

In *Help! I'm Ruining My Kids*, Abbey's writing is raw, honest, relatable, and deeply encouraging. Moms carrying hidden guilt and shame will feel seen and understood, and her unique blend of gospel principles, theology, and science-backed strategies offers both truth and practical tools. Moms in need of a breakthrough will come away with lightbulb moments, a plan to break reactive patterns, and hope for moving forward in both motherhood and personal holiness.

**Emily A. Jensen**, coauthor of *Risen Motherhood and Gospel Mom*

For anyone who's ever felt they aren't the mom they thought they would be, Abbey's words are a healing balm to the disappointed soul. She's given us a rare gift: a book filled with hope that also meets us in our humanity.

**Kate Strickler**, founder, Naptime Kitchen; author,  
*I Just Wish I Had a Bigger Kitchen*

In a world overflowing with parenting tips, hacks, and how-tos, *Help! I'm Ruining My Kids* is an anthem of grace-filled dependence on God. Abbey's warm and authentic writing makes you feel like you are sitting at a coffee shop with another in-process mom, gleaning wisdom rooted in God's Word. If you're a mom discouraged because motherhood hasn't looked the way you hoped, this book will meet you right where you are and remind you that the gospel truly transforms not only how we parent but also how we live as beloved children of God.

**Gretchen Saffles**, bestselling author, *The Well-Watered Woman*

For those of you who know Abbey and her heart for Jesus and motherhood, it will come as no surprise that in her newest book she offers moms the kind of genuine hope everyone is desperate to hear. She does this like a loving friend, full of sincerity and personal compassion. Her words are deeply practical and deeply theological as she points us to Jesus. This book is exactly what every mom needs to hear right now.

**Adam Griffin**, lead pastor, Eastside Community Church, Dallas, Texas;  
host, *The Family Discipleship Podcast*; author

Abbey's new book is a refreshing reminder that parenting isn't powered by our perfection but by God's presence, offering freedom, hope, and the

assurance that he's at work in our kids' lives, even when we fall short. A wise and theologically grounded guide for weary, overwhelmed moms. Who doesn't need that?

**Megan Michelson**, director, *Birds & Bees*

This gospel guide confronts “mom guilt” head-on! Abbey takes raw moments of motherhood and pulls them through the sieve of the gospel and its application. Her writing is filled with truth and tact, and it thrusts moms into the arms of the God we can trust to transform us. You will be left filled with hope, not only in how you see your role as a mom but also in how you see your role as a daughter of God.

**Blair Linne**, author, *Made to Tremble* and *Yara the Brave*  
and *The Swirling Worry*

Abbey's writing is the kind you don't just read—you feel it. Her words are raw and unpretentious, tender yet weighty. And they reach straight into the hidden places of a mother's heart. There's something deeply therapeutic about the way she speaks truth, always wrapped in the language of the gospel. Abbey's vulnerability, honesty, and steadiness shine through every page. This book doesn't shout. It simply tells the truth with courage and clarity, inviting moms to stop hiding and meet grace right where they are. Readers won't walk away the same; they'll walk away lighter, steadier, and more rooted in hope.

**Rebekah Hannah**, children's ministry director, Redeemer LSQ in NYC;  
CEO, Anchored Virtual; author, *The Secret to Confidence*

I so wish I would have had this book when I was raising my young children. Abbey would have been a trusted friend and mentor to me, as I longed to be a gospel-rich mom to my daughters. My own kids are now grown, but I heartily commend this book to moms still hard at work shaping the hearts of their kids, even as God shapes theirs. This book is full of both grace *and* truth, real-life stories *and* biblical principles, ideas for application *and* an invitation to rest. It truly is a handbook and companion for every mom who wants to give and receive the gospel in her own heart and home.

**Jen Oshman**, author; speaker; women's ministry director

HELP!  
I'm Ruining  
My Kids



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My Kids

*A Gospel Guide for the Mom  
Who's Desperate for Change*

*Abbey Wedgenworth*

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*Help! I'm Ruining My Kids*

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*For Jamison.*

*Your friendship is one of God's greatest displays of kindness to me. Thank you for walking with me so closely, for never being surprised, for trusting me with your worst and loving me at mine. Thank you for telling me the truth, encouraging me, celebrating with me, lamenting with me, and consistently reminding me of the gospel. I am so thankful to be walking each other home. Don't you dare get there before me. I can't spare you.*



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## Foreword

I've known Abbey for a long time, and we have a lot in common. We both have a house full of boys, a love for good theology, and a penchant for writing. But as I read this book, I began to realize just how much more we share.

At a deeper level, we share an attentiveness to mental health in parenting, an awareness of our human limits, and a conviction that embodiment matters—that the way our bodies live and move in the world profoundly shapes the way we parent. In the first four chapters alone, I gained wisdom I didn't know I needed.

As I continued reading, however, the part I was most grateful for was Abbey's honesty. I not only felt like I got to know her, I also encountered someone real. It's easy, especially when writing, to hide your life behind abstractions. Abbey does the opposite. She offers her actual life, with all its gifts and flaws, and invites the reader into it. That kind of honesty is a gift—not only because it makes the book relatable and instructive but because it creates space to see grace at work. In Abbey's stories, we see how Jesus meets us precisely in the gaps between who we are and who we long to be.

This book will continually draw your attention to the ways God

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is at work in your own story and in the lives of your children. Abbey is relentless about directing our attention toward Jesus.

At the same time, the book offers a wealth of practical wisdom. I was especially grateful for the food analogies that represented various ways to weave Scripture into daily life, the spontaneous prayer suggestions, and the ideas for practicing apology and repair.

But enough from me. I commend this wonderful book to you and pray that the Lord will use it to remind you of his love—and to transform your family through it.

With hope, Justin Whitmel Earley  
Founder of Avodah Legal and bestselling author of *Habits of the Household*, *The Body Teaches the Soul*, and others

# Introduction

## Desperate for Change

Mommy is feeling a little frazzled,” I confessed, glancing in the rearview mirror at my three boys crammed into an overcrowded row of boosters and car seats. “Can you just not touch or aggravate each other for the rest of this car ride?”

Desperate for quiet, I put on a movie, a treat usually reserved for the last hour of a road trip.

Pressing play, I pleaded, “Just watch this show and be quiet, okay? We’re almost home.”

Our new puppy lay curled up in the passenger seat, cloaked in wrinkly skin and softly snoring in peaceful oblivion, unaffected by the chaos. Not me. My jaw was tight. My shoulders were tense. My skin felt taut. Trying to take deep breaths, none of which seemed to fill my lungs, I started racking my brain to figure out what was making me so anxious.

A shrill cry interrupted my thoughts. “He pinched me!” my youngest squealed. With all the calm I could muster, I reminded them through gritted teeth, “Boys, please just keep your hands to yourselves and watch the show.”

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In the few moments of silence that followed, I heard my stomach rumble. The console snack bag was empty. Of course, the ones I packed for me had been devoured by my children. I wanted out of this car. I wanted out of my skin.

*Is this what claustrophobia feels like?* Just as I thought to roll down the windows, we turned onto our dirt road, but being covered in dust didn't feel like something that might help the situation. *I wish they would just pave*—"Stop it!" The shout of another brother interrupted my thoughts, landing in my ear like a soup can on my big toe. It was the last straw. I slammed on the brakes, launching our puppy from the passenger seat into the glove box and creating a cloud of dust around the car.

I whipped my head around and discovered that I had finally captured the attention of the kids who had been blatantly ignoring my requests for the entire car ride. Having their attention, I launched into a "Why can't you just . . . ?!" speech, coldly rattling off shaming sentence after shaming sentence as the young faces of my captive audience went from stunned to scared. And then they were sobbing. My voice stopped suddenly, the effect of my words finally registering. My ears filled with their crying, my eyes pooled with tears, and my head flooded with shameful thoughts.

"I'm a terrible mom."

"How can I treat my own children this way?"

"One day they'll be telling this story to a therapist, tracing all their issues back to me."

We pulled into the garage, the doors of the car opened, and the boys tumbled out, sniffing. Without any prompting, they hurriedly scattered to their designated places for quiet time. But their

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compliance didn't feel like a win. *They're afraid of me.* With my ears still ringing and my heart still pounding, I crated the puppy, walked to my room, and fell apart.

This is my story of realizing that I needed to change.

Unfortunately, this story is only one of many others like it. These moments highlighting my need to change have happened all throughout my tenure as a mom—and they still happen.

That's not my favorite story to tell, but it's one I'm compelled to share because if we're going to make any progress on this journey together, you've got to know from the outset: I don't have it all together.

But don't worry, this book isn't at all a case of the blind leading the blind. I've seen the goodness of Jesus and the transforming power of his grace in my motherhood journey, and I want to help you do the same.

I *have* changed. I *am* changing. And I hope I never *stop* seeing a need for change in my life, since the standard of perfection is Jesus, and we won't be like him until he returns. The comfort we moms have on this side of eternity is that Jesus knows our lowly states and doesn't give up on us. He's given us a beautiful new identity to live out of and a miraculous reality to live into. My joy abounds over how God has worked in my life. His peace dispels my guilt and fear when I recall all the places where I've failed and consider the ways I'm still failing. And I hope that as you read this book, you will experience that same joy and peace.

Many of us are not the mothers we thought we would be. We fall short of being the mothers we *want* to be. When our heads hit the pillow, our minds are flooded with thoughts of self-condemnation and fear that we're messing up our kids.

For the past year, every time a mom friend asked me what

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I was writing, I'd share the title of this book. Without fail, she would respond with some variation of, "I need to read that ASAP." Sometimes she'd even get tears in her eyes and start divulging specifics.

If you worry about how your sin and shortcomings affect your kids, you're not alone. I'm right there with you, and so is every other mom I know.

We live in a fallen world. Things are not as they should be, and that means neither are you. But the good news is that your story doesn't end there. Christ comes to redeem the narrative, and nothing is beyond redemption—not you, not your experience of motherhood, and not your affected children. You *can* change, and you will, with a bit of help from some tools you'll find in this book and a lot of God's unending grace.

Feeling hopeful enough to come along on this trip? Buckle up (don't mind the Goldfish crumbs and sticky seat belts). Let's take a look at the road map for our journey together.

We will begin by dealing with the guilt and shame you feel by helping you embrace your gospel identity. In part 1, we'll dedicate time to *understanding the mom you are*, reflecting on how God made you, what it means to be human, and how your story and circumstances have shaped you. In part 2, we'll explore *becoming the mom you want to be*. We'll help you decide what you want to change and take a look at God's chosen instruments for spiritual transformation: prayer, Scripture, hardship, and community. In part 3, we'll embrace the truth that change takes time and explore some truths and practical tools for *parenting well as a work in progress*. Specifically, this section will help you let go of the desire for performance and perfection, equip you to repair your relationship with your kids when you blow it, and encourage you to trust God with your kids.

## *Introduction*

While change is a process, we can't press pause on the work of parenting. As you read this book, you're still in the trenches. So each chapter is followed by a "Parenting Connection" aimed to help you not only to put what you read into practice for your own journey toward personal change but also to immediately incorporate the content of each chapter into your interactions with your kids. My prayer is that these tools will help you feel less helpless and more equipped to love your kids well—even if you still feel a long way away from being the mom you want to be.

And finally, just in case you, like me, can't remember why you walked to the pantry, at the end of each chapter you read, you'll find a little recap called "Believe It for Your Motherhood" followed by a section called "Apply It to Your Parenting." These sections offer quick reminders and refreshers you can easily revisit.

When you close this book, I hope you'll feel more hope-filled and equipped for your own journey of becoming a mom who looks more like Jesus and hopefully hand it to another mom who is also desperate for change. She probably won't be too hard to find. If you can already think of someone, consider inviting her to read along with you right now. Later on, we'll highlight the importance of the role of others as we pursue personal change. But just know that reading this book with another mom or a group of moms can aid your efforts to become more like Jesus. For this reason, I've included questions for group discussion in the back of this book. I hope they'll serve you well.

When you look back on the time you spent engaging with this book, I hope you'll remember it with gratitude, seeing it as a place where God met you in your frustration and despair over motherhood and moved you from helplessness to hope.