

PRAISE FOR **Not Alone**

Living in a spiritually mismatched marriage represents one of the greatest challenges a couple can face. Lynn Donovan and Dineen Miller tackle the issue head-on with grace, honesty and a wealth of practical advice. I'm encouraged by their willingness to reach out to this often-overlooked segment of the Church.

Jim Daly

President, Focus on the Family

I was raised in a spiritually mismatched home and my own mother would have LOVED the wisdom, encouragement and practical help Lynn and Dineen offer in *Not Alone*. Raising children and tackling teens is hard enough in any environment but Lynn and Dineen offer help and hope so you always feel you are NOT ALONE!

Pam Farrel

Author of *Becoming a Brave New Woman*, *Men Are Like Waffles*, *Women Are Like Spaghetti* and *10 Best Decisions a Woman Can Make*

Pick up your favorite highlighter because *Not Alone* is one of those rare books full of practical wisdom that you will want to read, reread, bookmark and highlight. While this book is aimed at parents in spiritually unequal marriages, Lynn and Dineen offer godly insight and encouragement for *all* parents. I finished this book feeling, as a sometimes worried mom, that I'm not alone, that my earnest prayers can move God to act, and that He always has my back.

Susy Flory

New York Times bestselling author and a mom of two

This dynamic duo's use of Scripture, prayers, transparent real-life stories and personal study questions is powerful. They have truly walked through the valley that women in spiritually mismatched marriages are in and they offer a firm hope. This is a must-read for women who are seeking wisdom and guidance as they raise their children in the midst of marital challenges.

Courtney Joseph

Author of *Women Living Well* and WomenLivingWell.org

For every mother who has silently wondered, *Am I enough?* authors Lynn Donovan and Dineen Miller point you to the very One who is. You don't have to be in a spiritually mismatched home to appreciate their wisdom and tender companionship on this holy ground called "motherhood." If I could place this book in the hands of mothers everywhere, I would.

Joanne Kraft

Author of *Just too Busy—Taking Your Family on a Radical Sabbatical*

When I think of Lynn Donovan and Dineen Miller, these are the words that come to mind: *sincere, passionate, godly, humble and accessible*. If you're in a spiritually mismatched marriage and you worry about your kids, you've come to the right place. These girlfriends will wrap you up in a hug, they'll tell you the truth and they'll point you to Jesus. They were so right to title this book *Not Alone* because when you're done reading, you'll know and believe that you're not alone on this journey; God is with you and He's got you.

Susie Larson

Radio Host, Speaker, and Author of *Your Beautiful Purpose*

I've walked the road of being in a spiritually mismatched marriage. When I was in my most desperate time of clinging to God, my kids' father was running away. Oh how I wish I would've had *Not Alone* to hold in my hands to combat that feeling of desperation and isolation. With comfort, grace and been-there wisdom, Lynn and Dineen will walk you through with hope—not only for you, but for your kids as well.

Kathi Lipp

Author of *21 Ways to Connect with Your Kids* and *Can I Get Some Help Here—Prayers and Practical Steps When Your Kids Don't Go According to Plan*

I have high hopes for my kids—but perhaps the greatest hope of all is that I want them to know and love Jesus in a way that’s authentic and real. Dineen Miller and Lynn Donovan clearly understand the heart’s desires of moms like me. *Not Alone* gives moms a resource of practical help and warm encouragement so that they can prayerfully and practically raise kids who not only know Jesus, but also love Jesus wholeheartedly.

Erin MacPherson

Author of *The Christian Mama’s Guide* series

Having spent a lot of time as the spiritual leader in my own home, I know how lonely it can feel. *Not Alone* is an invigorating source of hope and grace that calls women to godly parenting and guides them as they entrust their children’s spiritual well-being to the Father, the ultimate parenting partner.

Nicole O’Dell

Founder of Choose NOW Ministries and host of Choose NOW Radio

Passing down faith to your children is especially challenging when only one parent believes. Yet, as the title says, you are not alone! These authors and mothers know exactly what you’re going through. They can help you navigate the years ahead with hope, grace and clarity.

Arlene Pellicane

Author of *31 Days to a Happy Husband*

I love this book! Lynn and Dineen don’t just encourage women—they *empower* them to raise faith-focused children in a secular world. Their excitement is contagious—their wisdom runs deep. Whether you’re a single mom or in a mismatched relationship, *Not Alone* is chock-full of practical insight for passionate parenting.

Darlene Schacht

Author of *The Good Wife’s Guide* and coauthor of the *New York Times* bestseller *Reshaping It All*

In *Not Alone*, Dineen Miller and Lynn Donovan weave biblical insight together with their own stories as they help mothers discover hope, faith and courage to not only leave a legacy of faith as they passionately parent their children, but also to understand they are not alone in their journey. Although written for women who are in spiritually unequal marriages, are single moms or widowed moms, *Not Alone* will benefit all moms who read it. This is a great resource for small groups and I'm honored to recommend it.

Stephanie Shott

Author, speaker and founder of The M.O.M. Initiative

LYNN DONOVAN
& DINEEN MILLER

Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

—JESUS CHRIST (MARK 10:14, NASB)

Not Alone

Trusting God
to Help You Raise
Godly Kids
In a Spiritually
Mismatched
Home



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To Brad and Caitie, Rachel and Leslie,
and to our Abba Father,
who holds all of us in the palm of His hand.

Contents

Acknowledgments.....	11
Foreword	13
Introduction	17
Lynn’s Story.....	21
Dineen’s Story.....	25
1. Extraordinary Kids	31
<i>Trusting God to Make Up the Difference</i>	
2. Heaven’s Kids.....	43
<i>Will My Kids Go to Heaven?</i>	
3. Equipped Kids	57
<i>Teaching Kids the Power of Prayer and the Strength of the Sword</i>	
4. Churched Kids.....	69
<i>Yes Church, No Church, We All Don’t Want to Go to Church</i>	
5. Peaceful Kids	81
<i>Saying No When the World (and Dad) Says Yes</i>	
6. Generous Kids.....	99
<i>Inspiring Kids to Have an “Others” Mindset</i>	
7. Authentic Kids.....	111
<i>“Real Deal” Faith Leads to “Real Deal” Kids</i>	
8. Triumphant Kids	125
<i>Praying for Our Kids: Their Friends, Their Safety and Their Future</i>	
9. Challenging Kids.....	137
<i>Handling Tough Questions, Confusing Situations and Special Needs</i>	
10. Legacy Kids.....	149
<i>Jesus for the Generations</i>	
Conclusion: The End of a Story	161

Appendix 1:	
Rebellion and the Prodigal Adult	165
Appendix 2:	
Scripture Index: My Identity in Christ	173
Appendix 3:	
Prayers for Moms and Prayers for Our Kids	177
Appendix 4:	
Bringing Faith Home: Family-Faith Traditions and Projects	185
Appendix 5:	
Leader's Guide Small Group Study.....	191
Member Class Form	201
Small Group Agreement.....	202

Acknowledgments

Dear Reader, we want to thank you. So many of you have walked this spiritually mismatched journey with us from our first book, *Winning Him Without Words*, and from our ministry site, www.SpirituallyUnequalMarriage.com. We have watched God turn our online presence into a beautiful community that was birthed out of common trials and challenges and is now moving forward into victories, stronger faith and deeper relationship with our amazing Savior Jesus.

In that beautiful growth God brought us together with our multi-talented editor Kim Bangs, an amazing woman who is a font of inspiration and a blessing to all she meets. We are privileged to call her a dear friend too. And from this friendship has come a stunning relationship with our publisher, Regal Books/Gospel Light. Their staff is a sensational group of people—Bill Grieg, Stan Jantz, Tasha Ruffing, Jackie Medina, Mark Weising, Rob Williams, Carol Eide and the entire sales staff, just to name a few. This amazing team has prayed over us and committed its time and energies to support us and our ministry. Each of these people walks with heartfelt conviction and true callings to serve God in their unique talents. We are so incredibly blessed by them.

And as in our first book, we could not move forward without the approval of our family, out of respect and love for them. Our children—Rachel, Leslie, Brad and Caitie—have eagerly shared stories and reminders with us, their sometimes forgetful moms, about how God has shown up in the funniest of places—in the car ride home, in a home full of love and tacos, in a sock fight, and in so many tears and hugs. God has been so incredibly faithful to us.

As we've walked the path of motherhood, our appreciation for our own mothers has increased tenfold. These two precious women have spoken words of love, have shed tears of joy and pain, and have prayed over us through the years. Both of us are

so grateful to our mothers, each of whom took the negatives of her past and determined to make them positives in her daughter's future. To our moms, you are such an inspiration to us.

And finally, we save the best for last, because who knows better how to finish things than our precious Lord and Savior Jesus? Lord, thank You for this amazing journey that continues to astonish and astound us. You are truly the beginning and the end. Thank You for allowing us to be an integral part of the middle. We adore You.

Foreword

How ever you got here, here you are. I know this sounds a bit like a Suessism but it is simply truth. At times we all find ourselves wondering, *How did I ever get here?* But the how isn't the question. The question we should ask ourselves is, *What will I do now that I am here?*

How you came to be raising your amazing children in a spiritually mismatched relationship isn't the issue you need to be most concerned about. Dear friend, simply ask yourself, *Now what will I do?* Or even better, *How now shall I live?*

Parents come in all varieties: single, married, blended, adoptive, foster . . .but all are still parents. And all face the same truth—parenting is hard work! For those who are parenting and missing a spiritual connection with the other parent, the challenge is even greater.

If you are holding this book, I know two things about you already: (1) You are committed to honoring Christ in the way in which you raise your children, and (2) You are much tougher and much more able than you think.

You, friend, are a lot like the two authors of this book.

A few years ago at a writer's conference I led a workshop on developing great proposals that would cause publishers to sit up and take notice. Later that afternoon I had a fifteen-minute appointment with one of the attendees—one that would change my life forever.

When Lynn Donovan sat down to talk to me about the book she and her coauthor, Dineen Miller, were proposing, I was immediately impressed by their passion for the audience of the book—women just like them who find themselves (for whatever reason) in spiritually mismatched relationships. Long before either of them had thought of or dreamed of writing a book, they had developed a web-based ministry for these women—an already well-established ministry that has continued to flourish over the years since Lynn and I met.

I received the proposal, did my prep work, prayed up a storm and walked into Regal's publishing board meeting ready to present it. I believe I uttered two sentences from my well-prepared presentation before two of our sales associates—both women, on the phone from other parts of the country—offered their thoughts on what a great need there is in the church to minister to these women, and how many women are in this situation . . . and on and on they went. Gratefully, our team agreed to offer a contract to Lynn and Dineen for their first Regal book, *Winning Him Without Words*.

In the process of working on the first book, I learned that Lynn and Dineen had never actually met in person! So I arranged for them to come to my hometown, meet me, some of our team, some of my friends and each other!

After meeting Dineen I saw the same passion in her for ministry that I had seen in Lynn. These two are “cut from the same cloth,” as it were. They don't write from a place of observation, they write from a place of life experience. Both are married to amazing men who have yet to take up their spiritual journey. However, their marriages, not without challenges, are thriving.

Not only have Lynn and Dineen both journeyed down the path of a spiritually mismatched relationship, they have each raised two children while doing it—children who have encountered life along the way, have had struggles and yet are thriving. You'll read much more about their children in the pages of this book.

Again, this is not a book written by two field experts or those who have observed women in spiritually mismatched relationships. These two women live life (very well) in the trenches alongside you each and every day.

You will find rich food from the Word of God in these pages and prayers to help your heart as you call out to God for wisdom, but you'll also find transparency, vulnerability and such practical wisdom that you will close the book knowing you can thrive too!

It is an honor to partner with Lynn and Dineen in their mission to develop a community of support and prayer for women in spiritually mismatched marriages. Since the time we

Foreword

reviewed their first proposal, we have been astounded by the ways God has used them to bless others. Doors have opened before them to reach more and more and God has given them incredible opportunities to share the truth. I feel like we've only begun to see what God will do.

Has this all happened because Lynn and Dineen are so special? (And they are.) No, it is because they realized, as you will too, that . . .

- The first order of life is to be committed to honoring the Lord.
- The second is to see that God has equipped you with what you need to do the task at hand.
- And, of course, the third is to step out in faith and do it!

As close to seven billion of us now journey through life on this tiny planet, I am grateful every day that by God's grace and plan our three lives intersected. As I mentioned, my first meeting with Lynn changed my life forever. I didn't know it at the time but I do now. As honored as I am to partner with them to get their messages out in book form, I am much more honored and humbled to call these two amazing legend women of God my friends and fellow prayer warriors.

You dear sister are not alone—never, ever, ever alone. The God who created the universe walks with you each and every day. He will give you what you need to thrive. Wisdom, miracles, friends—all you need He will amply provide.

On this journey, no matter our circumstances, we are truly **NOT ALONE!**

From one of the seven billion on the journey,

Kim Bangs
Senior Manager, Regal Books

Extraordinary Kids

Trusting God to Make Up the Difference

Dineen

Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. Such confidence we have through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

2 CORINTHIANS 3:1-6

Discovery

My dear friend, again, I wish I could talk to you in person over that cup of coffee or tea. Walk with me a little further, and take your time answering the following questions with prayerful consideration. Remember, you are not alone.

1. In hearing the answers people gave to the question, “Am I enough . . . ?” did a particular area of struggle or doubt resonate with you? How would you answer this question?

2. Besides Gideon, can you think of a biblical character who doubted whether he or she had what it took to do what God asked? Go and read that person’s story now.

3. Sit in a quiet place and meet with Abba. Make a list of the doubts and fears you have about raising your kids to know Jesus. Ask God to show you a verse to counter each of your concerns. Take your time doing this, and allow God to drench you in the truth and the many promises in His Word.

4. Write down on index cards two of the Scriptures you found, and this week focus on them, memorize them and use them to pray over and for your children. Next week write down two more, and each week thereafter do the same. What changes do you see already because of doing this?

5. What is one thing you can do on a daily basis to model your faith to your children? If your children are pre-teens, teens, or even adults, how can you be a mentor in their lives?

6. Start a list of areas in your children's lives that you want to pray about regularly. As you work through this book, add to this list as you feel God leading you.

TWO

Heaven's Kids

Will My Kids Go to Heaven?

Lynn

*Train up a child in the way he should go:
and when he is old, he will not depart from it.*

PROVERBS 22:6, KJV

Discovery

Mom, allow me to affirm you today. As a mother, you have a high and holy calling, with a mission to impact your children's souls. Take a moment and ask God to meet you here in these questions, to bring you affirmation, resolution and encouragement. Remember, Mom, there's no way to be a perfect mother, and a million ways to be a great one.

1. Think about the birth of each of your children. Recall the day that each one arrived. Now thank God for each of your children. Write down their names and then write out prayers of thanks. Then, next to each child's name, write out the hopes you have for that kid's faith, relationships and future.

2. How have you intentionally modeled your faith to your children?

3. What Scripture verses bring you comfort and encouragement in your parenting?

4. This week take five minutes every day to stop and enrich your personal relationship with Jesus. Pray, asking the Lord to lavish His love upon you and to help you become a child who receives the love of her Father.

5. What is one thing you want to start doing to grow in your relationship with Jesus?

6. In your daily living, how does your love for Jesus impact your children?

7. This week make a commitment to pray daily for each of your children by name. Determine to discover one area in which each child is struggling, and commit to pray for a breakthrough in that area. Write out this prayer.



THREE

Equipped Kids

Teaching Kids the Power of Prayer and
the Strength of the Sword

Lynn

Bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

EPHESIANS 6:4

Discovery

We have opportunities every day to share our faith with our children. I've found this part of parenting to be a rich adventure. I'm often surprised and delighted by the Lord as He arranges a spontaneous moment for me to share His love or a truth and His holy Word with my family. Join me now, and let's come up with a few more ideas on how to share prayer and the Bible with our kids.

1. As a mom, how do you model to your kids prayer and Bible reading as part of your relationship with God? How are you intentional in this area?

2. Is it possible to be the spiritual leader of your home and also to honor your husband as the leader in other areas? What does that look like in your daily life? Consider whether you need to make some changes in this area of your marriage relationship.

3. Look up Deuteronomy 6:6-7. How does this passage inspire you today? What would living out this passage on an everyday basis look like?

4. Describe an effective intentional moment in which you purposefully shared your faith, the Bible or prayer with your child/children?

5. Describe a catchable moment. How did it arise, and how did you respond to it?

6. Describe a moment that you missed. Pray now, and ask the Lord to make you keenly aware of these kinds of moments in the future.

7. Write down (or share) a few ideas for creating intentional moments that you would like to implement in your home.

Note

1. Resurrection Eggs can be purchased through the ministry of Family Life at www.familylife.com.



FOUR

Churched Kids

Yes Church, No Church,
We All Don't Want to Go to Church

Lynn

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

HEBREWS 10:24-25

Discovery

Mom, let this chapter encourage you as you live in the body of Christ. With all the church's imperfections, God still works miracles in and through His people. I also will ask you again to extend grace. There are Sundays when it's appropriate for you to skip church to spend time with your husband or to do things as a family. But keep Sunday morning church with the kids a consistent and high priority. As the Scriptures tell us, "Let us . . . not give up meeting together" (Heb. 10:24-25), because it's beautiful in the Lord's house.

1. Before moving further in this discovery, this is the time for you to truly contemplate and pray about your commitment to a church body. Ask yourself if you are part of a Spirit-filled church where you and your children can thrive. If you aren't sure or you are unsettled about attending church, pray and ask God for His direction and guidance in this area. Finding a church that fills your and your children's spirits takes time, effort, sometimes lots of visits and Holy Spirit-inspired prayer. Pray now if you need to. Pray every day until you are settled into a body of believers. Write your prayer.

2. Think about some of the conflict you've faced on a past Sunday morning as you prepared to leave for church. What were some of the flash points? Were they internal (disappointed expectations)? Were they with your spouse or your kids?

3. What are some actions steps you can take to manage your disappointment and your unmet expectations of yourself and others as related to church?

4. Using your answers to question number two, what can you do differently in the future to defuse conflicts with your spouse over church attendance?

5. List action steps you can take to help your children be ready for church on Sunday mornings.

6. What is the payoff of being in church? Describe the benefits of attending church that you recognize in your children today. What do you want for your children and their involvement in church in the future? Finally, how can you pray for your children and their church experience?

Peaceful Kids

Saying No When the World (and Dad) Says Yes

Dineen

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

PHILIPPIANS 4:8-9

Discovery

Hi there, my fellow mom. I know there's a lot to think about in this chapter. But my prayer for you, even as I wrote this, was that you would not be overwhelmed but empowered! Being the spiritual leader in our homes isn't easy, I know, but you have the Creator of the universe partnering with you. And He wants your children to know Him and walk into their full potential in Christ even more than you do. Take a moment to pray for God's leading and wisdom, and then let's talk some more in the questions below. Remember, I'm rooting for you!

1. What challenges are you facing at home regarding media choices, influences in your child's life and areas in which you and Dad don't agree? Ask God to show you which things you need to take a stand for. Then ask Him to give you the words and the right timing for approaching either your spouse, your children or both in order to explain your perspective. Also ask God to prepare their hearts to hear you. Be of courage! God has your back (see Isa. 58:11).

2. Some issues seem to crop up over and over again, such as which movies your children can watch or which games they can play. My girls always complained that they were the only ones who weren't allowed to watch R-rated movies as teenagers (they later thanked me for this). Each time they griped, I reminded them of the importance of what we allowed into our minds and hearts. Is there an ongoing issue in your family about which a more detailed understanding of your perspective might help your children accept that a no answer really is for their benefit and not to punish them?

3. Consider your children's daily schedule. What seem to be the priorities in your kids' lives? Do adjustments need to be made? Pray and seek God's wisdom, and talk to your children. Talk to Dad too. Are your kids feeling stretched too thin? If so, ask them what they'd like to let go of in order to simplify their lives. Explain to them that God wants only His best in their daily lives.

4. Dear one, this is for you. So often when we teach our children these truths, we see things in our own lives that need a little tweaking. Is God nudging your heart over something? Have a chat with Him, and see what He wants to tell you.



SIX

Generous Kids

Inspiring Kids to Have an “Others” Mindset

Dineen

*A generous person will prosper;
whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.*

PROVERBS 11:25

Discovery

My precious friend, I'll bet that you do more to model generosity to your children than you realize. When I reflected back on my daughter giving away her birthday money, I remembered that just a few weeks before, I'd given a homeless family the ten-dollar bill I had in my wallet—money I'd earned selling one of my novels. Part of me wanted some of the cash for myself, but when I saw this family, I couldn't hold back. My daughter had done the same. God has an amazing way of softening our hearts at just the right time and then taking our small offerings and turning them into rich blessings for the recipients, and especially for the giver. Walk through a few more questions and thoughts with me. My heart is yours. I freely give it to you.

1. Make a list of your favorite stories from the New Testament, then pick one that shows Jesus' heart for people, no matter who they are. Read that story as a bedtime story to your children (or at a time that suits your family time best). Have fun with it; act it out. Ask your kids what they think Jesus wanted the people in the story to learn. Then ask them what they think Jesus wants them to learn. Then read through your new list of stories in days to come!

2. I shared with you my journey to loving people. I can look back and see how vital this journey was for my future in serving others and to give me a heart for women who are walking similar paths to my own. How about you? Do you see an area in your life in which God is calling you to love others specifically? How can you model this for your kids?

3. One of my favorite “generosity projects” that my daughter and I have done together is to support a World Vision child. My daughter allotted part of her allowance to help support a little boy in Zimbabwe who is HIV positive. The reports we receive on this little guy give us visual proof that we are making a difference in his life. (At the time of editing this book, we found out he now knows Jesus!) What project could you and your kids do together? Think outside the box, and don’t limit your project to money. We can give of our time, our energy and our talents. One idea is to draw pictures and cards for the elderly in a nearby retirement home. What a way to bless others!

4. Do you believe that God is faithful to you and your children? If you struggle in this area, I encourage you to pray about it. Ask God to show you times when He’s been faithful to you that perhaps you have never recognized. Write these down in a journal, and continue adding to them. That way when you wonder or doubt, you can go back and read the stories. For further affirmation, read the following Scriptures, which give just a glimpse of God’s faithful character: 1 Corinthians 1:9, Romans 3:3-4, Deuteronomy 7:9, Psalm 33:4 and Psalm 91:3-6.



SEVEN

Authentic Kids

“Real Deal” Faith Leads to “Real Deal” Kids

Dineen

Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, “What then is this child going to be?” For the Lord’s hand was with him.

LUKE 1:66

Discovery

My friend, I hope you're feeling more and more empowered as you've worked through each chapter and answered the study questions. I'm praying for that. Even as I asked God for the words for this chapter, I prayed that you would find encouragement and strength in the stories I've shared with you. You're more than halfway through the book now. Just walk with us a little further, and let us love on you a while longer. God has all your concerns in His most capable hands. You can trust that fact for yourself and for your beautiful children.

1. When you think about your children's future, what do you imagine for them? Pray and ask God to show you what gifts and talents He's placed in them. Start a journal for your kids (maybe even a separate one for each child) so that you can write these down along with additional insights that God will give you as your children grow.

2. Every January I ask God for a specific Scripture to pray for each of my daughters throughout the year. I love sharing these with them. Ask God for specific Scriptures and issues to pray over for your children. Be sure to write these down too in the journal you started.

3. I mentioned earlier in this chapter the list of Scriptures in the back of this book. Use this index, “My Identity in Christ,” to help you and your children understand who each of you are in Jesus. When my girls were tweens, I taped a copy of these Scriptures to the wall in each of their rooms. Take a verse a week, working your way down through the list and praying these vital truths over you and your family.

4. Ask God to help you see the unique gifts He has placed in your children, and ask Him for the wisdom to help you nurture these gifts in your kids. This is another detail of importance to add to that journal. Imagine what a wonderful gift you will have to give your kids on their first day at college or on their wedding day.

5. One thing I’ve become diligent about doing is writing down those moments when God visibly moves in my life or my family. Like the stories about Leslie’s movie request or Rachel’s chair. Be sure to write these kinds of happenings down in your child’s journal. They’ll be precious stories to read to your kids as they get older and a beautiful legacy for your children to share with your grandchildren.

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you, _____, with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, _____, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you, _____, may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.



EIGHT

Triumphant Kids

Praying for Our Kids: Their Friends,
Their Safety and Their Future

Lynn

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

ROMANS 12:21

Discovery

Mom, set aside your unfolded laundry for a moment. Grab a hot or cold tea and your Bible, and join me as we discover a few aspects of God's faithfulness. "Mothers hold their children's hands for a short while but their hearts forever" (author unknown).

1. Describe an environment that you would consider a "safe place to land" for your children.

2. Can you remember someone's home from your childhood that was an "open-door home" in which kids were welcome? Consider what unique aspects and people contributed to that feeling you had of being welcome. What are those aspects? Can you bring them into your home?

3. Write down each of your children's names. Under their names write down their best friend's name, then follow that with the names of the kids who spend a significant amount of time with your children and/or those who bear influence upon them. Use this as a prayer prompt in your quiet time with the Lord.

4. This week ask your children about their friends. Ask your children how you could pray for their friendships. Pray for their concerns this week. Give God thanks for answers to prayer, and share those answers with your son or daughter.

5. Consider what attributes you are hoping for in your children's future spouses, their in-laws and their marriage relationships. Write these down and then date your paper and save it. In the future, such as on your child's wedding day, you can look back upon this list and experience God's faithfulness.

6. Look up Matthew 19:14-15. What does this passage say to you?



NINE

Challenging Kids

Handling Tough Questions, Confusing
Situations and Special Needs

Dineen

*Those who are victorious will inherit all this,
and I will be their God and they will be my children.*

REVELATION 21:7

Discovery

My dear fellow mom, thank you for walking through this chapter with me. I think this was the most emotional one, because it tapped some tender areas in my heart. I pray with the depths of my love for you that it brings you comfort and hope. We need that in our rough times, don't we? Especially when our child's struggle is ongoing. Take heart, my friend. God is with you all the way. He knows your needs and will take care of you.

1. Take your time looking up these Scriptures, and let them settle into your heart. Use more than one translation if it will help you get an even deeper understanding of what and who our hope is. Jot down next to each verse what you want most to remember.

Jeremiah 29:11:

Isaiah 40:31:

Psalms 25:4-5:

Romans 5:5:

Romans 8:24-25:

2. What have been the most challenging questions that your children have asked you? Are you grappling to answer such a question right now? Ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom, for guidance from key Scriptures and for a friend or mentor at church who can help you.

3. Are you trying to handle everything on your own? Write down everything that you're dealing with. How about joining a women's group for Bible study and prayer support to keep you from getting isolated? I know that's hard to do, especially when you feel that you're barely keeping your head above water, but trust me, it's the best thing for you. Let some ladies love on you and support you with prayer.

4. Think of several ways that you and your kids can have some fun, even if it's in your own back yard. Make a list. Enter your child's world with the goal to play and laugh together. No agenda, no lectures, no worrying. Ask God to bless this time and to give you more opportunities to do this.

5. Are you in tune with those precious moments that make all the difference in our lives? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you be more aware so that you don't miss out on them. More moments to add to your journal!



TEN

Legacy Kids

Jesus for the Generations

Lynn

Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands.

DEUTERONOMY 7:9

My Beloved _____,

I have loved you and your children since before you were born. I have treasured you and have been walking with you long before you knew I was there.

I stayed with you in the delivery room when you pushed through your labor. I stood near your head and marveled at the plans for this tiny life you were birthing, knowing that you were chosen to be this child's mother.

When you tickled your baby's feet and when giggles filled your heart, your laughter was worship in My ears.

I stood present in your child's bedroom when your brow was furrowed with deep lines of worry. You wiped the child to cool the fever as I held your child's hand and watched you work and whisper desperate prayers.

I heard every word.

When your little one waved to you on the first day of school, your tears I saw. You didn't know it, but at My command a

legion of angels walked with that small one through the door of the school.

I saw the cruelty of teasing and bullying by other kids on the playground. And when your small one cried himself to sleep, I was the One who gently kissed the tears from his cheek and whispered words of joy and hope for his future into his dreams that night.

It was I who cheered with you, my beloved, at your child's first step, at her discovery of puppies and mud pies. It was I who watched over her while she slept and who thrilled with a proud chuckle at her first crush.

My love soared at your child's baptism, and My righteous anger flared when the enemy spoke lies of deception and destruction into our beautiful child.

When you failed or you didn't get a parenting moment quite right or even when sin caused pain or harm to those in your care, please know that every one of those moments I have redeemed. From those failures I will shine bright. I will use your child's pain to draw him to Me in his adult years.

I know you have felt overwhelmed, uncertain and ill-equipped for this mission of mothering, but I assure you that I stand at your side to love and protect you and those you treasure most. I love your children with a depth and ferocity you cannot conceive of this side of heaven.

Never doubt for one second that I am beside you. I am whispering words of wisdom into your ears, and when you feel all alone in training up your child, stop and allow yourself to feel My embrace. I am all around you, and I will never leave you nor forsake you.

Every effort, action, correction, instruction and emotion you pour into your children will prove itself out in the future. That is My promise. Cling to that in the difficult days. It is all worth it.

Beloved mother, you are the chosen one.

Your mission field is a divine calling, to which none other can compare. Your mothering is far more important to Me than feeding the hungry or serving in church or supporting missions to other countries. Your mission field is your home; it

is your husband and your children. This mission is for life, and this mission is eternal.

Your mission is love.

This is your high and holy calling.

And this is My Word: your children will rise and call you blessed. Your husband, your children's father, will praise you, and, chosen mother of My heart, your strength, love and worship of Me will rise up, and you will surpass them all.

Your name and those of your children are written upon My heart.

—The Lord God Almighty

Discovery

1. Read Acts 16:1-2. In verse 1 of this passage we discovered a spiritually mismatched relationship. In the second verse Timothy is described. How is he perceived by the people

of the nearby towns? How does this passage reflect on Timothy's mother and grandmother?

2. Has 2 Corinthians 6:14 been a stumbling block in your faith walk? Please describe how.

3. Look up Romans 8:1. Write it down. Then pray and ask God to place this passage in perspective and to allow you to live without condemnation and to walk in freedom.

4. Take time to do a search and/or to research passages of Scripture that speak to those who live in spiritually mismatched marriages. List them.

5. I shared with you how the passage in 2 Timothy 1:7 was a lifeline for me. What passage or passages have proven to be your lifeline?

Visit our website (www.MismatchedandThriving.com) and print out “The Letter to My Chosen Mother.” Write your name on the letter. Read it out loud now, and then tuck it into your Bible. Read it often, and allow the Lord to affirm you, Mom.

APPENDIX 2

Scripture Index: My Identity in Christ

Dineen

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

LUKE 4:18-19

My friend, take your time and work through this list of Scripture verses that are not only for your children but for you as well. So many of us walk through life without fully understanding that we belong totally and completely to Jesus and that in Him we are new creations with completely new identities. Jesus doesn't make us clean up our act first either. In fact, He came specifically to set the prisoners and captives free, meeting people right where they are. That means you and me and everyone we love and meet.

You are:

- A citizen of heaven (Eph. 2:6; Phil. 3:20)
- A friend of God (John 15:14-15)
- A joint heir with Christ (Rom. 8:17, *NKJV*)
- A new creation (2 Cor. 5:17)
- A soldier (2 Tim. 2:3-4)
- Able to do all things through Christ (Phil. 4:13)

- Accepted (Rom. 15:7)
- Adequate (2 Cor. 3:5, *NASB*)
- Adopted as God's child (Eph. 1:5)
- An overcomer (1 John 5:4-5)
- Beautiful (Song of Songs 1:15)
- Beloved (Deut. 33:12)
- Bold and confident (Eph. 3:12, *NKJV*)
- Bought with a price and belonging to God (1 Cor. 6:20)
- Cherished (Ps. 83:3)
- Chosen (Col. 3:12)
- Christ's Bride (Rev. 21:9)
- Complete in Christ (Col. 2:10, *NASB*)
- Dead to sin and alive to God (Rom. 6:11)
- Delivered (2 Cor. 1:9-10)
- Encouraged (2 Thess. 2:16-17)
- Equipped (2 Tim. 3:17)
- Established, anointed and sealed by God (2 Cor. 1:21-22, *NASB*)
- Favored (Ps. 84:11)
- Given power, love and a sound mind (2 Tim. 1:7)
- God's child (John 1:12; Rom. 8:14-16)
- God's fellow worker (1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 6:1)
- God's holy people (Eph. 1:1)
- God's witness (Acts 1:8)
- God's workmanship (Eph. 2:10)
- Hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3:3)
- Holy (Heb. 10:10)
- Inscribed on the palm of God's hand (Isa. 49:16, *NKJV*)
- Justified (1 Cor. 6:11; Rom. 5:1)
- Known (Ps. 139:1)
- Made by God (Ps. 100:3)
- Made righteous (2 Cor. 5:21)
- Never forsaken (Heb. 13:5)
- One with God (John 17:23, *NKJV*)
- Perfect and complete (Jas. 1:2-4, *NKJV*)
- Prayed for (Rom. 8:27)
- Qualified to share Christ's inheritance (Col. 1:12)
- Redeemed (Gal. 3:13; Col. 1:14)

- Renewed (2 Cor. 4:16)
- Spiritually minded (Rom. 8:6)
- Sure that all things work together for good (Rom. 8:28)
- The light of the world (Matt. 5:14)
- The salt of the earth (Matt. 5:13)
- The temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19)
- Unable to be separated from God's love (Rom. 8:35-37)
- Under no condemnation (Rom. 8:1)
- United with the Lord and one spirit with Him (1 Cor. 6:17)
- Valued (Matt. 6:26)
- Victorious (1 Cor. 15:57)
- Washed, sanctified and justified (1 Cor. 6:11)

APPENDIX 3

Prayers for Moms and Prayers for Our Kids

Prayers for You, Our Fellow Moms

God, equip this mother with the diligence to go to You on behalf of her children. When she is in doubt of the power she possesses, remind her that You have entrusted her with these precious ones and that she herself brings holiness to her home and to her children. God, remind her of the battle that wages for her children. Help her to remember that all You ask of her is that she be faithful and diligent to “train up a child in the way he should go” (Prov. 22:6). Release her from any fear of her children’s choices as adults. Let her not fear what the future may hold but let her hang on to the fact that she has the ability to make an impact on her kids through her example and through her precious prayers as a mother. Give this mom a verse to remind her of what You have called her to do.

When she doubts her role, flood her with reminders through Scripture, friends and encouragement to fight the good fight! Remind her that she is a seed planter and that the godly people You bring into her children’s lives are the ones who will water, and that You will grow them into what You have called them to be.

—SHELLY WEAVER

My Abba Father, I pray with an overflowing and earnest heart for every mother who loves You and who loves her children that she will find encouragement in Your presence. Lord, fill her up with energy on her difficult days. Reveal to her the great value of her efforts regularly so that she will maintain her focus

and will continue the mission You have decreed for her. Speak gentle words of love to her when she is scared, worried, tired or hormonal. Lord, surround her with Your people to speak wisdom, laughter and hope into her as a mother.

Father, from this day forward let this beautiful and precious mother never forget that her high and holy calling surpasses all others in her life, and remind her that she will have a lasting impact on the world through her offspring for generations to come.

Protect her from the lies of the enemy. Bless her with provision, abundance and delight. Let her see the love notes that You send to her every day. Fill her life with adventure, laughter, promise, skills, unending energy and a will to serve You and her family with the love of Christ. Show her how very proud of her You are, and let her walk fully in her God-given identity as a child of the Most High God.

—LYNN DONOVAN

Prayers for Our Children

Lord, I pray that You would handpick every one of my children's friends, that each one would be loyal and honest and would walk with integrity so as to be a good influence on my kids. I pray that my children will be a good influence on their friends as well—the presence and aroma of Christ. If any friend in my children's lives is a negative or evil influence, please change this person's heart or take this person out of my kids' lives. Lord, help my children to treat their friends with kindness, respect and consideration. Help them to walk with integrity of heart, as David did.

—DINEEN MILLER

This is what I pray on the nights when I put my young boys to bed:

*Dear Lord, thank You for _____, _____ and _____.
Thank You for Your love for them and Your special plan for*

each of their lives. Please bless them and keep them, and lead them all their days. May they always know Your great love for them.

The last line I find especially important. That is the one thing everything hinges on, because it is when we lose sight of how much God loves us that we tend to fall away from Him. But even when life's not fun, if we can still feel His love, it makes all the difference.

—GILLIAN RUSSELL MEISNER

I like to pray Ephesians 1:16-20:

I thank God for you. I pray for you, _____, constantly, asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you, _____, spiritual wisdom and insight so that you, _____, might grow in your knowledge of God. I pray that your heart will be flooded with light so that you, _____, can understand the confident hope God has given to those He has called—His holy people, who are His rich and glorious inheritance. I also pray that you, _____, will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe in Him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated Him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms.

—DEBRA ALLEY

Father God, may my children fall in love with You.

—MARTHA BUSH

Dear Lord, I pray that You would keep a constant hedge of protection around these children and that You would keep the evil one far from them. Lord, I also pray that You would give me a vision for my children's future so I can cooperate with You in the plans You have for them. In Jesus' name. Amen.

—TAMARA HAJCAK

Dear Lord, heavenly Father, thank You for these children whom You have entrusted to me. Help my children to rely on You at all times; help them to be saved. May they put You first in their lives. Whatever Your will is for their lives is what we want. Help us all to love each other and to embrace Your will for our lives. Help us to appreciate each gift You have given us in our personalities and in our lives. In Jesus' name. Amen.

—ANDREA LUDWIG

Lord, prepare my child's future spouse, and build a firm and unshakable foundation of faith in this person who will marry my child. I ask for this same preparation for my child so that, as You have designed for marriage, the two of them will become one, will walk together in strong faith and, by serving each other and others, will bring You glory, Father. Keep them both pure until the day of marriage. Until they meet, guard their hearts and remove any romantic entanglement from their lives that is counter to Your plan of what's best for them. Help them both to be patient and to trust You to bring them together according to Your perfect timing.

—DINEEN MILLER

Lord, please fill my daughter to overflowing with Your Holy Spirit. From her young age may she be used for Your kingdom's purposes; may she learn to pray to You and to see and know Your answers to her prayer; may she learn to hear and know Your voice. Keep her safe. Give her wisdom in school and in her studies, and please prepare a godly husband for her in the future so that she will not have to walk the path that I have walked. In Jesus' name. Amen.

—OLGA G.

Father, guide my children to always love unconditionally, even when they mess up or experiment—because all kids do. Amen.

When your children disappoint you, ask God for guidance, and ask Him to restore your unconditional love toward them.

—GAIL MCKINNEY

Father, please give me the strength not to get in Your way in my children's lives so that they become all that You have planned for them. Help me to share Your love, Your mercy and Your grace with them and to point them toward You when they are wandering away, confused or scared. Help me to love my kids when they are not very loveable, to see what You see, to say what You'd say. Help me to know that it's not all about what I want them to become but what You desire for them, so that they will bring glory to You and will be Your hands and feet in this broken world.

—JEN BABCOCK

Thank You, Lord Jesus, that You daily walk with my children, that You daily plan for my children's futures and that You have designed my children uniquely for their generation to be Your light in this world. Release Your full potential in them, and show them daily how to walk in it, Holy Spirit. In Your name, Jesus, I pray this for each of my children. Amen.

—DINEEN MILLER

Abba Father, I'm placing my children in the palm of Your hand this very hour. I ask You to anoint my children with a fire so that they will live a fulfilling life in Your presence. Place in these children a hunger for more of You and for Your purposes for their lives. Reveal in tender love the true character traits You instilled into my children. Empower my children to step into their destinies with the courage of Joshua and Caleb. Create opportunities daily for them to witness Your love in action, Your grace in great measure and Your forgiveness that brings freedom. Then place these qualities into their hearts, and let them live there forever.

Walk with my children today, revealing to them Your power and purpose. Let my children live in the freedom of their true identity in Christ, and encourage them to step into the authority and privilege of royalty. Perfect their destinies.

Bring them joy in everyday living, peace to share with the world, love that overcomes all evil and a light that changes the atmospheres in which they walk. Shine in them so brightly that

thousands are brought home to You. Lord, may my children become all that You desire and may they bring great honor, glory and power to Your name. I ask in the name of King Jesus. Amen.

—LYNN DONOVAN

Scripture Prayers We Can Pray for Our Children

Psalm 4:3 (NKJV): “But know that the LORD has set apart for Himself him who is godly.”

My child has been set apart to serve You, Lord. Help me as a mother to see my child as holy and destined for great things in Your kingdom. Help me to gently guide my child in Your ways.

John 1:12: “Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”

Lord, my child is Your child. Please reveal Yourself to my child in ways that he or she will receive salvation and will thrive in this life.

Ephesians 4:32: “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

Lord, help me to model kindness and compassion and to instill these qualities into my child. I ask that these qualities will guide my child in all his or her relationships.

Jeremiah 15:16 (NLT): “When I discovered your words, I devoured them. They are my joy and my heart’s delight, for I bear your name, O LORD God of Heaven’s Armies.”

Place in my children a hunger for Your holy Word, and may the Scriptures be the wisdom and truth that lead them all their lives.

Proverbs 13:20: “Walk with the wise and become wise.”

Lord Almighty, let my children choose their friends wisely. Keep them from the influence of people who appear to offer friendship but who will lead them away from You. Lord, surround my children with friendships that are honorable, sincere, kind and fruitful. Let a genuine love and commitment rise out of these friendships that are centered in You. This is my plea from a mother's heart.

Ephesians 6:10: “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.”

Almighty Father, surround my children with Your protection. Help me to teach them to place their armor on as they walk into the world. Make them strong in the Lord, and may they live in the authority and power You intend them to. When they battle evil, go before them and lead them to victory and peace.

Luke 2:52: “And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.”

Abba Daddy, I humbly ask that my children grow up learning the value of wisdom. Bless them with Your wisdom. Grant them the discernment and wisdom that the world doesn't understand. Let my children see circumstances and opportunities through the lens of the Bible. And because You have graced my children with great wisdom, let them humbly grow in great favor with man and even more so in Your great favor.

Psalm 37:4: “Take delight in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.”

Great King, this verse is the desire of my mother's heart. May my children take such great delight in You that they find their way through this life with joy, experience Your lavish love daily and receive riches unending. May they delight in You, and as they do, I pray that You will bless them with every desire of their heart.

Leader's Guide Small Group Study

Lynn and Dineen

*The greatest among you will be your servant. For those
who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those
who humble themselves will be exalted.*

MATTHEW 23:11-12

Leading a small group is one of the most rewarding investments you will make in the kingdom of God. Thank you for giving your time, love and prayers to help others discover hope for their children. Dineen and I have prayed for you, asking the Lord to bless you as you facilitate this study.

Helpful Hints as You Begin

- Love on the ladies who are in your group. Make them feel welcomed and comfortable.
- Listen more and talk less. Keep confidences. Encourage the women to share, and assure them that your study is a safe place in which they are free to be authentic.
- Encourage uplifting talk of husbands and dads, and let the women know that your group is not a place for husband or father bashing.
- Encourage each member of your group to speak. Although some individuals share more easily than

others, these ladies sometimes dominate conversations. Steer the conversation to allow everyone a chance to contribute to it. Thank those who share frequently, then ask someone who is quiet to share her thoughts.

- Always use the Bible as the basis for truth in your group. Encourage women to search out and to provide Scriptures to support their opinions.
- Use discernment, share your heart with authenticity and allow yourself to be vulnerable without making the group uncomfortable.
- Be sensitive to your members' time. Begin the study on time, and end on time.
- Invite the Holy Spirit into your group, and expect the love of Christ to transform lives.
- If at any time you feel that any member of your group or her children may be exposed to abuse or addiction, encourage her to seek professional Christian counseling. Seek wise counsel from your church pastor as well.
- Visit www.MismatchedandThriving.com for free handouts and study support materials that can be used at any time in your group study.

Sessions

This is an 11-week study. It includes one introduction session, followed by a review of each of the 10 chapters of *Not Alone*. During the week leading up to your first meeting, cover your study and the women who will be attending it with prayers of protection, and ask the Lord for a fresh anointing of the Holy Spirit. Also, telephone each participant, introduce yourself as the group leader and remind the ladies of the meeting date and time and other pertinent details. Let them know that you are praying for them. Share your excitement over what God has prepared for your group.

As the group leader, greet the women as they arrive each week. Begin the meetings on time, and remind the women to silence their cellular phones. After your first introductory meeting, the

basis for your meetings each week will be the “Discovery” sections at the end of each chapter in this book. As your group discusses the discovery questions, allow for differences of opinion in your discussions, always pointing to Scripture as the final truth. Remember to have a box of tissue close by.

Any study that deals with personal issues such as marriage and parenting will require discernment and sensitivity on the part of the leader. Be aware that some women in your group will struggle with the concept (or label) of being mismatched. You can also expect to have women join your group who, although their husbands are professed believers, may be uncertain of their spouses’ faith condition. And welcome with open arms women who are divorced and single mothers. Make each one welcome regardless of her spouse’s faith. Your group was hand selected by God, and you can expect Him to change lives.

Thank you for giving of yourself to others for the glory of God.

“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant!’” (Matt. 25:23).

Introduction: Your First Meeting

- Consider having beverages available, as well as nametags. Also have copies of the Member Class Form (at the end of this book) prepared to hand out.
- Welcome the women, and get to know them as they arrive.
- Begin the meeting with prayer.
- Introduce yourself, and introduce your family by sharing a photo of them. Share some information about each of your children, such as his or her name, age and basic interests, and share a fun or funny story about a parenting moment from your life. Provide the group with your name and phone number.
- Break the ice with something fun and easy. For example, play “In the Bag”: Fill a purse with a variety of items, such as keys, nail polish, dental floss, a small Bible, a cross, a pacifier, a pack of tissues, a candy bar, a

cell phone, crayons, etc. Be creative. Give each woman the opportunity to place her hand in the purse for 15 seconds and, when the time is up, to write down as many items as she can remember feeling. The woman who remembers the most items wins a prize.

- Ask each attendee to share about her children's ages, genders, names, etc. Ask them to bring a photo of their children to next week's study if they don't have photos with them in their handbag.
- Review the schedule of your study—times, dates and other information, such as a snack schedule if applicable.
- Review the study format. As the group leader, we suggest that you highlight key concepts from the chapter and discuss these. Then review the study questions with the group. Conclude with prayer. Ask the women for prayer requests. One way to do this would be to pass out 3x5 cards and have each woman write out her requests, then pass her card to the neighbor on her right so that the person can pray over her requests for the week.
- Remind your group why they are there: to study the Bible, to grow in their relationship with Christ, to build relationships with each other, to share and grow in a safe community in which they can encourage one another as mothers and, ultimately, to instill faith in Christ in their children.
- Make a copy of the Small Group Agreement (at the end of this book), and review it with the women.
- Have the ladies complete the Member Class Form and then turn it into the leader.
- Pass out the books, and assign the first chapter reading and questions that follow.
- Time permitting, ask the participants about their hopes and expectations regarding this study.
- Pray and then close the meeting.

Chapter 1: Extraordinary Kids

Be intentional about welcoming each woman as she comes in, and give hugs and smiles as needed. Sometimes newcomers can associate an overlooked greeting as a rejection or as a sign that they don't fit in.

Begin your session with prayer, inviting the Holy Spirit into your study group. Take a moment to share any family photos the women brought with them this week. Encourage the women to become familiar with each other's children and to pray for one another's families.

In this session you may want to offer an overview of the study's content. Review the discovery at the end of chapter 1, and encourage your participants, if they are comfortable, to share their answers. Consider sharing from your own experience to help create an atmosphere of camaraderie and trust within the group.

As this is the first session, be patient with the silences and sensitive to the fact that in this first week we tackle a very personal question, "Am I enough?" Encourage the women to share. Guide the conversation to uncover fears and anxieties, and instill truth in the ladies from God's Word.

Assign reading and questions for next week, and close with prayer.

Chapter 2: Heaven's Kids

Welcome returning members and any new members to your group. Begin your session with prayer. Ask the ladies to share their thoughts on the content and general theme of chapter 2. Explore together the truth that a mother's faith is the foundation of faith in her children. Discuss this concept.

Review the chapter's discovery questions, and look up 1 Corinthians 7:12-14 together. Discuss the concept of sanctification and how it can be applied in each of your homes. Encourage discussion as you move through the questions. If time permits, look up Proverbs 22:6 and discuss it. Share a prodigal story from your own life or have someone from the group share one to encourage the others.

Assign reading and questions for next week, and close with prayer.

Chapter 3: Equipped Kids

Begin your session with prayer. Ask the members of your group to share any changes and/or answers to their prayers, and ask them to share how praying for their children by name has changed their prayers.

Review the discovery questions for chapter 3. Focus on discussions about stepping into the role of spiritual leader in your home and how you can balance that with respecting your husband as leader in other areas of your life.

Share some teachable moments that you have experienced with your kids, and encourage the women to share their ideas for teachable moments with each other. Have someone write down some of these ideas and bring a handout with the ideas printed on it to next week's class.

This week, assign the women to pray that they will catch teachable moments with their kids, and challenge them to create at least one fun and spontaneous adventure with their children that will surprise and delight the kids.

Assign reading (include Appendix 1, "Rebellion and the Prodigal Adult") as well as questions for next week, and close with prayer.

Chapter 4: Church-ed Kids

Begin your session with prayer. Ask the women how they were intentional about creating teachable moments in their home this past week. Ask them to share their spontaneous adventure(s).

In this session ask the members to share some of their "getting to church" debacles and triumphs. Look up Hebrews 10:24-25, and discuss the passage. What are the biblical benefits of assembly with other believers?

Review the chapter 4 discovery questions. Approach the first question with sensitivity, as women who are doing this study with other members of their church may not want to

talk openly about the church. Encourage women to seek God's wisdom and discernment regarding this question. Ask the group members to share their thoughts on how they can embrace the design of their mismatched family units at church. Help them to find freedom from preconceived expectations of a family unit at church.

Share within the group ideas to help children engage in church groups and events. Allow time as well for discussion of Appendix 1, "Rebellion and the Prodigal Adult." There may be mothers whose children are walking through a season of rebellion who will need encouragement in this season of life.

Assign reading and questions for next week, and close with prayer.

Chapter 5: Peaceful Kids

Begin your session with prayer. Be aware that opinions may differ greatly in this chapter about how many activities our children should be involved in and about which things we should say no to. As you review the discovery questions for chapter 5, encourage the women to share thoughts and resources regarding these issues.

Explore the concept of comparing what is good to what is God's best. Encourage your group to share ideas of how they are teaching and helping their children to make good choices at home, at school and when they're out with friends.

Look up Ephesians 4:14, and talk about what it means to speak the truth in love. Introduce TCWT—*truth, conviction, words* and *timing*—a method for approaching a loved one regarding an issue that needs to be discussed.

This process begins with praying for God to show you the *truth* of the situation. What is really going on? What is your responsibility and motivation in initiating this discussion? Then pray for *conviction* of heart for yourself and for the other person involved. Next pray for the *words* to speak to your loved one; and finally, pray for *timing* so that God will prepare your heart to speak in love and will prepare your loved one's heart to hear your words in truth and love.

Assign reading and questions for next week, and close with prayer.

Chapter 6: Generous Kids

Begin your session with prayer. Spend some time talking about the challenges of loving others, and encourage the group to believe that when we pray and ask God to love others through us, He will change our hearts. Review the discovery questions for chapter 6. Encourage stories of generosity, and as you hear them, give God the glory!

Look up 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 and Hebrews 10:23. Ask the group how they see God's faithfulness working in their lives and in the lives of their children.

Consider a project that your group could undertake to help someone in the church or community or to help a cause. Be sensitive to time constraints, and try to pick options that will involve the women's children.

Assign reading and questions for next week, and close with prayer.

Chapter 7: Authentic Kids

Begin your session with prayer. Talk for a while about who we are in Christ, and ask the members to share at what level they feel they are walking in their identity in Christ: somewhat, getting there or embracing the full truth of who we are in Him. Discuss the chapter 7 discovery questions.

Look up 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 and Romans 12:6-8. If you feel your group is open to discussing spiritual gifts, ask them if they identify with any of the gifts mentioned. Also ask if they see some of these gifts in their children. Encourage the women who are unclear about this topic to pray for guidance and wisdom in this area, and even challenge them to ask God to release these gifts in their lives and in the lives of their children.

Encourage the group to share any stories of provision in which something came to them clearly at the hand of God.

Assign reading and questions for next week, and close with a prayer that Jesus will begin establishing the truths of who we are in Him in the heart of each woman there.

Prior to adjournment, plan for next week's lesson, which includes a Mexican food potluck (see chapter 8 lesson below).

Chapter 8: Triumphant Kids

Begin your session with prayer. Ask your members about their week.

In this session set the stage with a potluck of Mexican food, if it's appropriate for your study time and place. Enjoy tacos, and review the discovery questions for chapter 8 together. Share ideas on how to make your house "the home with the open door."

Assign reading and questions for next week, and close with prayer.

Chapter 9: Challenging Kids

Begin your session with prayer. Ask your members how they did with this week's chapter, which covers some tough areas. Try to stay very sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit, because this may be a time for some women in your group to open up about struggles they are having but haven't felt they could share openly in other venues. Have tissues and hugs ready!

Ask the group what they thought of Kendra's story. Review the discovery questions for chapter 9. Compile a list of ideas that the women come up with from question number four, and make a handout to give to your group members the following week. These ideas may even spur more.

Encourage the women also to have a prayer partner or a mentor whom they can talk to and pray with as they walk through any trial or challenge they are facing with their child. If you as the leader know of women in your church who can step into this role, prayerfully consider how to help the ladies in your group make connections with these women.

Assign reading and questions for next week, and close with a prayer that God's strength will carry each woman through whatever challenges she is facing.

Chapter 10: Legacy Kids

Begin your session with prayer. Ask your members about their week. Discuss the chapter 10 discovery questions, and have someone in the group read aloud “The Letter to My Chosen Mother.” Again, have tissues ready! *smile.*

In this session ask the members how their parenting perspectives have changed over the course of the study. Discuss the highlights that mothers have gained from this study. Ask the ladies to share the areas that they will continue to focus on in the weeks ahead.

Wrap up your study, and encourage each woman to simply grow in her love for Jesus and to allow that love to overflow to her children, to her husband and to a world in desperate need of a Savior. Close with prayer.

Member Class Form*

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Spouse's Name: _____

Children's names and ages: _____

What are you hoping to learn from this study?

What is your greatest spiritual, physical or emotional challenge at this time?

How can your group leader pray for you throughout this study?

Questions you may have:

* This form is supremely confidential. Your group leader will refer to it when she covers you and your family with prayer.

Small Group Agreement

I agree to . . .

Grow spiritually as an individual and as a group; to build a strong marriage through the application of biblical truth.

Give priority to the group meeting, arriving on time with reading and study questions complete.

Pray regularly for group members

Pray daily for my husband.

Be a safe place where women are free to be authentic and develop trust and godly relationships.

Keep confidences. What is said in the group stays in the group.

Be patient with others, offer love and stay clear of judgments.

Invite other women to join the group who would benefit from the study and prayer.

Laugh, love, cry and expect Jesus to show up.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Lynn Donovan: lynn@mismatchedandthriving.com

Dineen: dineen@mismatchedandthriving.com