, who loves our children, and longs for them to put their trust in His Son and walk in His truth, even more than we do. And we will find great relief in God's sovereignty over our good days and over our bad days, and over all of our in between days. This is the freedom that we crave. When we can say it's not all about me, I am significant, but I am not sovereign, and I can trust my Father with the kids He has entrusted to me as I seek to raise them to His glory, and not mine. See, we have the honor, and we have the responsibility, responsibility, of guiding them in truth and teaching them that Jesus is the way the truth and the life and the only way to the Father, but friend, we can't make them believe it. Only the Holy Spirit can do that. So, we can lay that pressure down and trust God with the kids He's entrusted to us. We have the honor and the responsibility of partnering with God by planting seeds of faith in our kids' hearts, through praying together and reading God's Word and memorizing Scripture and in serving and worshiping, we can nurture our child's faith. But we have to remember that we do not control what those seeds produce. Oh, we can plant those seeds, friend, I plant seeds, but I can't produce the fruit. That's the Holy Spirit's job. See, all the relief that we long for is found in the promises of God. And again, I want to encourage you, because all of the pressures that we named in the beginning, we're going to go through each one of those week by week and apply the promises of God to the pressures that we face.

But in closing, I just want to read one more passage to encourage us. It's what Paul wrote in Philippians 1:6, and then verses 9-11. Let's read this together, he writes, "*And I am certain...*", not, not kind of certain, but really certain. "*I am certain that God who began the good work within you*", or *within your children*, "*will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.*" Right? It doesn't say it's finally finished on the day they graduate high school or the day they graduate from college. This is a, this is a lifetime work Jesus is doing in our children. It is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns. And then he writes, "*I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing and knowledge and understanding for I want you to understand what*

really matters. So that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ's return.” Now listen to this, he writes, *“May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation, the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ.”* Not the righteous character produced in your life by your parents. “the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ and this will bring much glory and praise” to who? “To God.” Not to me, not to you, but to God.

See, what we're given here is the assurance that it is God, not us, “who” began a good work in our kids, and it is God, not us, who will continue that work in their lives, He will not give up on them, He will see His work through until it is finally finished on the day when Jesus Christ returns. The righteous character that we so desperately, I so desperately want to see in my boys’ lives, it will be the fruit of their salvation, not the fruit of my hard work and handmade charts. It will be produced by Jesus Christ. Part of God's purpose is to produce character in the lives of His children. And all of this, I'll say it one more time because I think it's so important, all of this will bring much glory and praise, not to our parenting, but to God. And this is the good news for those of us who don't feel good enough. There is wild... friend, there is wild freedom awaiting this. For every pressure there is a promise that reminds us that God isn't depending on us to be the Holy Spirit for our children. We are significant, but He is sovereign.

Melissa Taylor: Wow, Jeannie, oh my goodness. As Meredith and I are both moms, in different stages of motherhood, Meredith has her kids wild and crazy in the house all over the place. Mine are out of the house, but in some ways, I feel like... I wanted to ask you something because this is definitely good news for parents who feel, who don't feel good enough. I don't know a parent who feels like they are good enough.

Meredith Brock: If I've ever met one, I don't know that she was my friend. Because I cannot relate in any way, shape or form.

MT: Not at all! Because I believe every single thing that you said and everything you taught on but then I ask myself, what's wrong with me? Do I not trust God enough? Why, if I know these truths, why is it such a struggle. Like you for sure know because you wrote this Bible study *Mom Set Free*. And so, what do you have to say for that struggle that continues?

JC: We are a forgetful people. Right? From Genesis to Revelation we are forgetful people. We are wired to question God and doubt His provision and His goodness. It's part of the human condition. And so that's why we have to keep going back to the Word of God and asking the Holy Spirit to illuminate the truth and to deposit that truth in the storehouses of our hearts. Because we forget, and because the enemy has so much fun with us throwing these lies at our hearts and in our minds so that we – ok so I have this visual right now. So we keep going back to clenched fist parenting. I feel it sometimes in my physical body like my clenched teeth and clenched fists that are “Oh but I'm trying so hard but it's not sticking, it's not working. I don't see the fruit of all that we've done in all of these years and it gets so

discouraging.” You know? It gets so heavy and so I just... Lord you’ve never not been faithful. I have to declare the truth. You’ve never not been faithful so I’m going to keep forgetting and you are going to keep being faithful.

MT: Right, right.

MB: Wow, that’s so good! We look back at all of Scripture and how many times the Israelites forgot, you know, over and over and over again. And God gave us things, Ebenezer’s stones, all the... He gave us the Word of God to go back and remember and how many times we don’t, I’m so guilty of it. I don’t go back and remember. I think that because of my childhood, the way that I grew up, I grew up with five, well there are six kids in my family, and so I had five siblings. That level of chaos often times, it’s just like each man for himself. You just fight it out, you take care of yourselves. And I think during my childhood I developed this sense of it’s up to me, you know? And I think so many of us, and I think our American way of thinking is, you know, pull yourself up by the bootstraps. It’s up to you. And we apply that same thinking to our parenting and I would go even broader: to our faith at large. This doesn’t just apply to parenting, it’s to – Ok, I need to become more like Jesus so I’m going to do these things when it’s only the Holy Spirit that can really change our hearts.

MT: Jeannie said we will fail.

MB: Yeah! Oh my gosh, yes!

JC: Every day for me.

MT: But then we know God doesn’t want us looking back and holding on to that failure as a definition of who you are as a parent or your kids aren’t behaving like you wish they would. You think, what did I do wrong?

MB: It’s you. It’s all on you now.

MT: Yes!

MB: Ok so I’m going to get really specific, Jeannie, I have a question for you. Well, our listeners, for those who have been with us for a while, I have three kids, two that are biological and one that is our little foster son who will have been with us for a year next week. You guys, it’s wild! But one of those pressures that you mentioned at the beginning has really, really – so this is like real time counseling, Jeannie, are you ready? The pressure of making – orchestrating a perfect future for my children, is—I’ve always felt that with my biological children, but I feel it even more intensely with my foster son because I don’t know, his future is so unknown, you guys. I mean, he could be gone next week and go back to his biological family, and that’s the goal of foster care. You want to reunify with their biological family.

But it has been a very intense season of worry for me. And I pray, and I pray, and I pray over him every night when I'm putting him to bed, I'm like Lord Jesus this little boy is yours. I did the same thing with my biological children obviously where I try to say I know I can't orchestrate their futures, but Jeannie, give our listeners, and me — this is really just for me, I'm asking. Help me. How can we deal with the worry, that actual physical, the thoughts that go through our minds, that actually, what you just said, “the clenching, white knuckle, I clench my jaws, I'm going to do this, I'm going to pull myself up by my bootstraps and make this happen?” What's a practical tip for our listeners that will help them deal with that moment, that kind of traumatic moment that they might find themselves in?

JC: Yeah, and that resonates with me. That's actually the reason, that's the very first one I read because I think that's the biggest pressure for me and for a lot of us. That pressure to orchestrate a good future for our kids. Or a perfect future for our children. It's why we feel the pressure from the day they're born. Is it organic pureed food or is it jarred food? The right stroller, and then the right preschool so they get into the right college. And so they get the perfect job and find the wife and get the fence. And it's just like the pressure, and there's this lie that if we don't follow all the right steps. I mean, I even feel it now, and it gets really practical. You know, should I sign him up for a lot of stuff or a little stuff. Should I try to let him play a lot of sports or only one sport? Should I give him freedom with devices or not because then they'll rebel and go crazy. There's all of these questions that bombard our minds all day long, right? And we feel like if we get those things right then their futures will look like what we pray and hope they'll look and if we get those things wrong, their futures won't look like we hoped and prayed what they would look. And this might sound like a, “Of course she said that answer”, but it's the truest thing I know, and that is for me, I go back to Scripture. I literally have to go —Proverbs 3:5-6. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Lean not on your own understanding of what your child's future can look like or should look like or needs to look like. But in everything you do, acknowledge Him, seek Him. Ask Him for wisdom. And He will guide your path. He will give you wisdom. He will give you what you need to parent the children He's entrusted you. And when you can't figure it out, remember that He already has. It's the truest thing I know. I literally said to my husband last night, I have decision fatigue.

MB: You and me both.

JC: I have decision — I cannot make one more decision for one of these five humans right now. We feel so overwhelmed right now where I'm like oh we didn't even talk about the other thing from last week that's still lingering that needs a decision. And if we don't make a decision, then X, Y, and Z could happen. That could be terrible. I mean, we feel the pressure right now to make so many good decisions on behalf and I just have to keep going back to the Lord and be like, I don't know what to do when it feels out of control, you remain in control. You are sovereign. This is the encouragement. He is working so much out that we have no idea about. So while I'm doing here scrambling and calendaring, if that's a word, orchestrating, lining things up, I just see my Heavenly Father so in control and so at peace and He's going “Daughter, do what you can, but trust me. I've got this covered.”

MB: I don't know about you, Melissa, but I feel like I could just [long sigh].

MT: I do too, because we need the Lord, but we need each other. What you have given to us today, you brought up Proverbs 3:5-6 and my child, my grown child who has walked away from the Lord somewhat, that's the life verse that we've been praying over this child since the day of birth. And so, look, you have encouraged Meredith and I personally and I know so many other people. Just keep the faith and keep holding on to God and going back to Scripture. It sounds so simple, but it's not. It is the truth.

MB: Our plumbline, and our anchor. Well thank you so much for coming on the show today, Jeannie. I know, like Melissa said, this is a message that I needed to hear but there are so many moms out there who needed to hear. I have no doubt that this is going to help our listeners take a deep breath and trust the Lord that He is in control. And real quick, I want our podcast listeners, will you do us a favor? Would you first, I'd like you to think about a friend, a mom friend right now who needs to hear this message. And just, shoot her the link real quick.

MT: Totally going to do it.

MB: Me too, me too! Because I have friends right in the trenches with me. Also, we would love, love, love if you would leave a review for this podcast because it helps – we love to hear your encouraging words, but you know there's this machine behind podcasts, there's this algorithm that as you get reviews, the podcast actually gets exposed more and we want to help as many moms, women learning to love and live for Jesus as we possibly can. So share it, it would mean so much to us.

MT: Right, right. And ok you guys know I need to talk about Online Bible Studies one more time, because I'm really passionate about exactly what Jeannie has talked about and that's knowing God's word and living God's Word and that comes from studying the Bible in community. And so, if you're a mom, I think you need this study *Mom Set Free*.

MB: I'm doing it!

MT: Well, you're in luck because we're going to do this study beginning September 7 here at Proverbs 31 Ministries. All you need to do is visit proverbs31.org/study. You can get signed up for free, and then visit our bookstore which is p31bookstore.com to purchase the Bible study *Mom Set Free* to make your study experience even richer.

MB: And if you're listening and you're not a mama, don't be discouraged! Don't you worry, we've got other goodies in store for you! The word on the street is *Mom Set Free* isn't the only Online Bible Study that's happening this September. We are also offering *The Dream of You* by Jo Saxton and you can sign up for this at proverbs31.org/study just like the other one. So we can't wait to have you join us. God has

something in store for you. A fresh word that you need to hear. Thank you so much friends for joining us. At Proverbs 31 we believe that when you know the truth and you live that truth out, it really will change everything.