

## **Walking As He Walked**

### **A Series of Daily Devotionals For Moms**

**by Robyn Kindlund**

One day as I scrolled through the Scriptures looking for that little "nugget" for the day, I ran into this familiar verse: *"This is how we know we are in Him: whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did"* (1 John 2:5b-6).

Since I, as a busy mom of two toddlers, tend to read Scripture while dialing a spiritual 9-1-1 for parenting wisdom, I began to think about how this verse applies to us as parents. If I claim to be Jesus' follower, I must walk before my child as Jesus walked. My parenting, amongst my other roles in life, must reflect His image. So I started to brainstorm the "ways Jesus was" with His disciples and with little children to determine the ways I could strive to emulate His "parenting style." The following daily devotionals are the outcome.

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## **Day 1**

### **High Expectations, Lavish Grace**

It's possibly the toughest question every mom faces, every day. "How do I balance my unconditional love for my children with my desire for them to be obedient and good?" I struggle with it daily, but have decided to try and follow Jesus' lead. Jesus had high expectations, but lavish grace.

Watch carefully how he dealt with His disciples. He really didn't allow much slack when it came to standards of faith and obedience. He expected the best from them. In Matthew 8, they panic when the storm kicks up while they're in the boat. Jesus calmly awakes and asks them, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Peter in Matthew 16 talked back to the Lord, telling Him that the things He was prophesying about Himself would not happen. Jesus held nothing back, replying, *"Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."* And Mark 10 says Jesus was indignant (righteously angry, displeased, offended) when His disciples began to rebuke the children who were trying to reach Him. His expectations in all situations were clear: that His men trust Him, that they honor and obey Him, that they love one another.

Wonderfully, Jesus was at the same level a man of intense grace. The standards clearly in place, He was lavish in forgiving His disciples' failure to meet them, and continued to love and invest in their lives. He was not a rules guy; in fact, His most severe judgments came down on the rules guys, the Pharisees. Their rules were arbitrary, excessive, and used as a club to manipulate the people; His standards and expectations were governed by love and grounded in His identity. He told the woman caught in adultery, *"Neither do I condemn you; go, and sin no more."* Why did He not condemn her? He knew her heart was repentant, and she was humbled before Him. He gave Peter another chance after the most blatant betrayal of his life. He took the murderer Paul and gave to him arguably the most powerful ministry in the early church. In each case, He believed the best potential for faith and obedience in their lives, and built on it, brick by brick.

Our goal with our children should be to nurture soft hearts, submissive to our loving authority and responsive to our high expectations. Yes, it's a high calling we have, but it is no less than Jesus' goal with us.

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## Day 2

### Using Stories to Illustrate Spiritual Truth

Parables. Seeing as no less than 35 of them are recorded in the gospels, we can safely assume that they were one of Jesus' favorite ways of teaching spiritual truth to His people. It seems He was routinely sitting down or standing among the crowds, telling them stories which would, in a receptive heart, open a fresh door of understanding. This was not a dull man with a list of commands and prohibitions, standing in the temple square reading them off. He was a gifted storyteller who knew that people would remember and click in with examples they could relate to.

How often do we get creative with our children, finding ways to incorporate the things in their little worlds with important truths? Do we use the things they see outdoors to draw attention to the things of the Lord? How about drawing parallels between our relationship to them and their

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relationship to God? Do we make learning about Him a joy, something that intrigues and captivates them?

Let's become master storytellers with our children. It wouldn't hurt to actually sit down during their naps and think out a few stories which would apply to their experiences during the past couple of weeks, or would draw on the things they know well. If we want to capture their imaginations, their hearts, their wills for Christ, we need to teach the way He taught, along the way, spontaneously (but with thoughtful preparation) in the teachable moments. (See Day 6.) And we're all capable of it.

*"Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates." Deuteronomy 6:5-9*

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## Day 3

### Sacrificing Ourselves for Our Children

*Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children<sup>2</sup> and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

Ephesians 5:2

In the big picture, most of us could probably say in truth, "I would give my life for my child." What is interesting about Ephesians 5:2, however, is that it doesn't ask us to physically die. It calls us to look at Christ's love extended to death and to model that love in our lives. Scripture makes it clear that we *are* to be willing to die for our faith, but perhaps even harder for most of us to grasp is that we are to sacrifice *ourselves daily*: for our husbands, our friends, our partners in ministry, and for our children.

Romans 12:1 is pounded into our brains, but try applying it to your parenting: *"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship."*

Even mothering can constitute worship to God if viewed correctly and offered as a living sacrifice.

Jesus offered Himself daily to those He was invested in. He didn't care much whether His needs were met (try submitting that philosophy to a parenting magazine!) and, sure enough, God met

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His needs. He routinely put Himself out, went out of His way, stopped in the maelstrom of a busy schedule to touch a withered hand or drive the demons away from one harassed soul. He let the children clamber onto His lap; He went to visit His friends Mary and Martha and weep over Lazarus. He took the time and energy to give of His heart, His resources, His power. No legitimate need was of too little consequence to Him.

This doesn't mean we must meet every perceived need our children have at the moments they perceive they have them! We, like our Heavenly Father, must be wise in giving relief, in knowing when to let them struggle through and when to offer comfort, in handing out resources and withholding them when necessary. But that's part of the sacrifice: being willing not to be popular with our children at times, for the sake of loving them.

Sacrificing ourselves also speaks to those moments they need to sit quietly with us, when it would be simpler to plunk them down in front of the TV so we could get something done. It's about allowing their friends to visit sometimes when we're dead tired. It's about choosing to give time to them when we'd much rather give it to ourselves. It's about Philippians 2:3-4: *"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."*

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### Day 4 Spending Time with the Father Alone

"Oh, no," you're thinking. "Another guilt trip on quiet times." Call it what you will, but if we want to walk as Jesus walked, we'd better pick up on His priorities, and clearly, time alone with the Father was one of them. Luke 6:12 recounts one entire night Jesus spent in prayer. In Luke 11, observing His prayer prompted His disciples to ask Him how to pray (hence, "The Lord's Prayer"). Luke 10:21 tells of Jesus being full of joy through the Holy Spirit.

But perhaps most startling is Jesus' statement in John 5:19: *"I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does."*

If we desire to do good things in the lives of our children, can we expect without the Father's fellowship to be more empowered than Jesus was? Even He, God Himself, needed to be in close communion with the Father to make it through life on earth. We do ourselves and our families a great disservice by neglecting to feed ourselves and to clothe ourselves with God's power and character traits through routine time with Him.

It's easy to say, "I prayed today," when in truth the day consisted of a series of "help!" calls. Truly, those prayers are valid and crucial to a busy mom, but revelation and intimacy, the ability to hear God's voice can come only through time devoted to Him.

As ardent for ministry as Jesus was, and with the clock ticking away (imagine, He had only three years to accomplish His earthly lifetime of ministry!), He took solid blocks of time simply to pray, to get strength and direction from the Father. He knew the Scriptures, having studied faithfully as a child. Again, if this was important to Jesus, how can we presume to get by without it?

If this is a guilt trip, so be it. Let's agree to submit every other guilt-induced priority (get more exercise, eat less fat, have a cleaner house, better-behaved kids) to it, and protect and increase our time with God!

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### **Day 5**

#### **Anticipating and Providing for Needs**

*"And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus"(Phil. 4:19).*

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One of the most challenging, frustrating, confusing, and gratifying jobs of a mom is to discern what her children's *true* needs are, and to meet them wisely and graciously. I remember as a new mom, frantically trying to determine what my daughter needed, feeling so inadequate and needy myself. As she has grown, it has become easier to discover what she *thinks*

she needs, but it can still be a task to discover what her true needs are. Thankfully, we have a Shepherd in Jesus who knows exactly what we need, and, according to James 1, is willing to impart His wisdom to us as we attempt to raise our children in a way that's pleasing to Him.

Isaiah 40:11 shows us the beauty of Jesus meeting our needs: *"He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young."*

Note, not only does He meet our needs, but helps us minister to those of our little lambs. He is the Master of anticipating and meeting needs. In Matthew 14:14, He landed on shore and saw a huge crowd; with compassion on them, he healed their sick. Shortly afterward, he fed the multitudes (who were very hungry, having listened to Him teach all day and needing to travel home) with five loaves and two fish. He never neglected physical needs.

Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 6 that the Father knows what we need *before* we ask Him, that He is aware of our physical needs for food, clothing, and shelter. Part of this knowledge we can never emulate; He's God, and we're not! However, we can seek to know our children as God knows us; to study them, to learn their love languages, to determine what they need in the realms of physical health, emotional strengthening, mental stimulation, and spiritual training.

2 Corinthians 9:8 encourages us, *"And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work."* How perfect His wisdom: in meeting our needs, He makes us capable of meeting our children's. Fully equipped and armored by God, we will have endless stores of good gifts for them, and will

be wise enough to lavishly give only what will build them up. Like Jesus, we will know enough to withhold what would not benefit them and make them hunger for the things that will.

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### **Day 6**

#### **Taking Advantage of Teachable Moments**

Be honest. Aren't there days (maybe many of them) when just getting through feels like heroism? As you lay that precious child in bed, you're thinking, "I made it! I made it! I got through this day!" It's neither a win or a loss in your life or your child's; it's a draw, a wash.

There will be days like that; there's no getting around it. But the experts (older moms) say these days of young childhood are amazingly fleeting, and in no time we'll be wishing we had them back, regretting lost opportunities to build and invest in our children. How do we redeem the time we have with them?

Remember, as we mentioned a few days ago, Jesus had only three years to impact the 12 men who walked with him. What were His methods of making time count? We talked a bit about using stories; He did that a lot. That was one way He took advantage of teachable moments. Let's think about some others.

For one thing, Jesus capitalized on opportunities. The Sermon on the Mount wasn't publicized in the local temple bulletins: "Jesus to Speak Monday at 2 p.m." Matthew 5:1 seems to indicate spontaneity; it says he just saw the crowds, went up on the mountainside, sat down and began to teach. He saw an opportunity and took major advantage of it. We need to watch our children for the times they are most open to teaching, and creatively, joyfully point them to Jesus.

He often used others' faith (or the lack of it) to teach His disciples. The centurion in Matthew 8 astonished Jesus with his faith, and He used that as a springboard to teach about how the Gentiles would be included in the kingdom. When the disciples came to Him in Matthew 15 and said, *"Do you know that the Pharisees were offended [by what you said]?"* He replied, *"Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots."*

A simple question about the actions and reactions of others resulted in profound teaching. We can point out to our children the genuine faith of others, and help them understand the difference between what is true and what is error, simply by (without malice!) using character studies.

Of course, Jesus both taught principles and instilled reverence for His glory by performing miracles. His miracles were not without purpose; they always shone light on some aspect of God's character or purposes. When we see God working in our lives (miraculously or not), we are handed perfect opportunities to help our children see His presence. Let's begin talking daily to them about what He is doing in our lives, our homes, our extended families, our church bodies, and the world. In matter-of-fact, conversational ways, we can help them to see just how integral our faith in Christ is to us. He can and should be the central topic of conversation in our

homes, but it's not natural. Like Him, we must practice the presence of God and capitalize on every chance to help our children get to know Him.

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### **Day 7** **Telling the Truth—Even When It's Hard**

If I am to be toward my children as Christ is toward us, I have to tell the truth. It sounds easy enough, doesn't it? Don't lie to your children. What's the big deal?

Truth is not always pretty. Increasingly, we want to shield our children from the truth about the world, about themselves, and particularly about us. Certainly, select truths are meant to be revealed at select times. Children can't handle the entire truth about everything, and we as their parents should be wise and discerning about what we expose them to, and when. However, I think we sometimes shade the truth, if not glossing over it entirely, for our own benefit. It's easier not to have to answer their hard questions. Jesus, however, had a different style.

With His disciples, He lovingly taught spiritual principles which revealed, at times, distressing truth about their own lives. He made no bones about their sin or their lack of faith. Yet *"having loved His own who were in the world, He now showed them the full extent of His love"* by washing their feet (John 13) and eventually dying for them. He didn't care to preserve their self-esteem by pretending they were something they weren't; however, His kind of love affirmed them in deed and truth. Likewise, we should not allow ourselves to be untruthful with our kids using false praise, or underplay their episodes of rebellion because we're afraid we will damage their esteem. They should know, in the context of the love we live before them, how esteemed they are in our eyes.

It's vital, too, that our children recognize the truth about the world: that all people begin with darkness in their hearts and that Jesus brings light. The vast majority of people they will run across do not honor God, and that is why our culture, in particular, is in disarray. It will be helpful to them to have this perspective as soon as it can make sense to them. We should try not to give false hope for *this* world ("everything's going to be okay") but to instill hope in their Heavenly Father, who transcends it. Jesus never gave false reassurance to His disciples, but asked them to put their faith in Him alone.

Finally, we need to tell the truth about ourselves. Somehow, our kids need to see our struggles and our triumphs in Christ, to see people of faith living it out in an honest way before them. While preserving our authority and their respect, we are to ask our kids' forgiveness when we sin against them, to help them see our vulnerabilities and model the character quality of humility.

Remember, Jesus revealed small bits of truth to His disciples as He determined they could handle it. It was three years before He gave them everything they needed to know. With our children, it could be up to 18. We just have to be careful that whatever information we *do* give them is truth. After all, you-know-what will "set them free."

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### Day 8

#### Demonstrating Compassion

So many days, it's easy to just plain get fed up with our children. After the 10th discipline issue comes up, or they're fighting again, or they've just been *loud* all day, we have many emotions toward them...but compassion may not be one of them.

Maybe you have compassion toward your kids. What about your friend's kids? The unruly ones down the street? Are you compassionate toward people who aren't like you, don't fit in with your

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circle of friends? Do you show compassion toward people who are sick, poor, homeless, abused, mean-spirited, just a bit odd? Did you know your kids are catching your attitudes toward others?

Sorry to overwhelm you with questions. Most of them discourage me, because on the compassion scale, I usually come up short. But I want my girls to be compassionate, so I'd better change my heart. I'd better look at Jesus.

Jesus, Matthew 9:36 tells us, *"when he saw the crowds... had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."*

He saw beyond their annoying habits, their empty faces, their rude behavior and saw people who just hadn't had anyone to shepherd them. James 5:11 says that the Lord is full of compassion and mercy. He has more than enough, and He wants to share it with us.

Let's begin to pray for hearts of compassion. We need it for our children: to see beyond their sin to their little hearts that are somewhat harassed and helpless sometimes. We need it for those "square pegs" we meet, to see beyond their misfit exteriors to the beauty with which God sees them. We need it for those truly harassed and helpless, who have no food, or no roof, or no parents. Lord, give us a heart of compassion, to show our culture what Your heart is about, and help us then to foster compassionate hearts in our kids.

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### Day 9

#### Invest, Invest, Invest!

This is a common topic: investment. Not only do we hear about financial savvy and get advice on how best to invest our money, but it seems that everyone's talking about investing in people. Invest in your kids. Invest in your employees. Invest in your friends. What is all this investing about, anyway?

The dictionary has (count `em) 8 definitions of "invest," but the one that seems to fit our purpose here is, "To spend (time, effort, etc.) with the expectation of some satisfaction." Jesus certainly spent the time and His effort with the 12, and expected some satisfaction. What kind of satisfaction, though? He was most concerned that the Father would ultimately look good, be given glory. His investment in those 12 men was with an eye to the day when they would carry on without Him, and give God glory.

We like to say we invest in our children. By playing with them, reading to them, singing to and with them, disciplining them, praying with them, taking them to church, etc., we spend ourselves with the expectation of some satisfaction. We can take satisfaction in those moments when they display godly character, when they obey, when they smile. Mostly, though, we should be investing with an eternal sense of satisfaction our goal. Like Moses, we may never see the

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promised land—our children's godly lives—but we can continue to invest with that in our sights.

How do we invest? Like financial investing, we have to

- give up some things for others
- be willing to sacrifice short-term satisfaction for long-term payoff
- choose carefully our arenas for investment
- enlist the help of others
- risk a bit

In the final analysis, we want to look back on our 18 years with our kids and see smart, thoughtful, liberal investment that pays dividends for the kingdom of God and in their own lives as well. Certainly Jesus' investment in his men had those kinds of dividends...many of which continue to bless us today.

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### Day 10

#### Honoring Their Father(s)

Is there nothing more disillusioning to a child than to hear unkind words about the people he loves, particularly his parents? Children (in most cases) tend to believe that their parents are the world's best people, and it's comforting to them.

Sadly, our kids probably hear more disparaging talk about their fathers from us, than from anyone else. Whether behind their backs ("Your father is ... messy, or such a slob... or gaining weight... or working too much... or lazy... or not spending enough time with us... or watches too much TV...") or in their presence ("You never hang out with the kids... You're going to be gone *again* this weekend?... Can you please just do some work around here?"), we can dish it out. And maybe our husbands can take it. But the kids? What are they learning? *Mom has very little respect for Dad. Dad isn't really in charge. It's Mom and us vs. Dad. We can't really trust Dad.*

Now, in most cases none of these statements are true, but could it be these kinds of thoughts that fill our children's minds when they hear us talk about their fathers? We must "take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" and then pay careful attention to how we voice those thoughts in front of the kids. They need to constantly hear us affirm their dads, and never hear us criticize. You may even need to sit down and list your husband's positive qualities, praiseworthy deeds and accomplishments, to refresh your memory, ignite your gratitude, and provide a "hymnbook" for singing his praises.

(This doesn't mean we bury our conflicts. It will be helpful for our children to watch us work out our differences and air our grievances in a mutually respectful, submissive, humble manner. We should have some "marriage moments" in their presence, so they can begin to learn how to handle conflict and come to resolution.)

Verbal affirmation of our children's earthly fathers is also a good warmup for teaching them how to praise their Heavenly One. In daily conversation, we can take every opportunity to thank God and praise His attributes, so that they understand the place of worship in their daily lives. **One**

**of the end goals of our parenting should be that our children love God more than they love us.**

That takes God-consciousness and diligent effort, both of which Jesus exercised constantly.

*"Now this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do" (John 17:3-4). When he drove the demons from a man (Luke 8), he told him, "Return home and tell how much God has done for you."*  
We should counsel our children the same way.

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## Day 11

### Encouraging Courage

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How many times a day do you have to pick up your weeping child in a warm embrace, comforting her from the latest fall or shove or scrape? Do your kids seem to be afraid of everything? How comfortable are they meeting new people?

All of us and our children have areas of fear that grip us, that freeze us up and keep us from enjoying our lives. But Jesus challenged His men to have no fear, and we should similarly challenge our kids.

The episode in the boat is the most compelling example. Jesus fell asleep before a violent storm threatened to capsize the boat in which He and His disciples were sailing. The disciples woke Him (yeah, they had to wake Him; do you think He was relaxed?), saying, "*Master, Master, we're going to drown.*"

Luke 8 says He just got up and rebuked the elements;  
*"the storm subsided and all was calm."*

`Where is your faith?' He asked His disciples. In fear and amazement they asked one another, `*Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey Him.*'''

That last part is key to this whole discussion. "Who is this?" Well, it's Jesus...it's God, who inhabits our lives and deserves to rule our households. If we truly recognize who it is, we can begin to conquer all the fears we ourselves have, and teach our kids to conquer theirs as well.

It's not just about telling a child, "Quiet now, settle down, you'll be okay," although that's often

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appropriate. It's about imparting a quiet trust, a settledness founded in Jesus, who loves our children and has their lives in His hand. From the beginning we need to talk about Him, to tell stories about His character, His works, His miracles, so that they find Him an ally, a protector, their hero.

As Moses charged Israel, *"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them [your enemies], for the Lord your God goes with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you"* (Deut. 31:6). Let's tell stories about David, Daniel, Joseph...courageous young men who trusted in their God even when their very lives were at risk. More than ever, our children need role models of courage.

Jesus constantly built up His disciples' trust in Him, urging them to rest in His perfect plan, His presence, His power.

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## Day 12

### Listening for the Father's Voice

Where do you go when you're feeling desperate... when you have a day like this?

- the kids cry and whine ALL DAY
- none of them will obey you
- dishes are practically growing mold in the sink
- laundry is piled so high you can't see the machine
- your husband calls and says he'll be working late

Really, where do you go? To Calgon after the kids are in bed? To the sofa where you watch enough TV to forget your troubles? To a good book? To a friend? To the outdoors for a walk? All these have their place. But my daughter taught me a profound lesson about where we need

to go for comfort one cold night this winter.

She woke at 1 a.m. with a second bout of croup, that horrible-sounding hoarse cough, coupled with wheezing that makes you convinced the child will soon cease to be able to breathe. We took her outside into the cold, moist air as directed by the doctor on call. Nothing would calm her breathing or her spirit until my husband suggested I sing. Now, I don't have a voice that just calms all children, but fortunately, God gives us the ability to calm our own. She began to settle into my arms. After she fell into a fitful sleep, I stopped singing and kept rocking on the porch swing. She started to fidget again and began to try to communicate something. Her voice was so hoarse I couldn't understand, so I began to ask if she wanted some things. "Do you want to go inside?" No, she shook her head. "Juice?" No. "Another blanket?" No. She began to tug on my pajama top. I was getting more and more frustrated, unable to help her, until finally I got it.

"Do you want Mommy to sing some more?" I asked. Satisfied, she managed to breathe out, "Uh-huh," and settled back into my lap. Choked up more than a little, I began to sing again, and knew this was one of those mothering moments I would hug to my heart for the rest of my days. It took a few seconds to realize it was more than a sweet story; it was a parable. God my Father was showing me that my little girl had it right. When she was frightened, distressed, feeling out of control, she wanted only one thing: to hear Mommy's voice.

When I am frightened, distressed, feeling out of control, I often seek everything *but* to hear my Father's voice. And in the final analysis, He is the best comforter I have. Jesus knew this. He always went to talk to the Father in His most distressing times. There He drew the strength, courage, and resources to minister to those in His care.

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