



*Lori Elliott*

Lori Elliott is a pastor's wife and mother of four children. She and her husband, Dwight, were high school sweethearts and they celebrated their twenty-second wedding anniversary last June. Although Dwight and Lori planned on having three children, God had a different plan, and they were blessed with four children. Their oldest son, Drew, is eighteen. Their middle son, Caleb, is fourteen. He has autism and is non-verbal. Then there are the twins, Emma and Ethan, who are twelve.

Lori recently published her first book, *Running Through the Raindrops: Finding Joy in the Chaos of Raising Kids*. It is a collection of stories about her four children and the challenges and struggles she and Dwight have faced while parenting twins, a special needs child, and a teenager. They are stories that look at life through the eyes of a child and show how to appreciate the humor, joy, and excitement that can be found in daily chaos.

Lori has learned that things don't always go the way we plan, but that's not necessarily a bad thing. God knows what is best for us and if we follow his path and listen for his guidance, we will be surprised at how he will bless us in ways we could never have imagined.

*BIBLE READING: 1 Peter 5:7; Psalm 23:1-4; Proverbs 3:5*

As I sat in the back seat of the car that my teenage son was driving, I was overcome by this surreal experience. Wasn't it just yesterday that I was teaching him how to read and write? How can it be possible that he is old enough to drive a real, live car?

Those first few months when Drew started driving I was filled with anxiety and worry. Although he had taken a driver education class and passed the driving test, I still had trouble believing he was really ready. As parents, it can be difficult to watch our children grow up and venture out on their own. The older they get, the more independent they become and the more independent they become, the less we can protect them.

God wants us to trust in him and the protection that he provides for our family and loved ones. It can be hard to let go of our parental instincts and our belief that we have to provide protection at all times. Trusting in God means that we need to *cast all our anxiety on him* and believe in his power and protection. We must turn our cares and worries over to God and trust that he is in control. Only then, can we fully experience the amazing peace and comfort that our heavenly Father has for us.

*SONG: Whom Shall I Fear / God of Angel Armies (Chris Tomlin)*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, please help us to turn our worries over to you. Replace our anxiety with your peace and comfort. Guide us as we trust in your love and protection.*

—Lori Elliot

*BIBLE READING: Joshua 1:5-9; Philippians 4:4-7*

I could hear my father's words ringing in my head: "Speak slowly and distinctly. Speak from your diaphragm and project your voice." I heard this advice often growing up as the daughter of a preacher. Whenever I had a speech to give at school my dad would help me practice. I always welcomed his advice as I tried to get my speech ready to present to the class.

One time, however, was much different. I was up on stage to speak to a MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers) group about raising a child with autism. When I agreed to this speaking engagement I envisioned a group of fifteen or twenty moms. As I looked out at the crowded room I realized I had totally under-estimated the event. There were over one hundred mothers in the audience all waiting for me to speak. My legs were shaking and my heart was racing, and I couldn't seem to find the words. I had prepared and practiced my speech for weeks, but I couldn't find the courage to open my mouth.

I closed my eyes for a second and prayed: *God, I need courage.* I took a deep breath and opened my eyes. A wave of peace washed over my body as I began my speech. I noticed how engaged the women were. They shared in my laughter and tears as I recounted my journey of raising my son Caleb and described how autism had affected our family. God gave me courage and turned one of the scariest experiences of my life into a blessing that I would treasure for many years to come.

*SONG: Courageous (Casting Crowns)*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, give us courage to follow the path you have set before us.*

—Lori Elliot

*BIBLE READING: Psalm 21:1-7; 1 Peter 4:3-11*

When I was in elementary school I remember my mom teaching me that to have true joy in your life you need to think of *Jesus* first, then *Others*, and then *Yourself*. If you think of yourself and your needs before you think of Jesus and others then you will never find the joy and happiness that God has for you.

When our twins, Emma and Ethan, were in kindergarten, their Sunday School teacher was talking to the class about Jesus coming to die for our sins. She then asked the kids where they thought Jesus was today. “Jesus is in my heart,” Emma proudly answered. One other little boy in the classroom looked up in shock and said, “What is he doing in there?” The teacher went on and asked Emma how she knew that Jesus was in her heart and Emma said, “Because he speaks to me.” The teacher asked, “He does? Well what does he say?” Emma replied, “*Focus!*”

Even as adults, there are times when we need to be reminded to “focus” on Jesus and others instead of getting wrapped up in the distractions and problems of our own lives. Jesus loves us unconditionally and he wants us to be filled with joy and let his light and his love shine through us. When we turn our attention to Jesus and take time to show his love and compassion to others, we will find that our mood is lifted and that we are filled with the joy and happiness of Jesus Christ.

*SONG: The Joy of the Lord Is My Strength*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Jesus, please help us to focus on you and to find ways to show your love and joy to others.*

—Lori Elliot

*BIBLE READING: Matthew 11:28-30*

I was exhausted and all I wanted to do was to sit down for five minutes to drink a soda and read a magazine. I was tired from running through the day without a chance to catch my breath. I was tired of listening to endless arguments from the kids over who “started it” or who hit whom first. *Can’t a mommy have five minutes to herself?*

I grabbed a can of soda and my magazine and sat down on the couch. Surely the kids could entertain themselves and stay out of trouble for five minutes. Literally two minutes later Drew came running into the room holding up a pair of scissors in his hand and announced, “Mom! Caleb was cutting his hair!” *Great! That’s just perfect! So much for my five minutes.* I ran into the computer room and there sat Caleb with a big grin on his face and hair all over the desk.

I’m sure many of you have had days like this—days (or even weeks) when it feels like your life is spinning too fast and you can hardly keep up. Life can be exhausting and it is easy to become overwhelmed by the demands being thrown upon us. “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). God promises that if we come to him we will find the peace that our souls desire.

*SONG: It Is Well with My Soul*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, please take my weariness, share your yoke with me, and carry my burdens. I pray for peace for my soul and rest for my mind and body.*

—Lori Elliot

*BIBLE READING: Jeremiah 29:11-14*

As I looked at the ultrasound monitor my heart was racing. *Twins? Where in the world would we put two more babies?* Apparently I wasn't the only one trying to find the answer to this question.

A few weeks after the ultrasound, Drew announced to Dwight and me that once the babies came he would be moving out. We were shocked by this news from our five-year-old son and asked him why he didn't want to live with us anymore.

"Oh, it's not that I don't like it here. It's a pretty nice place and the food is okay, but once the new babies come there won't be room for me to live here."

Drew is a smart boy and he had counted up the bedrooms and knew that there weren't enough rooms for two more family members. We explained to Drew that we already had plans to build an addition on to our house with two more bedrooms and another bathroom.

"Whew, that's a relief!" Drew said as he gave me a big hug. "I've really kinda gotten used to you guys and I think I might miss you."

Like Drew, I often find myself scrambling to try and solve problems on my own. My faith can be weak and I forget that God is in control and that he has a plan for my life. Jeremiah 29:11 reminds me that I don't need to know what tomorrow holds; all I need to know is that God holds tomorrow.

*SONG: Today Is the Day (Lincoln Brewster)*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, please strengthen my faith and allow me to trust in your plan for my life.*

—Lori Elliot

*BIBLE READING: Romans 12:12; Isaiah 40:28-31*

When Caleb was first diagnosed with autism I went through many emotions: denial, anger, and of course, “mommy guilt.” Once the initial shock was over I became obsessed with trying to find a way to “cure” my son. I would spend hours and hours on the Internet searching for answers. Dwight and I tried therapies, vitamin supplements, special diets, and various treatments that other parents claimed had cured their child of autism. However, Caleb was still not talking. He was still withdrawn. He still had autism.

I prayed for God to heal Caleb. I prayed for the *big* miracle. As I continued praying and listening to God I began to realize that maybe God’s plan was not the same as mine. I started to notice little glimpses of hope that God was working in Caleb’s life in small, yet amazing ways. Caleb started to write words with his alphabet letters. At first they were words that he learned from movie credits on his DVDs like “producer” and “layout.” Then he began to use more functional words like “cracker” and “play.” He also started to play and interact with his siblings.

Some of these things would really not seem that amazing to most parents, but to us they were nothing short of a miracle. There were little glimpses into Caleb’s world that let us know that God was there and he did hear our prayers. Every time my fear and discouragement started to overwhelm my hope, God would send one of these small miracles to remind me that he has a plan.

*SONG: Holy Spirit (Bryan and Katie Torwalt)*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, show us hope in times of discouragement and despair.*

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*BIBLE READING: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13*

When I was in junior high we had a club called “The Terrific Five.” It was my brother and sister and me, and two of our friends. One weekend we decided we would have a garage sale to raise money for a trip to an amusement park. After the garage sale all five of us told my mom we were going to take down the garage sale signs but instead we walked to McDonalds to get ice cream. As we were paying for our ice cream cones I turned around and there stood my mom. I remember how guilty I felt for disappointing her and how horrible I felt for lying.

It is often hard for us to fathom how much God loves us. Maybe we have sinned or fallen away from God. Maybe we don’t think we are worthy of his love and forgiveness. Maybe we think we have to “earn” his love by doing great works. Maybe we compare ourselves to other Christians and feel we don’t measure up.

*“Your love never fails, it never gives up, it never runs out on me.”* This chorus from the song “One Thing Remains” is a wonderful reminder of just how abundant God’s love is. Sometimes we feel we’ve disappointed God or that we are not deserving of his love. However, God’s love is always available for those who seek him. In 1 Corinthians 13:7 we are reminded that his love “always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.” God will never give up on us and he will never stop loving us.

*SONG: One Thing Remains (Passion)*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, teach us to love others as you have shown your love for us.*

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